

Handout for

# Intellectual Freedom and Internet Filters: Can We Have Both?

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## Intellectual Freedom and Filters: Can We Have Both?

CIPA legislation has made the use of filters in schools nearly mandatory. How does a school effectively use a filtering program, how do you determine if your filter is working properly, and how do you set policies on what should or should not be filtered? This presentation examines how filters work, if they are effective, how to prevent over-blocking, and additional efforts districts must undertake to make sure students are working safely on the Internet.

legislators a false sense of security.

## Do we have to have filters in schools?

The short answer is “yes” if you want to federal revenues such as e-rate.

## Do filters work?

The short answer is “no.”

Filters:

1. Under block, allowing inappropriate sites through.
2. Over block, preventing access to appropriate sites.
3. Can be deliberately designed to block sites deemed not politically acceptable (including anti-filter sites).
4. Do not filter P2P networks, chat, or images.
5. Are relatively easy to disable or work around.
6. Give teachers, librarians, administrators, parents, and

## Can we provide intellectual freedom and still have filters?

The short answer is “if we are deliberate about it.”

In our role as proponents of intellectual freedom, we need to:

- Base our choice of filters not on cost or convenience, but on features and customizability.
- Strongly advocate for the least restrictive settings of installed filters.
- Generously use the override lists in our Internet filters.
- Treat requests to have additional sites blocked as you would any other material challenge in your district. (Look at your reconsideration policy.)
- Configure at least one machine that is completely unblocked in each library media center so that questionably blocked sites can be reviewed and immediately accessed by staff and students if found to be useful.
- Continue to help develop and teach the values students need to be self-regulating Internet users.
- Continue to educate and inform parents and the public about school Internet uses and issues.
- Continue to create learning environments that promote the use of the Internet for positive purposes.

## Who decides what is filtered and what is not? a partial solution.

On the difficult filtering issue, our district media/technology committee decided that as a result of CIPA, we would install a filter, but it would be set at its least restrictive setting. *Any teacher or librarian can have a site be unblocked by simply requesting it – no questions asked.* Adults are required to continue to monitor student access to the Internet as if no filter were present. The technicians now know that it is the responsibility of the teaching staff to see that students do not access inappropriate materials, not theirs.

By making your IT department solely responsible for student’s access to inappropriate sites, you are guaranteed:

- over blocking of appropriate sites
- dangerous over-reliance on filters

## What else should we be doing to ensure appropriate behaviors by children on the Internet?

### The short answer, "A lot!"

1. *Articulate personal values.*
2. *Build student trust.*
3. *Allow students personal use the Internet.*
4. *Reinforce ethical behaviors and react to non-ethical behaviors.*
5. *Model ethical behaviors.*
6. *Create environments that help students avoid temptations.*
7. *Encourage discussion of ethical issues. "*
8. *Design practice activities on making good ethical choices.*
9. *Stress the consideration of principles rather than relying on a detailed set of rules.*
10. *Help children understand that ethical behaviors are in their own long-term best interest*
11. *Assess children's understanding of ethic concepts.*
12. *Educate parents about ethical technology use*
13. *Be personally knowledgeable about the ethical and safety issues surrounding Internet use.*

### Selected resources on the effectiveness of filters written in the past few years. (links active as of May 2008)

#### ALA's Web Site on the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

<http://ala.org/CIPA>

**Does Pornography-Blocking Software Block Access to Health Information on the Internet.** JAMA, Dec 11, 2002. (No longer publically available)

**Filtering Software: Religious Connection**, Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.; Director, Responsible Netizen Institute

<http://www.cyberbully.org/onlinedocs/documents/religious1.php>

**Internet Blocking in Schools**, Electronic Freedom Foundation, 2003.

[http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Censorware/net\\_block\\_report/](http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Censorware/net_block_report/)

**Just Give It to Me Straight: A Case Against Filtering the Internet.** T. Callister and N. Burbules. *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2004.

**Library Filtering: Best Practices**, Infopeople Project 2002

[http://infopeople.org/resources/filtering/filters\\_best\\_practices.html](http://infopeople.org/resources/filtering/filters_best_practices.html)

**Report to Congress - Children's Internet Protection Act - Pub. L. 106-554 - Study of Technology Protection Measures in Section 1703.** National Telecommunications and Information Administration, US Dept of Commerce, August 2003.

[http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/ntiageneral/cipa2003/CIPAreport\\_08142003.htm](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/ntiageneral/cipa2003/CIPAreport_08142003.htm)

**See No Evil: How Internet Filters Affect the Search for Online Health Information.** Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2002.

[http://www.kaisernet.org/health\\_cast/uploaded\\_files/Internet\\_Filtering\\_exec\\_summ.pdf](http://www.kaisernet.org/health_cast/uploaded_files/Internet_Filtering_exec_summ.pdf)

**Who Defines Evil? Statement Regarding the Kaiser Family Foundation Study on How Filtering Affects Access to Health Information.** Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.; Director, Responsible Netizen Institute

<http://www.cyberbully.org/onlinedocs/pdf/whodefinesevil.pdf>

**Youth, Pornography and the Internet.** National Research Council, 2002.

<http://www.nap.edu/books/0309082749/html/>

Other links can be found on my wiki: <https://dougjohnson.wikispaces.com/IFresources>