

Opening Enough Doors for the Right Reasons

Many schools and workplaces restrict access to the Internet for a variety of logical and protective reasons. However, the degree of restriction or filtering necessary to satisfy these reasons, while still allowing students and teachers to be productive and access a full range of learning resources is a question that all stakeholders, from the school leaders and district management to the IT managers and teachers, need to consider. Read through the position statements below and the related resources. Share and discuss the issue with colleagues and school leaders to understand the implications for your school or district.

Position: *Schools should foster student learning by offering free access to the Internet and teaching responsible browsing.*

Do you agree?

While it is easy to argue that schools should offer students open access to the many resources the Internet provides, the reality is that many schools and districts are required by law to employ web filters. However, these laws do not mandate a blacklist of sites, which allows schools and districts a degree of discernment regarding their filters. This is a discernment schools and districts should exercise. Necessary as they may be, web filters can be overly restrictive, discriminatory, and insufficient to their purpose. The links below clarify the laws and potential concerns associated with web filters.

- [State Internet Filtering Laws*](#)
- [Straight from the DOE: Dispelling Myths About Blocked Sites*](#)
- [School District Told to Replace Web Filter Blocking Pro-Gay Sites*](#)
- [Don't Filter Me: Web Content Filtering in Schools*](#)
- [Web Filters—Filtering Learning?*](#)
- [Banned Website Awareness Day*](#)

Lighter, more fine-tuned filters may increase the possibility that students can access inappropriate content or that they will use the Internet for non-school related activities during instructional time. Learning to use the Internet responsibly is a skill students will need, however, through the rest of their educational careers and beyond. Therefore, schools and districts should seize the opportunity to create an Internet policy—which is another requirement from many state governments—that promotes education and responsibility. The following links discuss ways in which schools have and Mobile Learning Policy may integrate mobile learning, social media, and the Internet, safely and responsibly:

- [Online Safety 3.0: Empowering and Protecting Youth*](#)
- [National Education Technology Plan 2010 Executive Summary*](#)
- [Welcoming Mobile: More Districts are Rewriting Acceptable use Policies, Embracing Smartphones, and Social Media in Schools*](#)
- [Mobile Devices in the Classroom*](#)
- [How Teachers Make Cell Phones Work in the Classroom*](#)