

INTERNET FILTERING IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Leroy Smith, retired high school librarian of Colorado Springs posted a survey on Survey Monkey inquiring about the implementation and effectiveness of filtering in public and private schools. The following is a summary of the findings followed by the list of the questions.

SUMMARY

A total of 117 people, including 98 school librarians responded to this survey.

Though schools appear to be using a wide variety of filtering programs, there is consistency in how the programs are implemented.

- 80% of the respondents indicated they had “no part in the process” of selecting the filtering system.
- 55% of respondents indicated their systems blocked “by category”
53% of respondents indicated they had no part in deciding which categories would be blocked; only 9% of respondents were the primary decision makers in deciding which categories were blocked.
- 83% reported their systems allowed for blocking/unblocking of specific, individual sites on request; the most common configuration (47%) seemed to be a teacher or librarian at the school level submitting the request with the decision to block or unblock being made at the district level, only 15% of respondents indicated that teachers or librarians could unblock sites immediately at a students request.
In more than 50% of situations reported, the decision to block or unblock was made by a district-level computer technician or district-level administrator.
- “Overblocking” was perceived to be a greater problem (41%) than “underblocking” (12%).

There was less agreement among respondents in terms of satisfaction with the systems and the perception of the effects on teaching and learning:

- 31% were somewhat to extremely “dissatisfied: with their filtering systems; while 31% were somewhat to extremely “satisfied” with the systems.
- More respondents (34%) felt that filtering had hindered rather than helped (28%) teaching and learning.

The survey consisted of the following questions:

1. Please indicate your school type
2. Which of the following best describes your school/district?
3. Which of the following best describes the size of your school district?
4. Where is your school located?
5. Which of the following best describes the ages of students in your school(s)?
6. Which best describes your position?
7. Which of the following filtering programs is used at your school?
8. Which of the following best describes your involvement in selecting this particular filtering program for your school?
9. Overall, on a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied have you been with this filtering program (1 = extremely dissatisfied; 5 = extremely satisfied)?
10. Does your filtering program block Web sites by "category" (e.g., "adult material", "advocacy groups", etc.) and allow blocking of only chosen categories?
11. If "yes," which best describes your role in deciding which categories of Web sites are blocked for your school/district?
12. If your filtering program blocks Web sites based on categories, what categories of sites are currently blocked in your school/district (check all that you are aware are being blocked)?
13. Does your filtering program allow for the blocking and/or unblocking of individual Web sites on request?
14. If "yes," which of the following are accurate descriptions of this feature for your program (check all that apply)?
15. Which of the following describe how the decision is made to block or unblock individual sites (please check any that apply in your situation)?
16. If your filtering software allows individual sites to be blocked or unblocked, which of the following BEST describes who makes this decision.
17. If decisions to block or unblock sites are made by a committee, please describe the committee members.
18. "Overblocking" occurs when an appropriate site is mistakenly deemed inappropriate and blocked from the user. How serious do you think the problem of "overblocking" is with the filtering program you use? (1 = very serious; 5 = not serious at all).
19. "Underblocking" occurs when an inappropriate site is mistakenly deemed appropriate and is permitted to the user. How serious do you think the problem of "underblocking" is with the filtering program you use? (1 = very serious/ 5 = not serious at all).
20. On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate the impact your filtering program has had on teaching and learning at your school. (1 = Hindered it a lot; 5 = has helped it a lot.

Complete survey results may be viewed at:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/Report.asp?U=221508932770>