

Internet Monitoring for Educators is a Must in Today's Society

In today's society, the internet is a vast arena of knowledge which provides a plethora of information on most any topic you desire. However, users beware as the information found can either be a conundrum to enhance and encourage learning, or can take the user through a cesspool of undesirable dark alleys with the click of a mouse. It is well known that the internet is one of the best education tools used in the school systems today. School districts are no different than any business or workplace. Schools face productivity, quality of work and liability issues. For this reason, internet monitoring has become a hot topic in today's public schools where teachers are losing jobs due to inappropriate internet use. School systems should be held to a higher standard when it comes to internet monitoring and a strong monitoring system should be in place. Teachers are to use the internet as a way to mold young minds and encourage learning. If a teacher is using the internet and e-mail in an unacceptable way, they should be stopped and held accountable.

Educators today are given the challenge of bringing relevant world experience to their classrooms on a daily basis. To fully experience the ever changing tide of technology, teachers must have access to the internet. Districts must put faith in their employees to shape and form the minds of students to become active participants in society – this 'faith' now includes proper experience and access to the internet. The biggest problem facing school districts is how to balance the obvious benefits of online access for their employees with the risks inherent in providing those tools to teachers. The most effective and simplest way for an employer to protect its ability to monitor employees' online activities and avoid legal challenges to that monitoring is to put in place a policy which clearly informs employees that their use of e-mail and the Internet will be monitored and ensure that all employees are aware of the policy.¹ The best way to do this is to have each teacher and student sign an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) that clearly states that all internet use will be monitored. Employers have the right to see what their employees are working on or doing at all times. Since the employer owns the computer network and the terminals, he or she is free to use them to monitor employees. If employers have a signed consent form, there is no room for argument.

For educators, inappropriate use of the internet not only takes place in the "physical" workplace, but the "virtual" workplace. In a recent court case, *Spanierman v. Hughes*, the "federal court rejected a challenge brought by a non-tenured teacher when the public school at which he taught decided not to renew his contract. The school had accused the teacher of overly familiar contacts with students via his MySpace page that were deemed "disruptive to school activities."² "The Spanierman case could be viewed as a simple case of inappropriate communications with students, regardless of the medium involved. Although reasonable minds may differ on whether Spanierman's communications warranted the discipline he received, the court ruled that, under the circumstances, it was the school district's call to make."³ We are quickly becoming a virtual workplace where everything we do will be monitored by someone. It is simply good practice for all educators to keep everything they do on the internet appropriate so they do not have to worry about who is seeing what.

¹ Bassett, Morgan J., *An Overview of E-Mail and Internet Monitoring in the Workplace*, <http://www.fmew.com/archive/monitoring/>, Jan 2002.

² Jeffrey D. Neuburger, *Teacher Fired for Inappropriate Behavior on MySpace Page*, <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2008/10/teacher-fired-for-inappropriate-behavior-on-myspace-page289.html>, Oct. 2008.

³ Jeffrey D. Neuburger, *Teacher Fired for Inappropriate Behavior on MySpace Page*, <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2008/10/teacher-fired-for-inappropriate-behavior-on-myspace-page289.html>, Oct. 2008.

Some individuals may counter that internet usage is not relevant to education today, that there are other ways to educate students to the technology tide without hands on usage and incorporation into the classroom. This 'thought' would be most like training a student to drive a car without actually ever stepping foot behind the wheel. With this idea of 'teaching' comes the fact that students won't know how to react in certain situations without the proper guided experience. Therefore, monitored teacher/student access must take place to properly educate students as to the benefits of the internet

In summary, as employee Internet use has increased exponentially in the last few years, new problems have surfaced for employers: decreased productivity, communication of proprietary information and the exchange of inappropriate materials, such as sexually explicit or racially demeaning jokes, banter or Web sites. Because employers can face vast liability arising from such misuse, it is imperative that they are aware of what is occurring in their workplace.⁴ Teacher monitoring of Internet and e-mail use is an excellent liability-prevention tool, as it allows school districts to keep abreast of what is occurring in their workplace.

⁴ Policy, Sindy J., Keeping an eye on Net use and e-mails can prevent litigation, <http://www.abanet.org/buslaw/blt/ndpolicy.html#top>,