*Please use this letter as a foundation and edit according to your situation to request more information from your school board and administration about what they are doing to protect their students from online risks and to encourage them to do more. While schools may be putting some safeguards in place, we have found that that information is usually not clearly communicated to parents and that—more importantly—most schools could be doing a lot more.*

[Date]

Dear [*Insert your local superintendent, school board president, PTA president, and or principal*],

As a [insert school] parent, I’m immensely grateful for the incredible amount of planning and sacrifice that has gone into this unprecedented school year. I know the administrators and teachers are committed to ensuring a healthy, productive, and safe learning environment for our children - *especially* during the pandemic. And that is why I am writing today.

I am very concerned about our students’ online safety while they are [at school/distance learning/learning in a hybrid model]. I would like to understand what safeguards have been put in place and what more the district and school intend to do to ensure a safe learning environment.

With so many more children online for longer periods of time during COVID-19 (for school *and* leisure), the [FBI](https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/school-closings-due-to-covid-19-present-potential-for-increased-risk-of-child-exploitation), [US Department of Justice](https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus/keeping-children-safe-online), [National Center on Missing and Exploited Children](https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2020/covid-19-and-missing-and-exploited-children), and countless other experts have issued warnings that the pandemic is expanding online risks such as exposure to pornography, child sexual abuse material, grooming by predators, and child sex trafficking. I’ve learned from the National Center on Sexual Exploitation’s *Safe Schools, Safe Libraries* initiative that [access to pornography](https://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/PTA_Outline-of-Concerns-and-EBSCO-examples_08-29-2017.pdf) and potential [access by predators](https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/school-closings-due-to-covid-19-present-potential-for-increased-risk-of-child-exploitation) has been and continues to be a [problem at and through schools](https://endsexualexploitation.org/sssl/) - and is exacerbated during the pandemic.

I’m asking that [insert school district and/or school] **recognize, prioritize, and minimize students’ potential exposure to predators, pornography, and sadly - other students causing harm -** by implementing online safety best practices noted by experts.

1. **Safeguards on school-issued devices:** Please ensure that any devices given to our students have all possible parental controls and safeguards in place. Even if families and schools have adequate Internet filters at home (and many don’t), additional controls on the devices, search engines, and apps provide an extra layer of protection from pornographic and sexually explicit material. *At the very least, please**provide clear instructions to parents and guardians about how to do so at home*. Information on what, if any, safety measures have been put in place by the district and/or school would also alleviate a lot of concern and frustration that I and other parents currently have. Protect Young Eyes ([www.protectyoungeyes.com](http://www.protectyoungeyes.com)) is a digital safety organization that offers easy-to-follow instructions for schools and families you may consider sharing with our community.
2. **Age-appropriate research databases:** What research databases is our school using? Did you know that widely-used EBSCO and Gale products geared toward primary and secondary schools have been found to contain sexually explicit material and pornography, including live links to pornography and prostitution websites and articles promoting the commercial sex industry and risky sexual behavior (BDSM, group sex, anal sex)? Did you know these databases contain loopholes that bypass Internet filters and include options to search other databases that may not be age-appropriate? As a parent I want to better understand what learning platforms my child is using and what their access is to the various databases offered through the school (including library and state-sponsored databases). I ask you to research these issues more thoroughly and provide a report to parents on your findings. You can learn more about these databases and see what is being purchased by school districts by visiting **National Center on Sexual Exploitation (www.endsexualexploitation.org/EBSCO)** and **Pornography is Not Education** **(**[**www.pornographyisnoteducation.org**](http://www.pornographyisnoteducation.org)**).** I look forward to hearing your report.
3. **Filtered Internet and Wi-fi** (including hotspots): Schools that receive federal E-rate funding [are mandated to comply](https://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=10370) with the [Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA)](https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/get-the-facts-on-cipa/) to monitor how students are using the Internet, use software that blocks access to harmful material, and implement an Internet safety plan. What Internet filtering services does our school use? How does Internet filtering by the district extend to families during distance learning? If the school district is working with ISPs and telephone carriers to provide discounted or even free access, please require filtering.
4. **Teacher training:** Are our teachers using social media platforms like [Snapchat](https://endsexualexploitation.org/snapchat/), [WhatsApp](https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/whatsapp-has-a-child-pornography-problem/) and [TikTok](https://endsexualexploitation.org/tiktok/) to engage students? Do they know these many of these platforms are known to be pedophile hunting grounds and rampant with child sex abuse material. Do your teachers know the risks of the platforms, devices, and education tools they’re using? Are they clear about protocols and procedures when a student is exposed to or even sharing pornography (including sexually explicit pictures of peers) while completing school assignments, on the playground, or school bus? Do they have the support and training necessary to deal with these potential harms? Digital Safety should be required for all school personnel.
5. **Education for families:** We’re in this together. Help us help *you* by giving us the information we need to keep our kids safe. Please educate families about online risks and how to mitigate them. Other school districts and schools around the country are hosting webinars and teaching sessions about technology during distance learning. Can our school consider the same? Perhaps our school PTA could sponsor a special session for parents regarding Digital Safety. At the very least, please be clear with families what platforms and websites our kids will be using, provide us with our children’s passwords, and direct them us resources we can use to have age- appropriate conversations with their kids at home about body safety, harms of pornography, digital citizenship, etc.
6. **Youth empowerment:** Part of doing everything we can to protect our kids is to teach them to protect themselves. Does our school curriculum include digital citizenship, cyber security, or critical porn analysis? In our increasingly tech-reliant education system, lessons around these issues should be required, prioritized, and ongoing. At a minimum, students (and parents!) should be well aware of school policies and expectations around devices (school-issued and personal) and Internet usage. Sooner, not later is when students should be taught in age-appropriate ways about body safety, recognizing predatory behavior (in person and online), [understanding the harms of pornography](https://endsexualexploitation.org/publichealth/#talking_points) and what to do if they’re exposed to it, being clear on the socio-emotional risks of “sexting”: sending sexually explicit photos of themselves, as well as the potential consequences—[including criminal liability](https://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/what-does-it-mean-distribute-child-pornography.htm)—of taking and/or sharing sexually explicit material or using it to bully, shame, or threaten someone (i.e. “revenge porn”), and most importantly what to do if they feel uncomfortable or threatened.

I’m sure we can’t even imagine all the challenges our administrators and teachers are currently facing...But parents are also struggling. I hope that together, we can prioritize our children’s online safety as it is critical to their health and wellbeing: something I know we all care about deeply.

Sincerely,

*[Signature, contact information]*

Please contact Lina Nealon, Director of Corporate and Strategic Initiatives, at [lnealon@ncose.com](mailto:lnealon@ncose.com) for more information and resources to keep students safe online.

Resources for school administrators and educators (electronic links)

* National Center on Sexual Exploitation’s [Safe Schools, Safe Libraries](https://endsexualexploitation.org/sssl/).
* **Safeguard your students’ devices and apps** by visiting digital safety organization, [Protect Young Eyes](https://protectyoungeyes.com/). Find the [devices](https://protectyoungeyes.com/parental-controls-every-digital-device/) or [apps](https://protectyoungeyes.com/apps/) your students are using, read about the risks, and **follow their step-by-step instructions to turn on privacy and controls**. *Please share this with our community!*
* The [Safeguard Alliance](https://endsexualexploitation.org/prevention/), a project of the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, has a library of resources on various topics related to the sexual exploitation and abuse of minors and what parent and educators can do to about issues like sexting, child-on-child sexual abuse, pornography exposure, etc.
* [Culture Reframed](http://www.culturereframed.org/) has extensive resources for parents, including their free [Parents Program on Porn and Hypersexualized Media for Tweens and Teens](https://www.culturereframed.org/parents-program-on-porn-hypersexualized-media/).
* This [DHS CyberSmartCampaign](https://www.dhs.gov/be-cyber-smart/campaign) has short videos that cover cyber safety basics.
* [**Readiness and Emergency Management for schools Technical Assistance Center**](https://rems.ed.gov/) (administered by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Supportive Schools) provides extensive resources, live and recorded trainings, and interactive tools on a wide range of threats and hazards to schools, including ensuring students’ online safety during the pandemic.
  + [Cybersecurity and Cybersafety for Schools](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/TASnapshot_CybersecurityCyberSafety_508C.pdf) (*parents, send this to your schools boards, principals, and PTA and ensure they are implementing these measures*)
  + [Cybersafety Quick Links for Protecting Youth](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/CyberSafetyProtectingYouth_COVID19_508C.pdf) (*resources schools can use and share with families and students*)
* [Common Sense Media](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/) includes extensive resources for teachers on types of educational platforms, social media, etc. Has live chats on available for educators on various topics related to online safety.
* [Youth Wellbeing Project](https://www.youthwellbeingproject.com.au/) tailors presentations for students from K–12 to build online literacy.
* [Protect Young Minds](https://braindefense.protectyoungminds.org/) has just released a new curriculum, [Brain Defense](https://braindefense.protectyoungminds.org/), geared toward 4th–6th and 9th–12th grade students with purchase options for single classrooms, schools, and multiple schools.
* [Netzsmart](https://www.netsmartz.org/Home) through National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) includes lesson plans for teachers with activities, kid projects, videos, tip sheets, etc. on every cyber-related topic possible (digital footprint, gaming, cyberbullying, sexting, etc.)
* [Education World](http://www.educationworld.com/): [Promoting Responsible and Ethical Digital Citizens](https://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/responsible-student-technology-use.shtml): Article includes links to lesson plans about [Digital Literacy and Online Ethics](https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson-plan-booster/cyber-ethics.shtml), as well as [Think Before You Hit Send](https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/student_engagers/internet_safety.shtml).
* Learn (and see) what EBSCO and Gale databases believe is age-appropriate material: visit our ally organization [Pornography is Not Education.](https://pornographyisnoteducation.org/f/hijacking-of-school-tech-by-the-porn-industry?blogcategory=Cengage)