[Updated July 2021]

To Whom It May Concern,

As we prepare for another school year, one that is likely to continue the trend of heavy reliance on education technology tools, I’d like to fully understand what precautions our [district/school/teachers] are taking to keep our students safe online while at school, as well as at home while using school-provided devices, databases, and online resources.

Unfortunately, exposure to pornography and even predators through school-issued devices and education platforms has been a growing problem, one that was greatly exacerbated during distance learning during the pandemic. This is an issue requiring urgent and adequate prevention measures by our school boards and administration. Student exposure to harmful material and individuals not only **places the children entrusted to your care in danger of severe harm, but** **it also puts our school at risk of legal liability and loss of federal and/or state funding.**

While we understand that parents must be aware of potential risks and students must also be educated on responsible use of technology, it **is the school’s responsibility to ensure the products it provides students are safe and that our community is made well aware of potential risks and how to mitigate them.** Unfortunately, it is all too often when children have already been groomed by predators or exposed to harmful material through school-provided resources that the gaps in prevention are recognized. Please proactively do what you can to prevent any of our students being harmed.

We urge [insert school/school district] to **recognize, prioritize, and minimize students’ potential exposure to predators, pornography, and even students causing harm -** by implementing online safety best practices.

I would like a detailed response on which of these measures have been put in place. I’m sure I’m not the only parent who would appreciate this information.

1. **Safeguards on school-issued devices:** Please ensure that any devices (iPads, Chromebooks, etc.) given to our students have all possible 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 parents may 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. Please be aware that Google actually instituted several major changes going into effect September 1, 2021 to make K-12 Chrome OS users safer by defaulting several safety features [www.endsexualexploitation.org/chromebooks](http://www.endsexualexploitation.org/chromebooks). However, Apple has not done so for its products.
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? Please research these issues more thoroughly and provide a report to parents on your findings. You can learn more about these databases and the type of material our children are at risk of accessing by visiting **National Center on Sexual Exploitation (www.endsexualexploitation.org/EBSCO)** and **Pornography is Not Education** **(**[**www.pornographyisnoteducation.org**](http://www.pornographyisnoteducation.org)**).**
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/), [Twitter](http://www.endsexualexploitation.org/twitter), [TikTok](http://www.endsexualexploitation.org/tiktok), or [Discord](http://www.endsexualexploitation.org/discord) to engage students? Are they aware that children under 13 are not allowed on most social media and gaming apps? Do they know that many of these platforms are **known to be predator hunting grounds and are rampant with child sex abuse material**? Do our 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 riding the 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:** Help parents and caregivers help *you* by giving us the information we need to help keep 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 online safety. At the very least, please be clear with families what platforms and websites our kids will be using, provide parents with our children’s passwords, and direct us to resources we can use to have age- appropriate conversations with our 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.

We understand the many challenges school boards and administrators are facing in a rapidly shifting education landscape. However, above all else, the school systems must keep children safe: and in our current environment that means thorough and adequate measures to prevent exposure to harmful materials and predatory individuals through ed tech tools.

I look forward to hearing from you what is being done to ensure our student’s online safety – as it is critical to their health and well-being.

Best,

Lina Nealon

Director of Corporate and Strategic Initiatives

National Center on Sexual Exploitation

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Resources below for school administrators, educators, and caregivers compiled by the **National Center on Sexual Exploitation** ([www.endsexualexploitation.org](http://www.endsexualexploitation.org)). For more information, please contact public@ncose.com.

* National Center on Sexual Exploitation includes extensive information and evidence on the harms to youth of pornography exposure, the dangers of various social media and gaming platforms, resources for parents/caregivers, school administrators, and youth.
* 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.
* **Safeguard your students’ devices and apps** by visiting child 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!*
* [Culture Reframed](http://www.culturereframed.org/) has resources for parents and youth, 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 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 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.
* [Wired Human](https://www.wiredhuman.org/) empowers youth to combat digital exploitation and build value-driven screen habits.
* [Cyber Fareedah](https://www.cyberfareedah.com/) helps parents and caretakers protect kids online with easy to follow safety tips through short videos, text messages, podcasts and more
* [Defend 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. Faith-based supplements available.
* [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).
* See what EBSCO believes is age-appropriate material: visit [www.endsexualexploitation.org/ebsco](http://www.endsexualexploitation.org/ebsco)

**Negative Outcomes Linked to Pornography Use in Youth**

Scientific research shows a wide range of harms and negative outcomes linked to pornography use. In adolescents, pornography consumption is associated with greater engagement in risky sexual behaviors,i increased female sexual victimization,ii increased probability of sending sexual images and messages by boys,iii sexually coercive and aggressive behaviors,iv adverse mental health effects such as depressive symptoms,v as well as impaired verbal memory in pornography-addicted juvenile subjects,vi and decreased academic performance.vii Especially noteworthy for its potential implications for educators, pornography consumption by men is associated with grey-matter volume loss and decreased functional connectivity in a key areas of the brain responsible for exertion of cognitive control over motor behavior, response inhibition, behavioral flexibility, attention, and future planning.viii

Children are at greater risk as exposure may affect their development and behavior. Researchers have explained, “Having exposure to pornography at a young age may not only introduce children to behaviors they may eventually acquire, but the children may have those behaviors reinforced by seeing the models (e.g. the individuals shown in the pornography medium, the person who exposed the child to pornography, etc.) being rewarded by the behavior. If the benefits of such sexual behavior are reinforced for the child, they may have a higher likelihood of adopting the behavior themselves.”ix The younger and more often children are exposed to such content the more problematic it can be.x

i Meghan Donevan and Magdalena Mattebo, “The Relationship between Frequent Pornography Consumption, Behaviours, and Sexual Preoccupancy among Male Adolescents in Sweden,” Sexual & Reproductive Health 12 (2017): 82–87, doi: 10.1016/j.srhc.2017.03.002; Debra K. Braun-Courville and Mary Rojas, “Exposure to Sexually Explicit Web Sites and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors,” Journal of Adolescent Health 45 (2009): 156– 162; C. Marston and R. Lewis, “Anal Heterosex among Young People and Implications for Health Promotion: A Qualitative Study in the UK,” BJM Open 4 (February 4, 2016): 1–6; Emily R. Rothman, et al., “Multi-Person Sex among a Sample of Adolescent Female Urban Health Clinic Patients,” Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine 89, no. 1 (2011): 129–137; E. Häggström-Nordin, U. Hanson, and T. Tydén, “Association between Pornography Consumption and Sexual Practices among Adolescents in Sweden,” International Journal of STD & AIDS 16 (2005): 102–107.

ii Silvia Bonino, Silvia Ciairano, Emanuela Rabagliette, and Elena Cattelino, “Use of Pornography and Self-Reported Engagement in Sexual Violence among Adolescents,” European Journal of Developmental Psychology 3, no. 3 (2006): 265–288.

iii Nicky Stanley et al., “Pornography, Sexual Coercion and Abuse and Sexting in Young People’s Intimate Relationships: A European Study,” Journal of Interpersonal Violence (2016): 1–26.

iv Michele L. Ybarra, Kimberly J. Mitchell, Merle Hamburger, et al., “X-Rated Material and Perpetration of Sexually Aggressive Behavior among Children and Adolescents: Is There a Link?” Aggressive Behavior 37 (2011): 1‒18, doi: 10.1002/ab.20367; Michael C. Seto and Martin L. Lalumière, “What Is So Special about Male Adolescent Sexual Offending? A Review and Test of Explanations through Meta-Analysis,” Psychological Bulletin 136, no. 4 (2010): 526–575.

v Cecilia Ma, “Relationships between Exposure to Online Pornography, Psychological Well-Being and Sexual Permissiveness among Hong Kong Chinese Adolescents: a Three-Wave Longitudinal Study,” Applied Research in Quality of Life 14 (2019): 423–439; Eunsuk Cho, “Frequent Internet Pornography Use: Korean Adolescents’ Internet Use Time, Mental Health, Sexual Behavior and Delinquency,” International Journal of Human Ecology 17 (2016): 27–37; Mo Min et al, “Current Situation of Pornography Use in Senior College Male Students and Its Correlation with Their Depression-Anxiety-Pressure,” Journal of Third Military Medical University (2017). vi Pukovisa Prawiorharjo et al., “Impaired Recent Verbal Memory in Pornography-Addicted Juvenile Subjects,” Neurology Research International (2019), doi.org/10.1155/2019/2351638

vii Ine Beyens, Laura Vandenbosch, and Steven Eggermont, “Early Adolescent Boys’ Exposure to Internet Pornography: Relationships to Pubertal Timing, Sensation Seeking, and Academic Performance,” Journal of Early Adolescence 35, no. 8 (2015): 1045–1068, doi: 10.1177/0272431614548069.

viii Simone Kühn and Jürgen Gallinat, “Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated with Pornography Consumption: The Brain on Porn,” JAMA Psychiatry 71, no. 7 (2014): 827‒834, doi: 10.1001 /jamapsychiatry.2014.93;

ix Rebecca Dillard, Kathryn Maguire-Jack, Kathryn Showalter, et al., “Abuse Disclosures of Youth with Problem Sexualized Behaviors and Trauma Symptomology,” Child Abuse & Neglect 88 (2019): 201‒211, doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.11.019.

x Megan S. C. Lim, Paul A. Agius, Elise R. Carroette, et al., “Young Australians Use of Pornography and Associations with Sexual Risk Behaviours,” Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 41, no. 4 (2017): 438–443.