**[Moving From 'Acceptable' to 'Responsible' Use in a Web 2.0 World](http://mobile.edweek.org/c.jsp?cid=25919971&bcid=25919971&rssid=25919961&item=http%3A%2F%2Fapi.edweek.org%2Fv1%2Few%2F%3Fuuid%3D2172CCDC-B247-11E0-B765-8D9F01ADD654)**

By Jim Bosco & Keith Krueger Education Week July 20, 2011

In just a few years, mobile phones and Web 2.0 collaborative and participatory applications have become a pervasive feature of modern life. They are woven into how we conduct business, produce and disseminate knowledge, participate in civic life, and engage socially. Yet, in many school districts, Web 2.0 and mobile technologies are largely viewed as inappropriate and are banned or severely restricted. It is increasingly clear that there is a need to consider the educational potential of these technologies and to take a balanced approach to their use in our classrooms.

We call on educational leaders, particularly superintendents, chief academic leaders, and chief technology officers to update their districts' acceptable-use policies, or AUPs. Now is the time to re-evaluate, rethink, and retool so we can expand and enrich learning for our students with current and emerging mobile technologies and growing collaborative and participatory means of using Web-based applications.

While we advocate for the opportunities that Web 2.0 and mobile devices present, we also acknowledge that these new possibilities bring with them challenges that need to be addressed in the educational environment.

**The Issue of Safety:** Concern about student safety on the Internet in both the Web 1.0 and the Web 2.0 worlds is unquestionably valid. The Internet is composed of the best and the worst that the human mind can produce. The Children's Internet Protection Act, or CIPA, enacted by Congress in 2000, requires schools receiving federal E-rate funding to block pornography from minors and to develop AUPs. But, in most school districts, the policies in place were developed before the rise of Web 2.0 and mobile technologies.

In one sense, CIPA did not go far enough in protecting our children. If we accept only what CIPA defines as harmful to minors-pornography-we disregard other materials that are at least as or even more harmful, such as those that spew hate based on race, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. While attention has been paid to protecting students from sexual predators, there has been much less attention on commercial predators. Without denying the need to protect students from inappropriate sexual content on the Internet, we believe other types of harmful materials also deserve attention.

Another aspect of safety involves protecting youths from misinformation. The Internet has made both good and erroneous information increasingly available. More access to information makes the skill of assessing information's quality more critical.

Social networking, smartphones, and other mobile devices have added new dimensions to the safety issue-both in terms of challenges and opportunities. Yet, the media and critics give much more attention to what is wrong with these new technologies than what is right, which means there is considerable focus on the misuse of social networking for cyberbullying, mobile phones for sexting, and other pernicious uses of social media. Rarely highlighted are the ways that social media or mobile technologies are enriching learning in our schools.

In our work, we have seen the way that leading-edge school districts have made effective use of mobile technologies and applications that are participatory (that draw the individual into a civic, educational, or social activity) and/or collaborative (that involve two or more people working together via the Web on a project of some sort). In those districts, teachers and administrators use social networking to bridge the gap between home and school with parents *and* students. They are also finding ways to engage students as active participants in their education rather than passive spectators. In such districts and schools, the tools of young people's social and recreational lives can be part of their learning lives as well.

**Developing Responsible-Use Policies:** One approach to protecting students from pernicious content on the Internet and the misuse of social networking or mobile technologies in schools is to ban them. This school of thought holds that banning the device or application will eliminate the chance of its being used for cyberbullying, sexting, or distracting from instruction. But if we are honest with ourselves, we know kids have ways of getting around the rules. And, by making something an illicit activity, some kids will be drawn to do what is prohibited just to show that it can be done.

Certainly, Web-filtering is necessary for younger children who might access inappropriate materials accidentally. Yet, as students move on to upper grades, we believe they need to become responsible, ethical Internet users. We believe that will only occur if school systems' policies and personnel get buy-in from students and provide guidance on responsible digital citizenship. Highly restrictive Internet and mobile policies in the school environment provide only a false sense of protecting kids. Some may believe that schools only need to be concerned about a student when he or she is in school and in a tightly controlled environment. We disagree. Instead, we believe in the vision of such districts as the Birdville Independent School District in Texas, whose mission statement is: "All students succeed in a future they create."

We believe the best way schools can contribute to safe and appropriate use of the Internet and student owned-mobile devices is to move from the traditional AUP approach to an RUP-a "responsible-use policy" approach. Traditional AUPs are not unlike the agreements that we accept when we buy or access products or services via the Internet by checking "accept." While these may satisfy legal requirements, most of us never pay much attention to them.

We advocate a new RUP policy/philosophy that treats the student as a person responsible for ethical and healthy use of the Internet and mobile devices. The role of teachers is to help students acquire the skills to responsibly use the Internet and mobile devices. Included in this education process is gaining a disposition to avoid inappropriate and malicious sites, as well as the skill to assess the validity of information found on the Internet or passed along by others via social networking.

So how can leaders get started? The Consortium for School Networking, or CoSN, the national association of school district technology leaders, is engaged in a major initiative on participatory learning funded by the [John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](http://www.macfound.org/). One of the resources this initiative has produced is a suite of tools to help educational leaders think through these issues; it is available at[www.cosn.org/AUPguide](http://www.cosn.org/AUPguide). At the CoSN website, visitors can also explore issues around [mobility in education](http://www.cosn.org/MobileLead), get assistance in reformulating AUP/RUP policies, and [engage in discussion](http://www.access4ed.net/) with other district education leaders.

The great educational philosopher John Dewey gave us important advice: "If we teach today's students as we did yesterday's, we are robbing them of tomorrow." Responsible use of the Internet is a critical aspect in the lives of our students today, as well as a vital ingredient in how they will live their lives after their formal schooling is done. The best we can do for students is to empower them to function responsibly in a world where they will have many choices.

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