ACCESS DENIED

How Internet Filtering in Schools Harms Public Education

February 2013

ACLU
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
of RHODE ISLAND

Access Denied: How Internet Filtering in Schools Harms Public Education

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Introduction and Summary

Every school district in Rhode Island makes use of Internet filtering software to designate certain categories of websites – or even websites that simply mention specific words – off-limits to students when they use school computers to access the Internet. This deeply-flawed software, and school districts' over-extensive embrace of it, prevents students across Rhode Island from accessing relevant and educative information in the classroom, and unduly limits teachers in their lesson plans as well. Allowing school administrators virtually unbridled discretion to determine how this technological censor will be used gives them a power over classroom teaching that would never be tolerated for offline lessons.

These concerns are not merely hypothetical. A review of filtering software policies and practices in Rhode Island's school districts demonstrates the severity and prevalence of the problem:

- Among the many varied sites that teachers have found blocked and interrupting their lesson plans -- either due to flaws in the filtering software or over-reaching implementation of the filters by school districts -- are the Smithsonian website, a video clip of the Nutcracker ballet, a website on global warming, a YouTube video on Social Security, and the websites of PBS Kids and National Stop Bullying Day.

- Through use of filtering software, more than half the school districts block students from accessing websites that, by the software manufacturer's own definition, "promote partisan historical opinion" or that include any information about undefined "anti-government groups."

- A few school districts block, or warn students about accessing, websites in such obviously-appropriate categories as "books and literature," "social opinion," and "religion."

- One of the filtering categories that a few school districts use – "Lifestyle & Culture" – has been known to block students' access to pro-gay rights websites.

- Use of so-called "safe search" keyword blocking by districts has led to such absurd situations as students being unable to access websites for a class assignment involving a synthetic polymer known as "polyvinyl alcohol" -- because the search for information contained the word "alcohol."

Also striking is the lack of meaningful policies by school districts to govern this intrusive censorship regime:

- Even while requiring students and staff to adhere to "acceptable use" computer policies, the vast majority of school districts provide no information as to what categories of websites are filtered, and the information provided by those that do is quite incomplete.

- There is no transparency in the decision-making by administrators as to what sites or categories of sites will be blocked, allowing non-teaching school officials to make virtually unaccountable decisions regarding the use of the filtering software.

- Even as teachers find class assignments disrupted by over-reaching blocking of websites, school officials appear to exercise unrestrained discretion to decide when to accede to teacher requests to unblock sites.

- While all these filtering efforts are aimed at keeping students from accessing "inappropriate" websites, students are routinely able to get around them.

The ACLU believes that basic steps should be taken to address the consequent serious impact on students' and teachers' First Amendment rights and on their right to access information in schools. Among other recommendations, we offer the following:

- School districts should filter only those categories required by federal law (in general, visual depictions of sexual conduct that fit under the definition of "obscene for minors"), and those required to protect the school computer system (e.g., blocking spyware and viruses, limiting excessive bandwidth, etc.).

- Use of "safe search" keyword functions in filtering software should be prohibited, as it is simply too blunt an approach that restricts access to legitimate sites, while doing virtually nothing to prevent students from accessing "inappropriate" ones.

- School districts should have in place written procedures to quickly respond to teacher requests to unblock sites, with a presumption that any such request should be granted.

- Information about the categories that are being blocked by school officials, and documentation of their responses to any requests for blocking and unblocking sites, should be readily accessible to teachers, students and any other interested parties.

- Students' access to Internet information should not vary in significant ways depending on where they go to school. In order to promote uniformity, the General Assembly should enact legislation implementing some of these recommendations.

- Rather than focusing on censorship, schools should spend more time educating students on Internet safety.

Instead of teaching students about appropriate Internet use and enforcing school rules and policies regarding the use of the Internet during class time, Rhode Island's public schools have used filtering software technology to truncate students' access to the wealth of information available online. This public school censorship bars students from a full range of ideas, and unduly hampers teachers trying to make use of new and exciting pedagogical resources. In efforts to keep our students "safe" from speech online, we have denied them the ability to experience all the lessons the Internet has to offer. The ACLU is hopeful that this report will prompt positive changes.[1]

Background

While students' First Amendment rights are not as expansive as those for adults, free speech and viewpoint-neutral access to information still have a place in the school setting. In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court expressly declared that schools could not remove books from libraries "simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek by their removal to 'prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion.'"[2]

As with attempts to censor books, the ACLU believes that students have a legal right to access information at school via the Internet without unreasonable barriers.

As with attempts to censor books, the ACLU believes that students have a legal right to access information at school via the Internet without unreasonable barriers. Under the guise of protecting pupils from digital harm, however, schools across the state regularly block access by students, teachers, and other staff to large swaths of the Internet, with little regard for the value of information online and with serious implications for the free speech rights of users and their access to relevant information in the school setting.

In order to better understand the scope of this censorship, the Rhode Island ACLU filed an Access to Public Records Act request with each school district for information about their filtering software, the categories of information filtered, their school policies regarding Internet access, and any requests filed by teachers or students to unblock websites. We found that policies vary widely between districts, and sometimes even between schools in the same district,

but in each case, the restrictions impose substantial barriers on both the ability of students to learn about the world around them and the ability of teachers to share information with their students.

The censorship that students and teachers face in the schools is due in part – but only in part – to a federal law known as the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). This controversial law requires schools and libraries receiving federal funding for Internet services to use a "technology protection measure" that blocks visual depictions of "obscene [material], child pornography," and – in the case of minors under 17 – material "harmful to minors" on all computers connected to the Internet. The term "harmful to minors" is defined to apply generally to materials depicting nudity in a prurient manner.[3]

Disturbingly, Congress approved CIPA even after a Congressional committee investigating the issue presciently concluded that, with the use of such filters, "protected, harmless, or innocent speech would be accidentally or inappropriately blocked."[4] This highlighted a fundamental disconnect between the aims of the legislation and the realities of technology; while CIPA's goal is to keep minors from viewing certain images, blocking or filtering software generally relies on text. With no ability for the filter to perceive context, even the most innocuous sites fall victim to the overly cautious filter when the software mistakenly identifies words or phrases as inappropriate.[5]

Following passage of the Children's Internet Protection Act, schools began installing filtering software that barred students from gaining any access to websites deemed inappropriate by the school's administration, not just websites that were covered by CIPA's

mandate. As a result, students are generally allowed access only to information their administrators – and the flawed filtering system – decide are acceptable.

In February 2011, the National ACLU launched "Don't Filter Me," a campaign dedicated to examining Internet censorship in schools involving pro-"gay rights" sites. This followed a series of complaints from students across the country that schools were discriminatorily blocking access to websites discussing LGBT issues in a positive light, while simultaneously allowing students access to websites condemning homosexuality. Many schools had unintentionally blocked this information and quickly made changes to ensure their filters protected the First Amendment rights of students while also complying with federal law. Other schools were less proactive, resulting in litigation by the ACLU. Last year, a federal judge ruled that a Missouri school district had violated the First Amendment rights of students by using an Internet filter that blocked many websites expressing positive LGBT views.[6]

Rather than focus on one particular issue, the ACLU of Rhode Island chose to examine public school Internet filtering as a whole. Most of the information received covered the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, although some requests for unblocking that were provided to the ACLU went back as far as 2005.[7] The information we obtained was accurate as of November 2011 (i.e., for the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year), when most of the ACLU's open records requests were fulfilled. Although filtered categories may be changed at any time by the school administration – often without warning to students or teachers – there is no reason to believe that schools made substantial changes during the most-recently completed school year.[8]

The Filtering Software Used in Rhode Island

Every school district in Rhode Island utilizes Trustwave's M86 filtering software (formerly known as M8e6), which is offered through the Rhode Island Network for Educational Technology (RINET) and is the same filtering software used locally in public libraries. M86 offers 23 filtering topics, further broken down into 125 categories, and also allows software purchasers to create custom categories. The filter allows for the blocking not only of categories like "Child Pornography," but also such topics as "Community Organizations," "Humor," and "Streaming Media." Managers of the filter may block an entire topic, such as "Entertainment," or select smaller subcategories within, such as "Art," "Comics," and "Online Greeting Cards."

In addition to blocking "categories," M86 boasts "safe search" enforcement and keyword filter control, preventing search engines from returning results containing designated blocked words, whether it is "sex" or "Facebook." Students who search for banned words will not receive results. Each category can be further customized to allow users to access a particular website, block them from accessing the website entirely, or warn users that while they may be able to view the site, the content may violate institution rules.[9]

This Site Has Been Blocked by Coventry Public Schools

This site has been blocked by our Internet filtering service.

This site either has undesirable content which is inconsistent with any educational objective, or may interfere with the normal operation of the network.

To view a Acrobat Reader (.pdf) file which lists all possible categories with explanation please click here.

If you feel this site has been blocked in error, please email the webmaster for review.

THE COMPLETE URL MUST BE INCLUDED FOR REVIEW

Error submissions will be ignored if complete URLs are not included.

Coventry Public Schools

Blocked Categories in Rhode Island Schools

In purported accordance with CIPA, all school districts that gave sufficient information reported blocking the categories of "Child Pornography," "Pornography/Adult Content," and "Obscene/Tasteless." However, filtering categories are not always what they seem. The sweeping and subjective generalizations informing some categories can end up blocking significantly more content than intended or legitimate.[10]

The sweeping and subjective generalizations informing some categories end up blocking significantly more information than intended or legitimate.
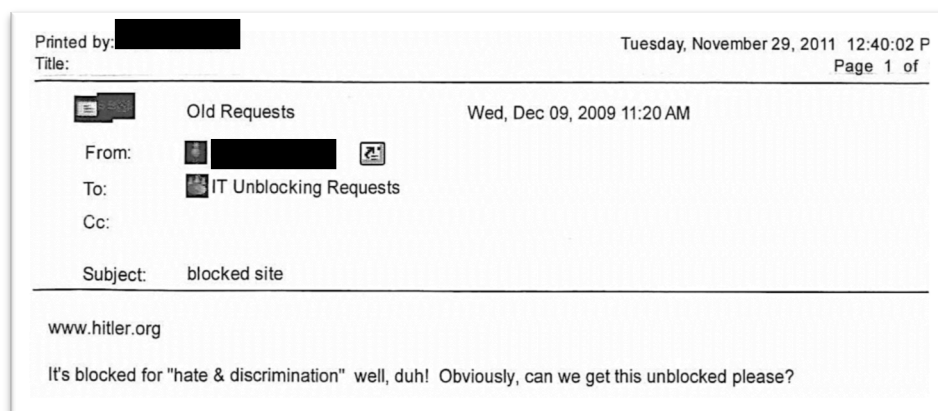
For example, since CIPA requires the blocking of legally obscene websites, it would seem difficult to object to prohibiting student access to pages categorized as "Obscene/Tasteless." Despite its title, though, "Obscene/Tasteless" is not designed to block sites that meet the legal definition of obscenity. Separate "pornography" categories do that. Instead, this filtering category blocks access to sites "that contain explicit graphical *or text* depictions of such things as mutilation, murder, bodily functions, horror, death, *rude behavior*, executions, violence, and obscenities etc." (emphasis added) The conflation of such a wide range of topics into one filtered category borders on the absurd.[11]

Other categories are just as problematic. Twenty-three school districts block any access to websites falling under the category of "Terrorist/Militant/Extremist." This filter blocks "sites that contain information regarding militias, anti-government groups, [and] terrorism." It is unclear how broadly this category defines "anti-government" websites, and whether it blocks websites merely "contain[ing] information" about such groups, as opposed to websites

promoting those views. However limited it may ultimately be, it remains extremely problematic by cutting off access to many primary sources of "extremist organizations," including (to give two known examples of blocked sites) the websites of such groups as Hezbollah and the Black Panther Party. Thus, teachers and students wishing to use the Internet to examine and discuss current affairs involving Al Qaeda or the Taliban, for instance, may likewise find themselves limited in doing so.

Twenty-four school districts block the category titled "Hate & Discrimination," which is also defined in incredibly broad fashion and raises similar concerns.[12] In fact, far surpassing CIPA's reach, school districts block access to a combined 89 categories of information. In contrast to the narrow limitations of CIPA – which in and of themselves raise considerable free-speech concerns in light of the basic flaws in filtering software – these 89 categories run the entire scope of the Internet, blocking students not just from potentially harmful imagery, but from topics deemed controversial, inappropriate, or time-wasting by school administration.[13]

Unfortunately, even when the categories are clearly appropriate for students to view, some schools still exercise their discretion to block them. For example, prior to the National

Printed by: ▮▮▮▮▮		Tuesday, November 29, 2011 12:40:02 P
Title:		Page 1 of
▮▮	Old Requests	Wed, Dec 09, 2009 11:20 AM
From:	▮▮▮▮▮ ▮	
To:	IT Unblocking Requests	
Cc:		
Subject:	blocked site	

www.hitler.org

It's blocked for "hate & discrimination" well, duh! Obviously, can we get this unblocked please?

Cumberland Public Schools

ACLU's "Don't Filter Me" campaign, M86's "Lifestyles" filter served as a de facto "gay rights filter," inappropriately blocking sites such as those for the Human Rights Campaign and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Discrimination (GLAAD). In reaction to ACLU concerns, M86 changed the title of the category to "Lifestyle & Culture," and revised the description to include more general cultural organizations, potentially dissuading blocking of that category.

Despite this change, two Rhode Island school districts – New Shoreham and Portsmouth – continue to block this category. Thus, for students in these school districts, many positive LGBT websites may remain inaccessible. Scituate doesn't block "Lifestyle & Culture" websites, but it does warn students that any content they view in this category may be inappropriate, likely deterring some students' access to useful LGBT websites.

In a similar vein, a few school districts block or warn students against sites categorized by M86 as "Social Opinion" ("sites that contain opinion on a variety of social topics"), which includes the sites for such organizations as the ACLU, PETA, the National Organization for Marriage, and Planned Parenthood. Also blocked in a few districts are the categories of "Religion," "Translation Services," and even "Books & Literature ("sites [including literary reviews] that discuss and promote books, literature, and periodicals distributed with the intention of providing entertainment"). By blocking "Web Logs/Personal Pages," seven school districts bar access to GoLocalProv, as well as SCOTUSblog, one of the most respected websites covering the workings of the United States Supreme Court.[14]
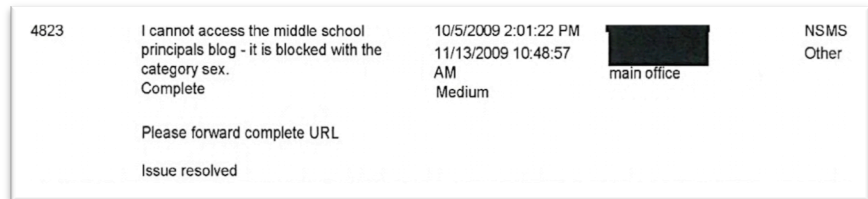
Blocked Websites in Rhode Island Schools

The scope and breadth of filtering categories and school district practices partially explain why so many innocuous sites – among them those for PBS Kids, National Stop Bullying Day, and even a video clip of the Nutcracker ballet – were temporarily blocked in Rhode Island schools during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, and why censorship concerns are not hypothetical. Time and again, teachers in Rhode Island public schools have been forced to take the time to file requests with administrators to unblock websites like these for the benefit of their students.

Just as surprising is how difficult it can sometimes be for teachers to get sites unblocked. For example:

- Three school districts block the use of "Generic Streaming Media." As a result, North Smithfield blocked – and refused to unblock – the Channel 10 School Closings page, as well as a streaming video from DiscoveryEducation.com.

- In Burrillville, students assigned a project examining the correlation between video games and violence were nearly unable to complete their assigned task when an article clearly titled "Do Video Games Cause Teen Violence?" was blocked by the district's use of the "Video Games" filter. The district responded to the teacher's complaint about the incident swiftly enough to unblock the search term – but only for a few specific students, and only during a specific time frame. Once class was over, the article was again made inaccessible to students.

- An overabundance of caution regarding the use of Facebook, MySpace, and other social networking sites resulted in the blocking of Smithsonian.com in Exeter-West Greenwich, as the filter classified the URL as belonging to MySpace. The page was not unblocked, and the teacher was instead redirected to another URL affiliated with the Smithsonian.

Of course, because of the broad nature of the categories, the technical flaws inherent in the use of filtering software, and the ultimately subjective nature in sometimes attempting to differentiate between "appropriate" (accessible) information and more questionable (blocked) content, it is little surprise to see so many problems arise. What is surprising is how willing school officials are to rely on a private software

| 4823 | I cannot access the middle school principals blog - it is blocked with the category sex.
Complete

Please forward complete URL

Issue resolved | 10/5/2009 2:01:22 PM
11/13/2009 10:48:57 AM
Medium | ████
main office | NSMS
Other |

North Smithfield Public Schools

manufacturer to decide what information students in their schools will be able to receive. Further, to the extent one might sympathize with schools' resource concerns in relying on categories that, for example, block high-bandwidth streaming media sites, their refusal to unblock specific sites in those categories, once a teacher brings a problem to their attention, is indefensible.

Even websites constructed by school faculty are not safe from censorship, as eight school districts block access to sites created on free web hosts, including Weebly.com, which caters specifically to students and teachers. The website for Exeter-West Greenwich athletics teams was temporarily blocked from students in that school district, and a Weebly-based website on "Global Warming in Antarctica" was not unblocked in Coventry based solely on its use of a free web host.

"Safe Search" and System Failures

Several school districts also utilize the "safe search" function, which blocks keywords. It is difficult to know exactly who is using this option, though; Narragansett, Smithfield, and

Coventry explicitly stated their use of "safe search," but others made no mention as to whether or not the program was in use.

The experiences of teachers and students with "safe search" epitomize the initial concerns surrounding CIPA and the inappropriateness of keyword-based searches to filter images. In Coventry, a teacher reported students were having difficulty searching for "polyvinyl alcohol," a synthetic polymer used in papermaking, construction, and fishing. The reason: the school district had used the "safe search" filter to block searches with the taboo word "alcohol." Despite this incident, school officials refused to unblock the phrase from the "safe search" filter. Meanwhile, in Exeter-West Greenwich, students were barred from Dogpile.com – a search engine – because the site, for unknown reasons, did not comply with the school district's safe-word filter.

Beyond the purposeful restriction of students' access to information, system malfunctions and issues inherent with the use of technology further restrict students' research. The website for the Burrillville Youth Basketball Association, for instance, was blocked from students because the M86 filter miscategorized the website as "Pornography." In Coventry, a website providing information on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) was similarly designated as "Pornography" and blocked from students.

While some filter categories are chosen in an attempt to prevent students from wasting time on games and social networking sites, this effort often leads to students using class time to find ways around the filter. Requests to block specific "time wasting" websites are riddled with complaints from teachers that their industrious students are constantly finding new ways around the filter. Students have learned to write down the IP addresses of certain websites, or use secure versions or slightly altered URLs that the filter has not yet been programmed to catch. A simple Google search on how to bypass an Internet filter returned 1,070,000 results. Thus, misguided efforts to keep students from some websites only seems to encourage them to find other ways to access the information on the Internet, and perhaps to spend considerable class time in doing so.

Warning Sites

Websites that are not blocked but issue a warning to the user carry their own set of concerns. Attempting to access a website which has been flagged as "Warn" by the M86 system triggers a screen informing the user that the website may be inappropriate or banned. This serves as a disincentive to students to view the website, even if the site is not blocked in its entirety.

As with blocked categories, the categories of websites that students are discouraged from accessing as a result of warnings seem to be based on the whims of school administrators. While school districts make relatively little use of the "warning" option, the times that they do so are often perplexing.

In North Smithfield, the book recommendation site Goodreads.com was blocked for students looking for new books. In response to a teacher's request, the site was recategorized to warn students that, while they could view the website, such access could violate the network's terms of service. The service order unblocking the site further warned that if there was a "problem," the site would again be blocked.

Scituate requires a warning for any website classified as "Society/Lifestyle," including the sub-categories "Alcohol," "Animals/Pets," "Books and Literature/Writing," "Fashion," "Recreation" and "Social Opinion." Whether they try to access a website about puppies or homosexuality, the Huffington Post or yard maintenance, Scituate students may be subject to a warning that what they are about to view may, for whatever reason, be contrary to the policies of Scituate Public Schools. As we will discuss shortly, the actual policies are rarely enumerated, leaving students wondering what, exactly, they may be doing wrong.

One other potentially significant problem also deserves mention. It should not be surprising that many websites simply are not categorized by M86 in any fashion at all. They include many Rhode Island-based websites – among others, the
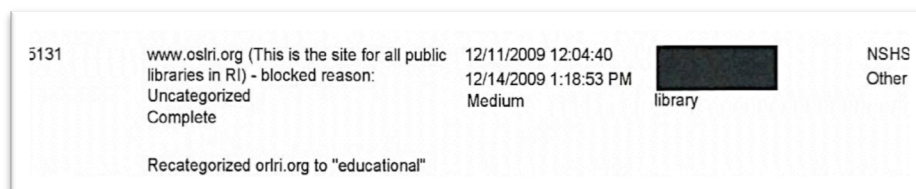
| 5131 | www.oslri.org (This is the site for all public libraries in RI) - blocked reason: Uncategorized Complete

Recategorized orlri.org to "educational" | 12/11/2009 12:04:40 12/14/2009 1:18:53 PM Medium | | NSHS Other |
| | | | library | |

North Smithfield Public Schools

ACLU of Rhode Island's own site, as well as those for Marriage Equality Rhode Island, The Providence Journal, and the Roger Williams Zoo. Depending on the programming for the filtering software in place in any school district, it's

possible that these sites may be blocked as well, as we are aware of at least one instance where a

teacher had to ask for an uncategorized website to be unblocked.

The Consequences of Filtering

In many cases, recategorizing or unblocking a website is not a speedy process. According to the documents we received from our open records request, administrators or

Time and again, the use of the Internet filtering software has significantly impacted the ability of teachers to use the Internet to proceed with a carefully-crafted lesson plan.

computer technicians often took several weeks or even months to address requests for unblocking filed by teachers. In some cases, websites were not unblocked until the following school year. During these long periods of time, students and many teachers were prohibited from accessing this information while on campus. One North Smithfield teacher complained, in a request for unblocking, "there is an [e]xorbitant amount of filtering through our network … In fact, this workorder site was even blocked."

As previously noted, however, a teacher's request to have a site unblocked is, too often, simply rejected. Time and again, the use of the Internet filtering software has significantly impacted the ability of teachers to use the Internet to proceed with a carefully-crafted lesson plan.

By far the website garnering the most requests for unblocking was YouTube. Teachers repeatedly found YouTube sites blocked from use in their classroom, often shortly before the lesson was to begin, forcing them to redesign their lesson plans in the last moments before class began. Frequently, several teachers from the same school or district placed requests to have YouTube videos unblocked. But even when a site was unblocked, teachers found that allowance rescinded, either by the administration or the filter itself, without warning. In a related

problem, teachers would sometimes find certain news sites entirely blocked because the comments section utilized Facebook, a site deemed off-limits by some schools.

In one district, a teacher attempted to set up a website for his science class so they could have easy access to assignments, interesting reading, and other class-related materials. Because he utilized a free web host, students were

| ncident ID | 3747 |
| Location | Senior High School |

Request Information

Incident Description	Please open googlemobile.blogspot.com. Please open blogspot.com. I can't see or edit the blog begun by the technology committee. Good God.
Request By	▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Location	Senior High School
Building	
Request Email	▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Emergency ?	No
Incident Date	6/8/2010
Created On	6/8/2010
Area Description	
Area Number	S-21

Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District

barred from accessing his website in his class or anywhere else on campus. Despite his request, the website was not unblocked. In another documented complaint, a teacher protested, "I have all of my lesson plans, bookmarks for skills tutor, worksites for kids, under my favorites in AOL … Today I tried to download two lesson plans I had worked on all weekend. I could not even sign on." In response, the teacher was informed AOL was banned under the filter. It was not unblocked and the teacher's diligent planning was wasted.

For many students and teachers, filtering is a brief suppression of their free speech rights that amounts to nothing more than a temporary annoyance. For other students, however, the severe restriction of Internet access may prove to be more damaging.

Although the use of the Internet has become seemingly ubiquitous over time, there still exists a very real "digital divide." According to 2012 research by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, one in five American adults still does not use the Internet. Adults with disabilities, minority adults, or those earning less than $30,000 a year are least likely to go

online. While approximately 95% of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 go online at some point, many do not have Internet access available to them at home. Youth from low-income and low-education families are particularly affected; low-income youth are more likely to report going online one or two days a week, or less, and are less likely to have access to a computer while at home. For these students, unrestricted Internet access at school is not only an issue of free speech, but of equal access to education. These students may not be able to complete assignments at school if their attempts at research are blocked by the school's Internet filter.

The Lack of School Filtering Policies and Procedures

While considerable effort goes into regulating the Internet habits of students and faculty, little effort is made to inform them exactly what it is they may not view. Of the telecommunications "acceptable use" policies or student handbooks we received, only nineteen school districts specifically mentioned that they employ some sort of Internet filtering to prohibit students and teachers from viewing specific information online. Six more districts allude to computer monitoring or indicate that they reserve the right to use monitoring software, without clearly informing parents or students about the use of a filter. Six others contain no information whatsoever regarding filtering in their "acceptable use" policies.

The vast majority of school districts also provide no advance information as to what is filtered. Although ten school districts make specific mention of some activities that are considered inappropriate

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computer use, for the most part they misleadingly refer only to the CIPA-prohibited categories of child pornography and obscene materials. North Smithfield makes specific mention of twelve information categories they screen at any given time – although they also block 38 others, and do not block all of the mentioned categories for all students. Portsmouth and

Tiverton also mention only some of the various categories they filter beyond what is required under CIPA. Even schools that provide advance notice that some categories will be filtered fail to offer further information as to what websites might fall under these categories.

In short, while students and staff are required to adhere to "acceptable use" policies, they often do not know what is considered unacceptable until M86 bars them from information they are seeking. For teachers who plan their lessons at home or students whose only substantive Internet access is at school, the deafening silence on what is acceptable and what is not can only lead to problems.

The absence of meaningful school policies has other significant consequences. It appears to promote completely arbitrary decision-making by administrators as to when to unblock sites requested by a teacher. Administrators also appear able to make virtually unaccountable and unchecked decisions regarding the use of filtering software and the categories that are going to be blocked. In this way, non-teaching officials are able to control the lesson plans of teachers in ways that would never be tolerated for offline lessons.

Recommendations

Set Meaningful Filtering Standards

- In order to promote academic freedom and protect the First Amendment in public schools, school districts should filter only those categories required by CIPA and those required to protect the school computer system itself (e.g., spyware, viruses, use of excessive bandwidth, etc.).

- The use of "safe search" keyword functions in filtering software should be prohibited, as it is simply too blunt and overbroad an approach that restricts access to legitimate sites, while doing virtually nothing to prevent students from accessing "inappropriate" ones.

- Districts should have in place a swift process to respond to the miscategorization of websites that inevitably occur so as to avoid inappropriate Internet censorship.

Establish Clear Blocking and Unblocking Policies and Procedures

- Schools should have written standards and policies in place to ensure that inappropriately blocked sites are unblocked in a timely manner when requested by faculty members.

- There should be specified criteria for overruling a teacher's unblocking request, as unblocking should be the default, not the exception.

- Information about the categories that are being blocked by school officials, and documentation of their responses to any requests for blocking and unblocking sites, should be readily accessible to teachers, students and any other interested parties.

- School districts should annually review and reconsider the categories of sites blocked, based on the requests for unblocking that have been received in the preceding year.

Promote Uniformity in Internet Access through Legislation

- In order to promote uniformity, the General Assembly should pass legislation codifying some of the standards contained in the above recommendations in order to protect the academic freedom of public school teachers and students.

More Reliance on Educating Students on Internet Use

- Instead of focusing on censorship as the solution, schools should spend more time educating students on Internet use and safety. This will not only be more productive, but will redound to students' (and parents') benefit outside the classroom setting as well.

Conclusion

Internet filtering in schools, whose impetus came largely from a federal mandate to prevent students from accessing "pornography," has proven to be at best a futile headache, and at worst a barrier between students and a full and fair education. While the mission of the public school system is to expose students to the world around them and broaden their minds with the full extent of the information available, the use of unnecessarily expansive filtering in schools has undermined that mission and barred students from accessing some of the world's most fruitful resources.

In trying to prevent students from visiting "inappropriate" websites, school officials have instead taken advantage of technology to implement an unjustifiable scheme of censorship that in actuality prevents students from accessing, and teachers from making use of, a wide range of useful sites. This must change, for it is only through the free exchange of ideas that students can truly experience a full education.[15]

Appendix: Categories Blocked by School Districts in Rhode Island

Sub-Category	Blocked For
Adware	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich (not middle school), Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Middletown, Narragansett, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (secondary II, III, IV), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Alcohol	Barrington, Burrillville (elementary students only), Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland (not staff or high school), East Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, New Shoreham, Portsmouth, Scituate (warning issued), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Animals/Pets	Scituate (warning issued)
Art	
Bad Reputation Domains	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, Woonsocket
Banner/Web Ads	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Coventry, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Middletown, Smithfield (not staff), Westerly
Books & Literature/ Writings	Scituate (warning issued)
BotNet	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
BPS-Block(BPS)*	Barrington
Cfblock*	Central Falls
Chat	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Lincoln, Middletown, Narragansett, North Providence, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Woonsocket
Child Pornography	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cranston (not teachers), Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln (including admin, SROs, IT staff), Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, New Shoreham, Newport, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Comics	Portsmouth
Community Organizations	

Criminal Skills	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, New Shoreham, Newport, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Cults	West Warwick
Dating/ Personals	Barrington, Burrillville (elementary students only), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Narragansett, New Shoreham, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (secondary I, II, III), Portsmouth, Scituate (warning issued), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, West Warwick, Westerly
DistrictBlocks*	North Smithfield (staff), Warwick
Domain Landing	Bristol Warren, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff)
Dubious/ Unsavory	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, New Shoreham, Newport, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Dynamic DNS Services	Burrillville (not staff), Cumberland, North Providence, Portsmouth, Warwick
Edge Content Servers/ Infrastructure	Bristol Warren, Smithfield (not staff)
Education	
Educational Games	
Employment	
Entertainment	Portsmouth
Explicit Art	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich (not high school teachers), East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Newport, New Shoreham, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (elementary I, II, III), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Facebook*	Burrillville, Cranston, Tiverton
Fantasy Sports	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich, Lincoln, Middletown, North Providence, Westerly
Fashion	Portsmouth, Scituate (warning issued)
Financial Institution	
Fitness	
Flash Video	Middletown
Free Hosts	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Coventry, East Greenwich (Frenchtown/Meadowbrook Farms elementary only), Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Middletown, Smithfield (not staff), Westerly

Freeware/ Shareware	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Coventry, Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff)
Gambling	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Coventry, Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Narragansett, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (elementary I, II, III, secondary II, III, IV) Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Games	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Coventry, Cranston (not teachers), Cumberland, East Greenwich (high school students only), Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, North Providence, Pawtucket (elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Games Patterns	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich (high school students only), Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, North Providence, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Gaming Sites (stray)*	Lincoln
General Business	
Generic IM	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Generic Remote Access	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich (not middle school, elementary school), Exeter-West Greenwich, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Generic Streaming Media	Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Woonsocket
Google Chat	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Google Talk	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
GoToMyPC	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Chariho, Coventry, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Government	
Hacking	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, New Shoreham, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV) Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, West Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket

Hate and Discrimination	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Cumberland (not staff or high school), East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, New Shoreham, Newport, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, West Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Health/ Medical	
Holistic	
Humor	Portsmouth, West Warwick
ICQ & AIM	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Illegal Drugs	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, New Shoreham, Newport, North Providence, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Image Servers & Image Search Engines	Bristol Warren, Middletown
Information Technology	
Internet Radio	Burrillville (not staff), Barrington, Chariho, Cumberland, East Greenwich (high school teachers, Eldredge/Hanaford elementary only), Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Lincoln (warning only), Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick
Internet Service Provider	Bristol Warren
Invalid Web Pages	Bristol Warren, Coventry, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
IRC	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Kids	
Legal	
Lifestyle & Culture	New Shoreham, Portsmouth, Scituate (warning issued)
Lincoln Public Block (Lincoln)*	Lincoln
Local Community	
Malicious Code/Virus	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, New Shoreham, Newport, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, West Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket

Meebo	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Message Boards	Bristol Warren, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Middletown, North Providence, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick
Military Appreciation	
Military Official	
Movies & Television	
Music Appreciation	
My Space IM	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
MySpace*	Burrillville, Central Falls, Cranston, Lincoln, Pawtucket (elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV) Tiverton, Westerly, Woonsocket
News	
Obscene/ Tasteless	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cranston (elementary school only), Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, New Shoreham, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, West Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Online Auction	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Central Falls, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Lincoln, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Warwick
Online Classes	
Online Communities	Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, Bristol Warren, East Greenwich (high school teachers only), Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Lincoln, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Online Greeting Cards	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Coventry, Lincoln, North Providence, Portsmouth
Online Trading/ Brokerage	Central Falls, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), North Smithfield (elementary school students), Warwick
Paranormal	East Greenwich (elementary schools only), Little Compton, Portsmouth
Pawt*	Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV)
pcAnywhere	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Smithfield (not staff), Westerly, Woonsocket
Peer-to-peer/File Sharing	Burrillville (not staff), Barrington, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich (high school teachers, Eldredge/Hanaford elementary only), Exeter-West Greenwich, Lincoln, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket

Phishing	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, West Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
PoPo	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Pornography/Adult Content	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cranston (not teachers), Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln (including admin, SORs, IT staff), Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, New Shoreham, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Portals	Bristol Warren
Proxies*	Woonsocket
QQ	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
QuickTime Video	Middletown
R Rated	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cranston (not teachers, high school), Cumberland, East Greenwich (not high school teachers, Frenchtown/Meadowbrook Farms elementary), East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, New Shoreham, North Providence, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield (not staff), Tiverton, Warwick, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Real Estate	
Real Time Streaming Protocol	Cumberland, Middletown
Recreation	Scituate (warning issued)
Reference	
Religion	Portsmouth
Remote Desktop	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Chariho, Coventry, Exeter-West Greenwich, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Restaurant/Dining	
Reviewed/ Miscellaneous	Bristol Warren, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff)
School Cheating	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, Little Compton, Narragansett, New Shoreham, Newport, North Providence, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield (not staff), Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket

Search Engines	
Secure Shell (SSH)	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Chariho, Coventry, Exeter-West Greenwich,Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Smithfield (not staff), Westerly
Self Defense	North Smithfield (elementary school students), Scituate (warning issued)
Self Help	
Shopping	Bristol Warren, Exeter-West Greenwich (students)
Social Online Communities (Facebook, etc.)*	Newport
Social Opinion	Portsmouth, Scituate (warning issued), Smithfield (not staff)
Sports	
Spyware	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, Westerly, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Staff-Only Passed*	North Smithfield (elementary school students)
Terrorist/Militant/ Extremist	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Chariho, East Greenwich, East Providence, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, Newport, New Shoreham, North Providence, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Portsmouth, Scituate, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
Theater	
Tickets	
Tobacco	Burrillville (elementary students only), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland (not staff or high school), East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, North Providence, Portsmouth, Scituate (warning issued), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
ToToMoMo	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Translation Services	Smithfield (not staff)
Travel	
Vehicles	
Video Sharing	Barrington, Burrillville (not staff), Central Falls, Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Lincoln, Middletown, North Providence, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff)
Virtual Network Computing	Bristol Warren, Burrillville (not staff), Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket
VoIP	Barrington, Burrillville (not staff), Coventry, East Greenwich (high school teachers, Eldredge/Hanaford elementary only), Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Middletown, North Providence, Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick

WangWang	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Pawtucket (elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Weapons	Barrington, Burrillville (elementary students only), Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland (not staff or high school), East Greenwich (middle school), Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, New Shoreham, North Providence, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Scituate (warning issued), Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Weather/ Traffic	
Web Based Email	Barrington, Burrillville, Warwick
Web Based Newsgroups	Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Portsmouth, Warwick
Web Based Storage	Burrillville (not staff), Coventry, Middletown, North Providence, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick
Web Hosts	Bristol Warren, Exeter-West Greenwich (students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (elementary students), Westerly
Web Logs/Personal Pages	Cumberland, Bristol Warren, East Greenwich, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Woonsocket
Web-Based Productivity Apps	Bristol Warren, North Smithfield (elementary school students)
Web-based Proxies/ Anonymizers	Barrington, Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Middletown, Narragansett, New Shoreham, Newport, North Smithfield (staff, elementary school students), Pawtucket (admin, elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield, Warwick, Westerly, West Warwick, Woonsocket
Windows Live Messenger	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Pawtucket (elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV) Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
Windows Media Video	Middletown
Yahoo IM	Bristol Warren, Burrillville, Central Falls, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Little Compton, Middletown, North Smithfield (elementary school students), Pawtucket (elementary I, II, III, secondary I, II, III, IV), Portsmouth, Smithfield (not staff), Warwick, Woonsocket
YouTube*	Central Falls (with exceptions), Cranston

* denotes categories created by school districts themselves

Endnotes

1 For additional information on the flaws of Internet filtering software and its impact on public access to information, readers are referred to two earlier reports prepared by the RI ACLU on CIPA's implementation in the public library setting: *Bowdler's Legacy: Congress, the Supreme Court and Internet Censorship in Rhode Island Public Libraries*, available at http://www.riaclu.org/PublicEd/Reports/libraryinternetreport.pdf; and *Reader's Block: Internet Censorship in Rhode Island Public Libraries*, available at http://www.riaclu.org/PublicEd/Reports/2005libraryinternetreport.pdf.

2 *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26, et al. v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982).

3 After the law was enacted in 2001, the ACLU and the American Library Association challenged CIPA's constitutionality. The U.S. Supreme Court, in a 6-3 decision, upheld the statute, relying largely on a provision in the law allowing filtering to be suspended in the case of "bona fide research or other lawful purposes." The Court held that CIPA-mandated censorship was constitutional as long as the use of the filtering software could be temporarily suspended at the request of an adult. *United States v. American Library Association*, 539 U.S. 194 (2003).

4 H.R. Rep. No. 105-775 (1998).

5 Shortly after the law was enacted, the Kaiser Family Foundation found that up to 24% of non-pornographic health websites were blocked by Internet filters; this percentage increased dramatically depending on the level of restriction programmed into the filter. Paradoxically, the intensity level of the filter had little effect on the amount of pornographic information that could be viewed. Rideout, Victoria, Caroline Richardson and Paul Resnick (2002). *See No Evil: How Internet Filters Affect the Search for Online Health Information [Executive Summary]*. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

6 *PFLAG v. Camdenton R-III School District,* 853 F.Supp.2d 888 (W.D. Mo. 2012). Those sites were often blocked because of a "sexuality" filter, while anti-LGBT websites were accessible because they were often categorized as "religion." The court found that the school had participated in viewpoint discrimination by allowing one perspective on the subject to flourish while suppressing another. The court also determined that allowing students to request the unblocking of certain websites was not a sufficient answer to the censorship, as it placed an extra burden on students that carried with it the humiliation and stigmatization of having to make school officials aware of their interest in pro-LGBT websites.

7 The full extent of the problems associated with inappropriately blocked websites, and how school districts react to them, is only hinted at in this report, as only a handful of school districts maintained and provided written documentation of requests that had been made to unblock sites.

8 A few school districts failed to provide basic information about their blocking policies. While every other school district provided screenshots or lists of the categories blocked by their filtering software, Providence and Jamestown claimed that no records of the blocked categories exist and thus failed to turn over any information. North Kingstown asserted that their blocking is not determined by the school department, but by the manufacturer, and therefore they did not know what categories are filtered. South Kingstown's filtering categories had recently changed at the time of our APRA request, and documentation from that district was therefore incomplete. Information from the Johnston school district about blocked subcategories was also incomplete.

[9] Categories can also be filtered differently for different groups of users, such as faculty, students, visitors, and administrators. Each Internet user is assigned a group and subject to the filtering decided for that group. Filtering may also be individualized, blocking or unblocking certain websites for specific users. Each school district has the capability to filter categories and search words at their own discretion; some have chosen to filter different categories for different schools, and even different users at the same school. As a result, there is considerable variation statewide as to what information is being blocked, and from whom. Unconvinced that the M86 software guarantees enough censorship, Barrington, Burrillville, North Smithfield and Westerly use secondary filtering software. Barrington, Burrillville, and Westerly utilize a program called OpenDNS, while North Smithfield opts for Websense TRITON. However, as M86 serves as the primary filter for all districts and less information was made available regarding the secondary filters, our report focuses on the use of M86.

[10] The list of filtering categories and their definitions is available at www.m86security.com/resources/database-categories.asp. Individuals also have a limited opportunity to check how the software categorizes particular websites by going to https://www.trustwave.com/support/m86filtercheck.asp.

[11] Among the sites blocked by this category is urbandictionary.com, a well-known, constantly updated Web-based dictionary of slang words and phrases.

[12] "Hate & Discrimination" is defined to include "sites which discriminate or promote discrimination based on race/religion/gender/etc., or support and promote partisan historical opinion." Do websites that support affirmative action in higher education – presently the subject of a high-profile case in the U.S. Supreme Court – "promote discrimination" on the basis of race? Do websites that *oppose* affirmative action do so? Are websites for the Democratic and Republican parties "discriminatory" because they "promote partisan historical opinion"? Apparently not, but there is nothing in the definition itself to provide very useful guidance to teachers or students before trying to log on to one of those sites.

[13] For reference, a chart of each of the categories blocked, and the districts blocking them, can be found in the Appendix.

[14] Apparently believing that levity has no place in the school setting, both Portsmouth and West Warwick go so far as to block "Humor" sites, defined by M86 as any site containing "material intended to be funny."

[15] This report was prepared by ACLU of Rhode Island Policy Associate, Hillary Davis.