

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 20, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Students on the Internet

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RESOURCE  
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### INFORMATION

#### ***Background***

As access to the Internet has increased so has the concern regarding appropriate use by students. In September 1999, a project team was formed to create a district plan to address the issues (Appendix I). The team developed a comprehensive understanding of the issues by engaging in activities such as the following.

- Reviewing the news, research and views expressed in various media.
- Engaging parents in a discussion of the issues at the Kids Come First conference in October 1999.
- Inviting experts to share their expertise with staff and parents. For example, the Media Awareness Network made presentations in November 1999.
- Discussing the issues with the Principals Advisory Committee on District Technology.
- Reviewing input from the Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Group (TAG) and the Student Advisory Team (SAT).

#### ***Complex Issues***

A framework was developed to assist staff in understanding the issues and the types of solutions that are typically adopted by school districts (Appendix II). The committee concluded that the issues involved both home and school use of the Internet. The majority of students use Internet and e-mail for the best of intentions. Concerns for them are related to personal safety, privacy, and exposure to advertising. A few students deliberately use Internet and e-mail for inappropriate purposes that are illegal, immoral, or unethical. Another way to look at the issues is to consider the well being of the student, the computer network, and the district.

A review of current research, conducted in January 2000 and attached as Appendix III, focuses on four areas of concern: (1) Student exposure to pornography; (2) Student exposure to hate groups; (3) Student exposure to predatory advertising; and (4) Students and "Internet Addiction Disorder". Information was collected from a variety of Internet sources, with an attempt to relate the issues to the Canadian context.

### ***Technical and Human Solutions***

The challenge is finding an appropriate balance between technical solutions and human solutions to the issues. Technical solutions include controlling access, electronic monitoring, and setting limits, whereas human solutions include adult supervision, policies, and education programs. The solutions to the issues are not without controversy because differences of opinion exist related to intellectual freedom, privacy, choice, and empowerment. A balanced approach that includes both technical and human solutions to the issues has been adopted. It consists of filtering inappropriate websites, an educational program and the adoption of a policy framework.

#### **1. Filtering Inappropriate Websites**

An Internet filtering solution that will block access to inappropriate web sites has been field-tested in 10 district schools. It will be available to all schools and central services departments by August 2000 as a component of the wide area network. It is expected that the majority of schools will choose to adopt the Internet filtering solution because 82% of schools have indicated on the annual technology survey that they “would support a district initiative to block or filter web sites for student use”.

Internet filtering will not prevent teachers from accessing web sites that are blocked because they will be able to override the filter using a password system managed at the school level.

Staff workstations in schools and central services offices may also be filtered because all stations that use the school’s proxy server, the school’s virtual private network (VPN) server, or the Centre for Education proxy server will automatically be filtered. It is possible to bypass the proxy server in situations in which the decision is made not to filter staff workstations.

#### **2. Education Program**

The inaugural activity of the WWise (We’re Web Wise) education program is a two-day summer workshop that will provide participants with information, resources, and strategies to deal with a wide range of issues and concerns about student use of the Internet at school and at home. Participants are encouraged to register in teams of 3-5 people, which may include school administrators, teachers, parents, student leaders, technical support staff, school library staff, school resource officers, counselors, community members, and others. The Alberta Teachers Association, Alberta Learning, the Edmonton Police Service, and Elk Island Public Schools are supporting the summer workshop through ‘contributions in kind’. Keynote speakers include Jane Tallim of the Media Awareness Network.

#### **3. Appropriate Use Policies**

In April, a new board policy, KA.BP District Technology, was approved. One of three new administrative regulations approved by the superintendent that supports this policy is KC.AR Appropriate Use of District Technology. It lays the foundation for the development of guidelines to address the issues of student use of the Internet (Appendix IV). This work will be completed during the school year 2000-2001.

Additional information about the issues and solutions is available on the district’s Internet web site: (<http://dtp.epsb.net/projects/wwwise.htm>).

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APPENDIX I – Committee Membership

APPENDIX II – A Framework for Understanding the Issues and Solutions

APPENDIX III – Students' Psychological Well-being and the Internet

APPENDIX IV – Administrative Regulation KC.AR