

Educators struggle with AUP enforcement

As technology becomes pivotal to instruction, restricting students' access gets trickier

By Laura Devaney, Senior Editor, eSchool News



Debates over school acceptable-use policies are focusing on whether technology access is a right or a privilege.

School districts create acceptable-use policies (AUPs) to define what is--and is not--acceptable behavior when using their computer resources. But at a time when computers and internet access are seen as increasingly important tools for instruction, many school leaders are struggling with how best to enforce these policies in the event that students transgress them.

Used to be, there was a simple answer: School leaders took away or restricted a student's computer access. But a movement growing in schools today says taking away a student's access to technology is akin to denying that student valuable learning opportunities--and so many school leaders are now searching for better alternatives.

Students are sophisticated technology users and often surpass the proficiency of teachers, said Jeanne Biddle, technology director for Kentucky's Scott County Schools, which has 13 schools and about 8,000 students.

Biddle's district has filtering systems in place to shield kids from inappropriate internet content, and its IT team works with students to help them understand how to keep safe online and practice responsible digital citizenship, she said.

Most students comply with the district's AUP, but others view it as a challenge to their technical expertise and will try to violate the policy by finding ways around the district's filtering systems, Biddle said.

Biddle and her team worked with the Kentucky School Boards Association to develop an AUP that demonstrates expectations for network use and what the consequences are if students use the district's network inappropriately.

Still, there are some drawbacks to the AUP as it's now written.

"One issue we have is that it has no teeth," Biddle said. "If a student does something inappropriate, do we take away internet access? Would you take a book away from a student if the student wrote in it?"

Biddle said her district is considering other disciplinary measures to confront AUP violations, hoping to address the problem without restricting students' access to learning materials.

It's a challenge about which more discussion "is desperately needed" among school leaders, said Bob Kehr, director of technology for California's Davis Joint Unified School District.

"There needs to be more collaboration and shared knowledge between school administrators responsible for disciplinary decisions and those with enterprise-level technical and security knowledge," Kehr said.

"Installing a keystroke logging program on the teacher's laptop is not the same as using an encrypted proxy to get around [a district's internet] filter--and I don't believe the appropriate discipline for either of these would be to remove internet privileges."

Kehr noted that AUP violations can include much more than inappropriate internet use; they can include such activities as hacking into school system databases or using cell phones to take pictures of other students without their knowledge (such as in locker rooms).

Other educators said they've put students who violated their district's AUP on non-networked machines, such as older laptops or desktops, to complete coursework.

Lori Minnis, technology coordinator for Montana's Cut Bank School District 15, recently discovered that several high school students had violated the district's AUP in varying ways.

"I have to say that it really opened our eyes when it actually came down to the lack of specifics detailed in our AUP" about how to deal with those behaviors, she said. The district has since written more details about enforcement into its policy.

Cut Bank students must sign an agreement accepting the district's AUP, and those students found guilty of violations lost their network or computer privileges or both for varying amounts of time--some for the remainder of the school year--as determined by the school's principal.

"Ultimately, the high school tech teachers had to develop alternative assignments for these students," Minnis said.

Teachers also came up with a plan to give the students computer access without putting them on the network.

"They...opted to set up stand-alone computers so [the students] could complete assignments. This virtually took away from the chance that the student would violate the AUP again," she said.

Because the incidents involved about a dozen students, Minnis said they prompted a "tremendous discussion" among district staff.

"Many felt that we needed to determine whether the use of technology is a privilege or a right in [students'] education," she said. "No matter what, we are entering new territory in student discipline issues and how to handle them."

Links:

[Scott County Schools](#)

[Davis Joint Unified School District](#)

[Cut Bank School District 15](#)

How to handle student AUP violations

Here are links to the AUPs of the districts mentioned in this story, including excerpts describing the disciplinary actions that educators are encouraged to take in enforcing these policies. An example of an AUP in an institution of higher education is also presented. It should be noted, however, that all three K-12 districts said they are reevaluating these disciplinary measures in light of how important technology has become to instruction.

Scott County Schools

<http://www.dtc.scott.k12.ky.us/technology/aup/index.html>

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Davis Joint USD

<http://www.djUSD.k12.ca.us/district/studentinternet.pdf>

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Cut Bank School District 15

<http://cutbankschools.net/ms/mywebs/techpolicy.htm>

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