



Acceptable Use Policies

Dig Deeper

i-SAFE America Inc.

5963 La Place Court Ste. 309 Carlsbad, CA 92008

Tel: (760) 603-7911

www.isafe.org

WHY Do Schools Need AUPs?

The Internet can be a powerful tool for use in an education setting. Instant access to sites on everything from tree frogs to the daily weather allows for creative lesson planning. As a resource for teachers it is astonishing. Lesson plans by subject area, reproducible worksheets, and online activities at a click of a button are all available. Obviously, students also have a vast resource in the Internet—they can develop their computer skills, take online field trips, do research, or correspond.

By using the Internet in the classroom, students now have access to information not available in most school libraries. Students' horizons are expanded without ever leaving the confines of the classroom.

However, with the positives come the negatives. The Internet has its dangers. There are online predators, cyber harassment and bullying to worry about. Not to mention the sites that can be objectionable for racial, sexist, political, sexual, or other reasons.

Moreover, there are sites that are simply people's opinions presented as fact, something many students don't understand. Additionally, most people do not realize that the Internet is an international linking of networks that is impossible to censor. Thus schools and educators must rely on other means to safely use the Internet as an educational tool.

One option is to limit access to sites through filtering or blocking software. Unfortunately, students who are grow-

ing up in the computer age often have the skills and means to bypass such software. Additionally, many educators find filtering and blocking annoying as educationally legitimate sites are often blocked due to image or text content.

Instead of banning or blocking, many schools are turning to another method—that of proactive education. By teaching students responsible behavior, asking them to sign an agreement, and providing written descriptions of the consequences for wrongful action, students develop a sense of responsibility and ownership for their online experience. These types of agreements are called Acceptable Use Policies—otherwise known as AUPs.

WHAT is an Acceptable Use Policy?

"An AUP is a written agreement, signed by students, their parents, and teachers, outlining the terms and conditions of Internet use. It specifically sets out acceptable uses, rules of on-line behavior, and access privileges. Also covered are penalties for violations of the policy, including security violations and vandalism of the system. Anyone using a school's Internet connection should be required to sign an AUP, and know that it will be kept on file as a legal, binding document." (*Classroom Connect*, December 1994-January, 1995 issue).

WHERE Should AUPs Be Developed and Used?

AUPs can be developed at almost any level. Many states such as California or Indiana have developed their own AUPs or mandatory guidelines for developing AUPs. Often school districts come up with guidelines based upon these or national recommendations. However, while appropriate, these do not necessarily cover every aspect that may face an individual school. Many schools adapt and add to these policies making them their own. In addition how to present AUPs, enforce AUPs, etc is often left to the school level decision makers.

AUPs Should Be Designed To:

- *Educate parents about their children's use of the Internet.*
- *Educate students about*
 - *risks peculiar to computer communication.*
 - *rules for efficient, ethical, legal computer/network use.*
 - *safe and appropriate computer social behavior.*
 - *use of available and unavailable services.*
- *Preserve digital materials created by students and teachers.*
- *Protect vulnerable children from inappropriate approaches.*
- *Discourage children from making inappropriate personal disclosures.*
- *Encourage ethical behavior, and discourage criminal behavior.*
- *Encourage accepted Netiquette from the very start.*
- *Encourage polite and civil communication.*
- *Encourage individual integrity and honesty.*
- *Encourage respect for others and their private property.*
- *Allow enforcement of necessary rules of behavior.*
- *Protect the school networking equipment and software from danger.*
- *Help improve network efficiency by influencing resource usage.*
- *Share responsibility for the risks of using the Internet.*
- *Reduce the risk of lawsuits against teachers, schools, and providers.*
- *Simplify life for computer systems administrators.*
- *Discourage copyright infringement, software piracy, and plagiarism.*
- *Discourage network game playing and/or anonymous messages.*
- *Discourage use of computers and networks for profit or politics.*
- *Assure Internet users that their online activities are monitored or assure Internet users that their e-mail privacy is (or is not) being respected.*