

AASL Executive Summary

Filtering in Schools

October 2012

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) conducted its national longitudinal survey, [*School Libraries Count!*](#), between January 24 and March 4, 2012. The annual survey collected data on filtering in schools. Participants answered 14 questions ranging from whether or not their schools use filters, to the specific types of social media blocked at their schools.

This paper is an overview of the data that was collected. As the results show, filtering continues to be an important issue for most schools around the country. The data from *School Libraries Count!* suggests that many schools are going beyond the requirements set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in its [Child Internet Protection Act](#) (CIPA).

AASL's position views the social aspect of learning as important for students in the 21st century and much of the filtering software seems to discount that aspect.

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Uses and Types of Filtering

When asked whether their schools or districts filter online content, 98% of the respondents said content is filtered. Specific types of filtering were also listed in the survey, encouraging respondents to check any filtering that applied at their schools. There were 4,299 responses with the *following results*:

- 94% (4,041) Use filtering software
- 87% (3,740) Have an acceptable use policy (AUP)
- 73% (3,138) Supervise the students while accessing the Internet
- 27% (1,174) Limit access to the Internet
- 8% (343) Allow student access to the Internet on a case-by-case basis

The data indicates that the majority of respondents do use filtering software, but also work through an AUP with students, or supervise student use of online content individually.

The next question identified types of filtering software and asked respondents to select those used at their schools. There were 4,039 total responses. The top three filtering software was:

- 70% (2,827) URL-based
- 60% (2,423) Keyword-based
- 47% (1,898) Blacklists

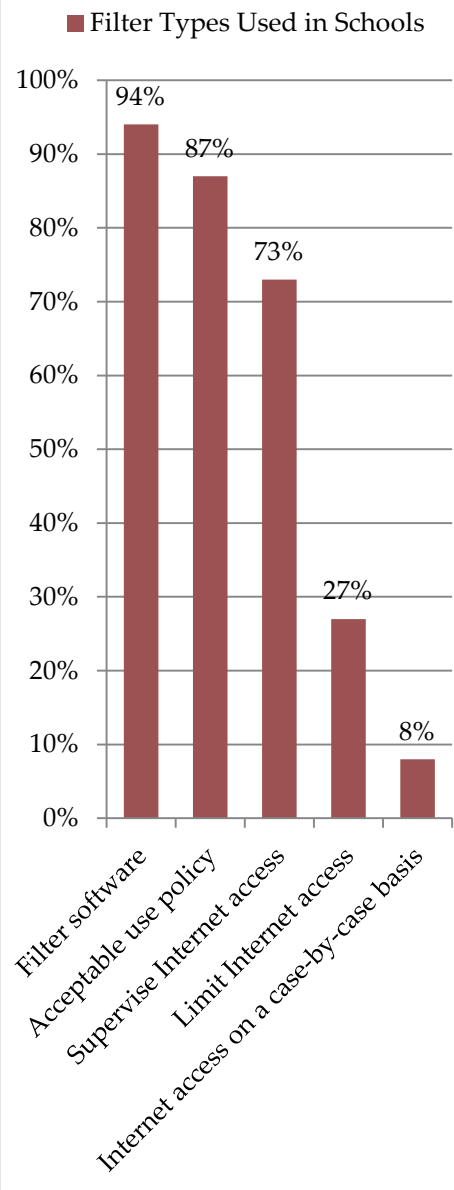
Who and What Gets Filtered

When respondents were asked if content for students is filtered by their school or by the district, 100% of the 4,299 respondents answered "Yes." Respondents also indicated that in 73% of schools, all students are filtered at the same level.

School Library Counts! Data Highlight



Filter Types Used in Schools



When asked if the filters affect both students and staff, 88% of 3,783 respondents said filters are used for staff, and 56% of 2,119 respondents said the same level of filtering is applied to students and staff alike.

The top four filtered content areas in schools surveyed include:

- Social networking sites (88%)
- IM/online chatting (74%)
- Gaming (69%)
- Video Services (66%)

Additional filtered content includes personal e-mail accounts, peer-peer file sharing and FTP sites. However when asked if they could request sites be unblocked, 92% of the 3,961 respondents indicated they could in the following ways:

- 27% (1,069) Have the site unblocked in a few hours
- 35% (1,386) Have the block removed in within one to two days
- 17% (673) Wait more than two days but less than a week
- 20% (792) Wait one week or more

The survey found that 68% of the decisions to unblock a site are made at the District level and only 17% of the decisions are made at the building level.

Bring Your Own Devices

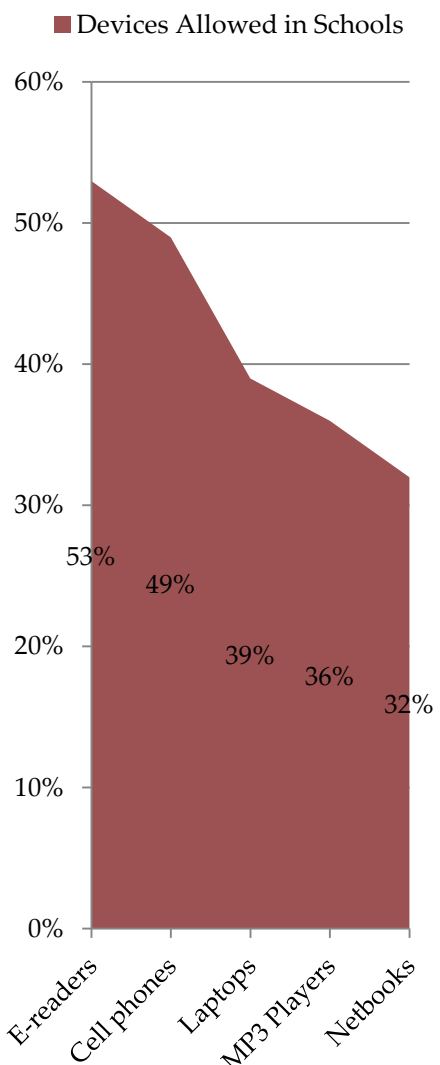
The *School Libraries Count Survey!* also asked which types of portable electronic devices students are allowed to bring to school. Respondents were able to select all that apply. The 4,299 responses revealed the following percentages for devices allowed:

- E-readers (53%)
- Cell phones (49%)
- Laptops (39%)
- MP3 Players (36%)
- Netbooks (32%)

School Library Counts! Data Highlight



Devices Allowed in Schools



When students bring these items to school, 51% of 2,981 responses indicated there is a filter mechanism used for these devices.

When answering how students' personal devices were filtered, the top five answers from 1,520 respondents were:

- Through the use of the AUP (48%)
- Logging on through the school network (47%)
- Not having Internet connectivity (29%)
- Using the discretion of the classroom teacher (28%)
- Logging into a "guest" network (26%)

Impact of Filtering on Learning

The last filtering question discussed the impact that filtering has on the individual programs. Respondents were asked to select all that applied.

Of the 4,299 responses 52% indicated that filtering impedes student research when completing key word searches, 42% indicated that filtering discounts the social aspects of learning, and 25% stated that filtering impeded continued collaboration outside of person-to-person opportunities.

On the other hand, 50% indicated filtering decreased the number of potential distractions, 34% indicated filtering decreased the need for direct supervision, and 23% indicated that filtering allowed research curriculum to yield more appropriate results.

One trend revealed in the survey is that students are increasingly allowed to bring their own devices to school, but those devices are still subject to the filters. Many school librarians are reporting that true student research is being hindered by school filters, making this an issue that AASL will continue to address in the future.

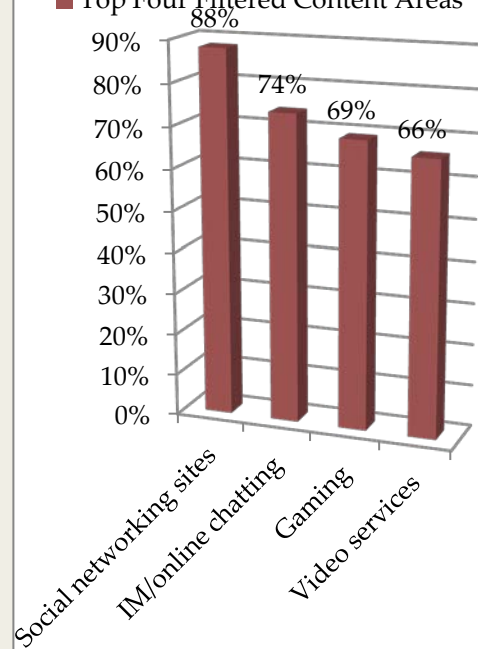
The 2012 School Libraries Count! survey results will be released by December 1, 2012.

School Library Counts! Data Highlight



Top Four Filtered Content Areas

■ Top Four Filtered Content Areas



Additional information on AASL's *School Libraries Count!* Survey can be found at the [Website](#).

