

*“This school blocks **everything!**”*

The kids talk about it every day; we hear about it every day. You probably do, too, when you pick up your student at carpool.

Is it true? Well, no. Of course it isn't true. The classroom is quickly becoming as much of a digital space as it is a physical space, so if we blocked **everything** then we would probably get as many complaints from teachers as we do from students. We do, however, block quite a bit. We block games, streaming websites, social media platforms, sites trafficking in violent or inappropriate imagery, anonymous image boards, and the official website of the New England Patriots. To students, it may seem like cruel and unusual punishment, but at the end of the day it is our responsibility to protect students from a world wide web that has only become increasingly deceptive and inappropriate as more and more people connect each day.

I've decided to devote my time with you this month to the topic of content filtering. More specifically, I'm going to share with you some basic information about the primary software we utilize for content filtering alongside a brief overview of why we are so “strict” about the content we do and do not allow your students to access. Ideally, reading this piece could start a dialogue between you and your student about our management practices in the technology department at PCK. Despite what they may think, we don't implement rigorous content filters because we hate fun, and I think that if they saw things from the school's point-of-view they might be a little less frustrated by their online experience at school.

---

## How We Do It

securly://

If your commute home from school has ever devolved into an in-depth discussion about our supposed disdain for Spotify, then you may have heard the name “Securly” tossed around here and there. Securly is a cloud-based content filtering platform that is ideal for schools such as PCK where classrooms are equipped head-to-toe with Chromebooks. Securly ties in with our Chrome Enterprise so that we can sort our users into groups (teachers, students, administration, etc.) and adjust permissions for those groups accordingly. Once we configure the different filters for each group, users in our domain (ckcs.net) will be managed by us on any Chromebook where they have signed in with their school credentials. Since students **have** to use their PCK account to access Chromebooks at the school (they are blocked from using any personal Google accounts to access our Chromebooks), this means that students are being managed

from the moment they open the lid of a Chromebook to the moment they ultimately close the lid (presumably in frustration because they couldn't listen to Drake during class).

Thanks to the "locked down" nature of Chromebooks and the intricacy with which Securly ties itself in with users on our domain, content filtering at this school is supremely effective. Unlike past implementations of content filtering at schools around the country, getting around Securly is exponentially more difficult. Once a site is blocked, it may as well not exist within the walls of this school. Additionally, when students try to access blocked material, a message is immediately sent to domain administrators notifying them which user tried to access which prohibited materials. Repeated offenses result in repeated emails which result in lengthy reports detailing each offense being printed and submitted to administration for further consideration.

That all sounds pretty intense, right? Intense enough that you might wonder "why are they doing this, exactly?" Well, we have our reasons!

## **Why We Do It**

There are many reasons "why," but in the interest of time I'm going to hone in on two specific reasons why we manage student devices so strictly.

### **Education**

Computers are something of a lightning rod for students due to their seemingly limitless capabilities, but for all intents and purposes they are no different than projectors, whiteboards, and textbooks; computers bought by the school are educational resources. Furthermore, the accounts created for students at PCK are educational resources. These resources were purchased - or created, in the case of student accounts - to enhance the learning experience of students. Any other use of these resources runs contrary to their purpose and is therefore subject to strict moderation.

This is a great topic of conversation to bring up with your students. It is easy for students to see their name on something such as a Google account and believe that their namesake alone entitles them to do whatever they please with that account, and it's just as easy for those same students to fail to notice the "@ckcs.net" that appends each of those accounts. Like any business, we have a vested interest in what our users use their accounts for, and we reserve the right to put a stop to any activity engaged in within our domain that doesn't explicitly tie into our mission to create well-rounded, highly-educated students of good character.

Do we truly begrudge the Taylor Swifts of the world? No. In fact, there isn't much of anything that is objectionable about Taylor Swift (I'm a big fan; I even proposed to my wife at one of her

concerts). At the same time, though, Taylor Swift's music doesn't directly support our mission, so access to her vast library of hits isn't what we would deem as "mission critical."

## Compliance

The other major reason forcing our hands in terms of content filtering is compliance, the word that makes every working adult groan uncontrollably when they so much as hear it mentioned in passing. Schools have so very many laws and regulations that they must comply with, and a handful of those laws deal directly with content filtering.

Most notably, the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) mandates that all K-12 schools and libraries receiving E-Rate funding do whatever is in their powers to protect children from inappropriate content and material that is otherwise harmful to minors on the Internet.

What constitutes material that is "harmful to minors"? Though there are certain materials that we can all agree are harmful, but what one family considers inappropriate or harmful may be very different from what another family deems inappropriate or "harmful". Thankfully, the law clearly defines "harmful" materials for us:

Any picture, image, graphic image file, or other visual depiction that – (i) taken as a whole and with respect to minors, appeals to a prurient interest in nudity, sex, or excretion; (ii) depicts, describes, or represents, in a patently offensive way with respect to what is suitable for minors, an actual or simulated sexual act or sexual contact, actual or simulated normal or perverted sexual acts, or a lewd exhibition of the genitals; and (iii) taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value as to minors.

Though this doesn't encompass *everything* that we block, it does encompass many prohibited materials at PCK ("Have you *listened* to the radio these days?", Mr. Robbins says while waving his cane from his tiny porch). The other major component of CIPA, "inappropriate content", is left up to the school. So, yes; technically, we don't *have* to block every game that students try to play on school equipment, but we do have the authorization to deem that content inappropriate for our academic setting. And - for reasons established above - we do make use of that authorization to ensure that our educational resources are being used for educational purposes.

If you would like to learn more about CIPA, then feel free to read up on it here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s\\_Internet\\_Protection\\_Act#Legislation\\_after\\_CIPA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_Internet_Protection_Act#Legislation_after_CIPA)

---

Hopefully that gives you a little insight into how we manage students' Internet access at PCK, and hopefully this inspires some discussion at the dinner table. I know that long, drawn out talks about federal laws aren't exactly the most exciting conversations, but they might help students feel a little less "infringed" by Securly and the technology department at PCK. After all, we only do what we do because we care, and not because we hate Drake.

But I also don't like Drake.

---

As always, please reach out to me at [drobbins@ckcs.net](mailto:drobbins@ckcs.net) if you have any comments or questions about this month's topic or anything else technology-related that is on your mind.