

BEFORE  
THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

“SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN OVER THE INTERNET:  
HOW THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY IS COMBATING  
CHILD PREDATORS ON THE INTERNET”

JULY 10, 2006  
WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
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SOMERSET COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

I work for the state as the representative of the Commissioner of Education in Somerset County. We have 55, 000 students, 79 schools, and 19 districts in Somerset County. Each district has its own administrative staff including a chief school administrator, school business official, curriculum coordinators and principals. There are over 600 school districts in New Jersey.

My role includes daily interactions with school districts, approval of budgets, review of certification of public schools every 7 years. I assure special education mandates and state laws and regulations are carried out. My office reviews grants, e.g. IDEA, NCLB, etc. for accuracy. I meet monthly with all school business officials and superintendents. I also mediate disputes that arise between districts and/or their constituencies.

Technology coordinators are employed by each district. It is their job to assure all hardware/software is up to date, is working and that the servers and systems are secure from any misuse or abuse of policy. Each district requires every student to sign a contract stating that they will not violate school policy restricting use of the internet to

approved websites. Any violation will result in loss of access to the internet. Each student has an ID number that tracks all use. There is elaborate software that blocks sites such as **Myspace.com** and **photobucket.com**.

I have attached a letter to parents from one of our superintendents that I shared with all superintendents in my county. Note that the major problem I hear about from principals and superintendents is the lack of monitoring by parents of their minor children's activities on cell phones, personal web pages and the internet at home. They do not indicate there is a problem with pedophiles at the school level.

We are planning to do training for all superintendents in the fall on internet safety. The plan is to assure that trainers will be provided with information and a plan of action to share with all teachers. They, in turn, will train all students concerning the hazards of personal websites and internet chat pages. Bullying, harassment and other abuses are topics to be covered.

In New Jersey, Memoranda of Agreement between law enforcement and school officials are updated each year and contain agreements concerning investigations and protocols for police related to drugs, weapons and harassment.

In short, the following are recommendations for federal legislation:

- ◆ Make available training sessions on internet safety protocols for parents and school districts to use with teaching staff. Our county prosecutor's office now provides training for parents and teachers.
- ◆ Make parents/guardians responsible for monitoring minor children's web pages and email correspondence in their homes.
- ◆ Address freedom of speech concerns raised by such groups as the ACLU. Give parents/guardians easy access to sites their children may be abusing. Restrictions on access hamper police investigations as well.

Finally, the problem of monitoring proxy sites in the school setting is ongoing. Students use a proxy server site such as [VTunnel.com](http://VTunnel.com) and can gain access to sites not picked up or filtered by the district software. Lists of words are updated nightly by the technology coordinator to filter any new sites that are pornographic or outside of district policy. Unfortunately, ordinary words can be used to create illicit websites that are not filtered.

Coordinators and school officials I talked with have no recommended legislation other than to require districts to have signed contracts between parents/guardians, minors and the school agreeing to not violate school policy on the use of the internet. Such contracts are routinely collected annually from all students using the school internet services.

I have attached recent newspaper articles about the issues we raised.

Attachments: News articles