

# Risk

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# Reporter

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## Developing more effective Internet use policies

Today's youth are exceptionally device-savvy. Laptops, tablets and smartphones are ubiquitous, and it's not uncommon to see toddlers competently flipping through a parent's iPad. But knowing how to operate a device isn't the same as understanding the power and problems that can come from tapping into the nonstop stream of online content. Develop policies that help students, parents and staff become prudent users of technology.

### Acceptable use basics

AUPs, or acceptable use policies, serve three main functions — they help prevent access to damaging online content, allow access to materials that support learning and offer schools legal protection.

"Your use policies should make it clear that education is the primary purpose of all technology resources and that access to these resources is a privilege — not a right," said Daniel L. Frazier, EdD, superintendent of education for Litchfield Independent School District, Litchfield, Minn.

The National Education Association suggests that AUPs include the following:

- **Preamble:** This covers how/why the policy was developed and its goals. It also ties the school's code of conduct to online actions.
- **Definition:** Explains key words included in the policy to eliminate confusion.
- **Policy statement:** Spells out what elements of computer use are covered by the AUP and whether students/staff have to meet certain conditions before using school technology.
- **Acceptable uses:** Defines when/how students and staff can use the computer network.
- **Unacceptable uses:** Gives clear examples of prohibited use and activities that could damage the network (e.g., downloading software).
- **Violations/sanctions:** Spells out how violations will be handled and how students/staff can report them.

If your school is a member of the E-rate program — through which you receive discounts on communication products/services — you will also be subject to the Children's Internet Protection Act, a federal law that addresses a number of other technology protection issues.

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## ( Internet use )

### Moving beyond “acceptable”

Although an AUP with these elements likely meets legal requirements, it might not work hard enough to protect students.

“Kids are good at finding work-arounds that bypass a restrictive system,” said James Bosco, professor emeritus of educational studies at Western Michigan University. Bosco is also a technology expert who’s done extensive work with the Consortium for School Networking, the country’s premier professional association for school technology leaders. “Your goal is to develop policies that create a culture of personal responsibility.”

With that in mind, many schools have gone to a responsible use policy — one that’s based on the premise that students need to learn how to make informed choices about technology and be held accountable for their behavior.

### Gather insights from a broad cross section

“Too often, use policies are developed by an IT expert with no classroom experience or pedagogical background,” Bosco said. “Ask yourself, ‘Is this policy helping produce a quality learning environment with digital media?’”

Develop your policy with a committee composed of parents, teachers, community members, administrators and, ideally, students. This will lead to better results and more buy-in.

### Strike a balance

“You can greatly minimize threats with filters, firewalls and blocking tools — and these are critical, especially to fight off viruses and malware — but smart administrators know you have to balance risk and opportunity,” Bosco said. “YouTube and Facebook are good examples. There’s certainly bad content on them and the potential for cyber bullying and inappropriate posting, but these channels are also exceptional learning resources.”

“With social media, the newness and appearance of freedom confuse people and allow them to make mistakes with inappropriate content, comments and postings,” Frazier said. “Instead of restricting these sites, schools should help students and staff learn how to use them appropriately.”

### Monitor in-classroom use

Each teacher should establish rules up front. “This isn’t just for tech-related subjects — it’s for every class,” said Katie LeClerc Greer, CEO of KL Greer Consulting and national expert on Internet and digital safety. “Walk around and see what kids are exploring. Learn from your students. I ask a lot of questions about which tools kids are using and for what.”

### Teach students to be their own filters

“We can’t anticipate and control everything students have access to,” Bosco stressed. “We must give them the tools to protect themselves from harmful and inaccurate information — an issue we don’t address nearly enough.”

### Involve parents

“These issues are new to parents too,” Frazier said. “Get them involved and help them understand their role at home — for instance, that their child’s computer should be in a public area of the house and that they should be periodically checking what a student is doing online and their web browser’s history.”

“Parents should get the same messages from the school that the kids are,” LeClerc Greer said. “If you bring in a resource to educate the students, have a parent session too.”

### Help staff too

“The new technology is exciting and liberating, but some people take inappropriate liberties,” Frazier warned. He recommended that schools:

- **Instruct staff/faculty to keep their distance with social media.** “I don’t think you should ban social media — it’s a good tool to connect with students,” Frazier said. “But teachers should know not to engage outside the context of their educational duties.”

Any online communication between a student and staff member should take place in a public environment, such as a public Facebook group.

- **Stress that all equipment is for educational purposes.** District policy should stipulate that computers and other technology resources are school property and that using them for private purposes is inappropriate.

### Be proactive

Don’t wait for a crisis. “When I go into a school, I first ask staff if they’re dealing with any particular social media-related issues, and the answer is nearly always some version of, ‘No, these are great kids, and we don’t have any problems,’” said LeClerc Greer. “But when I talk with the kids, I quickly find that’s not the case. If you think these problems aren’t happening in your school, you’re probably wrong.”

With students spending the majority of their time connected through some sort of device, it’s vital that schools help them develop skills to navigate the online world. “Constant preventive education and communication are critical,” LeClerc Greer stressed. “It’s better to deal with issues calmly and preemptively, rather than in a mad scramble when there’s a crisis. Tech-related issues are a daily reality.”

### Revisit and update your policy often

The relentless march of technology makes it challenging to find someone with the knowledge and time to keep your policies up to date. “Even an annual review isn’t enough,” LeClerc Greer warned. “Ideally, I’d recommend having someone on staff who can stay on top of this every day.”

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- **For more information** about acceptable use policies, visit <http://www.cosn.org/Initiatives/ParticipatoryLearning/Web20MobileAUPGuide/tabid/8139/Default.aspx>





## Managing Your Risks

### New checklist can help prevent injuries to teachers, other staff

Teachers, support staff and administrators have job duties that at first glance do not appear to be particularly dangerous. However, some of their daily tasks present significant potential for injuries.

In a recent five-year period, Church Mutual paid nearly \$7 million in claims related to injuries caused by reaching, repetitive motion or twisting. Many of the injuries were the result of improper workplace ergonomics.

Appropriate workplace ergonomics require fitting workstation conditions and job demands to the physical characteristics of the individual who uses the workstation.

School employees — especially support staff — often sit for long periods of time at workstations. If those workstations are improperly arranged, they can make staff more susceptible to problems, such as back and neck injuries, carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches and poor vision.

We've developed the following tools to help our customers analyze their staff members' workstations and determine how to properly adjust equipment to fit the needs of the individuals who use it.

- **Prevent Pain and Injury With Improved Workstation Ergonomics** — This 12-page booklet provides an introduction to proper workstation ergonomics, including illustrated guidelines you can use while adjusting or setting up workstations and tips teachers and other staff can use to help prevent injuries.
- **Improved Workstation Ergonomics: Employee/Volunteer Checklists** — This four-page checklist offers an easy way to evaluate workstation ergonomics and implement solutions, if needed, for each of your staff.
- **Workstation Ergonomics Poster** — This 11-by-17 inch poster can be hung near workstations to remind staff to use appropriate ergonomic principles when adjusting workstations.

Customers can order these workstation materials at no cost on our website, [www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com), in the Safety Resources section.

Edward A. Steele  
Risk Control Manager



## Staff Lounge

### Back-to-school maintenance safety

As summer winds down, maintenance teams are hard at work preparing facilities for the fall. Cut exposure to risk by providing your staff with the resources and oversight they need to properly clean and maintain your buildings.

**Follow a detailed project checklist.** This should cover everything from what is cleaned and how it's cleaned to proper removal and replacement of furniture. Also include the storage of both frequently and infrequently used items. "This is usually created at the managerial level but have front-line staff weigh in too," said Matthew Moberg, a trainer at Cleaning Management Institute, headquartered in Latham, N.Y. "This ensures clear objectives and standards and buy-in from all stakeholders."

**Document carefully.** "Catalog and track to ensure everything is cleaned appropriately and returned to its original state," Moberg stressed. "For instance, if you remove the cubbies for cleaning, record whether they were properly secured afterwards."

**Manage cleaning supplies.** Keep all maintenance chemicals and equipment away from staff and students and locked up when not in use. Maintain a clear line of vision on custodial carts and have a system to quickly determine if anything is missing.

**Regulate all chemicals.** "Even everyday cleaners can cause allergic reactions, emit harmful toxins and cause dangerous reactions," Moberg warned. "They can injure people and damage the building, and you need an experienced person to set standards and protocols for what is brought in, who uses it and how."

**Provide training to maintenance staff.** Training is critical for both new and returning staff, but a study by the National Education Association found that less than half of support professionals had regular health and safety training<sup>1</sup>. The maintenance staff plays a critical role in ensuring the safety of students, staff and facilities, and it's vital that they receive the information and skills to perform their job properly.

**Educate nonmaintenance staff and students.** "It's become increasingly common for staff and students to play a bigger role in preventing the spread of infectious bacteria and viruses," Moberg said. "That's great but only if they know what they're doing."

Moberg recommended an extensive internal marketing campaign that covers the following: desk cleaning and sanitation, hand washing, cough and sneeze awareness and overall education on touch points — areas that are commonly touched, such as flush handles, faucets, towel dispensers, light switches, doorknobs and door jams.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nea.org/home/18513.htm>

# Effective ways to cut down campus crime

As much as we'd like to envision college campuses as serene hubs of learning, the truth is that they function more like small cities where crime is an unfortunate reality. It will never be possible to completely eliminate crime, but these steps can help minimize threats against students, staff and campus visitors.

## Teach avoidance techniques

Stress the importance of traveling in groups, avoiding alleys and other problematic shortcuts, not wearing earbuds or headphones and not talking on the telephone when walking/jogging alone. "It's critical to avoid situations that reduce awareness of your surroundings," warned Sgt. Stephen Banet, the public information officer for crime prevention/victim services at the University of Denver. "Teach people to listen to that sixth sense that alerts you to danger."

## Make it easy to be informed

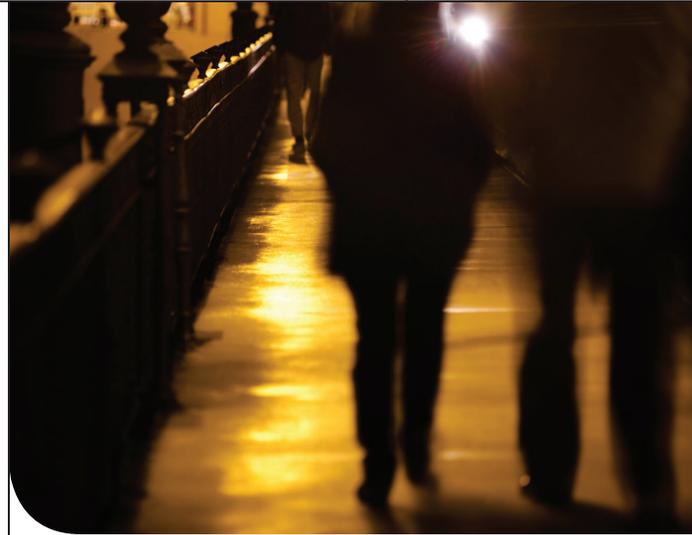
Use emergency notification systems that send texts, email blasts and voicemail alerts in the event of a crisis. "Only use this in a true emergency, or users will start to ignore it," Banet cautioned. "Encourage people to tell others about the alert — only 46 percent of our campus has signed up for these, but we assume there will be someone in every class who has received the alert."

## Educate students and staff

Include safety awareness in new student and employee orientation. Find ways to regularly connect with students. Mandatory dorm programs are helpful, and self-defense classes and tabletop displays in dining halls and libraries are also valuable. Make connections with outside groups — such as the Greek system — and encourage them to make use of campus safety resources. Recognize that graduate students might be harder to reach and might be subject to different issues, such as spousal abuse, stalking and restraining orders.

## Use some scare tactics

College students have an unfortunate tendency to overestimate their safety and assume problems "won't happen to me." One area where that might not hold true is car break-ins. "We post pictures of cars that have been broken into around campus, and that's been quite successful in prompting more defensive behavior," Banet said.



## Be proactive about property theft

While students are routinely cautioned not to leave their personal items unattended in the library and to lock their dorm rooms, many ignore these warnings. "We have officers roaming the libraries and traveling in pairs throughout dorm floors," Banet said. "If we see a computer left unattended for more than a minute or two or a room door left open, we'll confiscate the computer or lock the room. We leave a note that tells the student how to reclaim their item or get back into their room — better to deal with inconvenience than theft. This has led to a decrease in personal property theft."

## Offer safe walk programs or on-campus shuttles

Walk programs are typically offered either with trained students — run background checks on all — or police officers. Services and shuttles are typically provided during certain hours and within an established radius of campus.

## Recognize that men can be victims too

"Many programs and warnings are geared to women, but it's crucial to stress that men aren't immune from personal safety issues," Banet said.

## Form good relationships with city police

No campus is an island. Build a rapport with city police to gain a better awareness of the broader issues that could impact your campus.

## Tap into social media

"Facebook, Twitter and Yammer have been incredibly helpful in understanding problem areas on and near campus and gaining student input and support," Banet said. "Work with your communications department to use these effectively."

# Playground supervision

According to the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, over 500,000 children receive medical treatment each year due to a playground injury. More than 200,000 of those injuries demanded emergency room treatment, and 15 percent were considered severe. While proper equipment maintenance is certainly critical to student safety, experts agree that one thing is even more important: proper adult supervision.

"Supervision is about more than just watching kids," said Heather Olsen, EdD, assistant director for the National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) at the University of Northern Iowa. "It requires active monitoring of the environment and the ability to anticipate and address hazards. Too often, people assume it's just 'common sense,' but effective supervision demands standards and training."

## The ABCs of proper supervision

The NPPS recommends focusing on the following:

**Anticipate.** This refers to both potential site hazards and problems that could occur because of group dynamics or the behavior of individual students. Adults should arrive before students, so they have time to walk their area and identify and address site and facility hazards.

Position adults with a clear view of all playground areas and focus on those with a high potential for injury or bullying.

"Have the same adults dealing with the same kids every day," Olsen said. "You'll develop a rapport and know how to head off issues before they occur."

**Behavior.** This refers to the behavior of both adults and students. The adult needs to follow good supervision practices, which means moving, actively observing and interacting with the students. Adults should not congregate. Students need to know which behaviors are and aren't acceptable on the playground and to involve an adult if a problem occurs — whether it's a behavior issue or something unsafe about the grounds or equipment.

**Context.** Consistency is critical to playground safety. Your school should have a supervision plan that addresses the following:

- **Child/adult ratio:** The NPPS recommends having the same ratio on the playground or cafeteria as you do in the classroom but never fewer than two adults.



And it isn't only the younger students who require supervision during their break times. "High school students need effective supervision too, and there is no research to support having less supervision outside the classroom," Olsen said.

- **An injury management and reporting system:** Consult with the school nurse to ensure that all injuries are dealt with promptly and consistently. Each supervising adult should carry the following at all times: first-aid supplies (bandages, compresses, gauze, gloves and disinfectants), a whistle, a pen and notepad, injury report pads, plastic bags for trash and a communication device.
- **Discipline plan:** Have clear expectations of student behavior, communicate them to students and require adult supervisors to understand and consistently follow these standards.

## Training is critical

"Lack of training is a huge issue," Olsen said. "All supervisors, whether staff or volunteers, should go through a comprehensive program."

Olsen recommended that an expert deliver the training and that it's designed for the environment. Key issues to address are emergency planning and response, behavior management techniques, proactive positioning (placing adults at key locations) and site scanning.

## Double up

"There should always be at least two adults supervising at all times," Olsen stressed. "This is the most effective way to avoid problems."

## Communication

All supervising adults need a way to communicate with other staff, but your policies should prohibit personal texting, emails or telephone calls.

# Q | A

## A Perspective

*Most school districts handle student transportation either through school-provided resources or ongoing contracts with local taxi or other transportation companies. If your school even occasionally makes use of staff or parent volunteers to transport students to a school-related function, such as a sporting event or field trip, it's critical to have the proper policies in place to ensure student safety and minimize school liability. We asked Mark Jessup, a regional representative at Church Mutual, for his thoughts on this important topic.*



### **Risk Reporter: How does insurance coverage work if a teacher or staff member uses his or her personal vehicle to transport a student?**

**Mark Jessup:** If a school carries Church Mutual's Hired and Nonowned Automobile Liability Coverage, this will be secondary to the staff member's own personal insurance for the liability and medical portion of the claim and will not cover any claims for physical damage to the staff member's vehicle. It doesn't matter if transporting students does or doesn't fall under the staff member's prescribed duties. We recommend schools don't rely on staff to transport students. If additional assistance is needed, use parents. If school policies say staff aren't authorized to transport students, but they do anyway, our hired and nonowned policy will still provide coverage. Obviously, that school has a personnel issue to deal with, though.

### **Risk Reporter: What policies do you recommend if parents drive students to school events?**

**Mark Jessup:** Verify that the vehicle is well maintained, all safety equipment is functioning, the number of occupants doesn't exceed the recommended total for the vehicle and that all occupants use seat belts. Leave one seat open — this can be very helpful if the vehicle breaks down or someone has to get out of the vehicle. Students should not ride in the front seat. There should be two adults per vehicle, enabling the passenger adult to keep students from distracting the driver.

Each driver should have a list of the students, know them by name and transport the same students to/from the event. Take roll call before leaving the school, at any stopping points and when leaving the venue. Keep drivers' proof of insurance and driver licenses on file and have cellphone numbers for them on hand. Some schools do background checks on all parent volunteers — this is not a Church Mutual requirement, but it is a good idea, especially for overnight trips.



### **Risk Reporter: How can schools avoid student molestation — or accusations of it?**

**Mark Jessup:** In addition to background checks, have two nonrelated adults with a group of students at all times. Any disciplinary actions against a student should be enforced by a school employee only — not a parent volunteer. Inform all adults of the school's hands-off policy.