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Internet Filtering in the Dysart Unified School District

Introduction

School Districts that receive state and federal funding for technology are required by law to filter access to the Internet and prohibit access that is inappropriate. The Dysart Unified School District uses third party software and website categorization to be compliant with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

1. How does DUSD filter web content?

All network traffic destined for the Internet passes through a content filter. The content filter, which utilizes a content database containing millions of websites that are categorized based on their content, checks the destination to see what category the web site is categorized as. If the web site is in a category that is defined as "allowed," the traffic is passed out to the Internet and the web page is displayed for the requestor. If the website is in a category defined as "not allowed," the traffic is rejected and the user receives a web page stating the reason access to the requested web site was blocked.

Our third-party solution has many pre-defined categories established, based on customer requests and general industry practices. To view the complete listing of all pre-defined categories, visit <http://www.websense.com/global/en/ProductsServices/MasterDatabase/URLCategories.php>. There are various methods of categorizing a web site's content. Using proprietary software, our third-party content filtering provider searches the Internet based on keywords, reputation (meaning, many customers reporting a web site is inappropriate), and manually, by having an actual person review the site. Due to the nature of the Internet and its constant growth, not all web sites have been categorized yet. In the event the web site has not been categorized, the default behavior of the content filtering software is to allow access to that site. As more traffic to that web site is generated, it will eventually be categorized.

2. Why are some sites blocked that shouldn't be or vice versa?

As with any automated system, some web sites that are acceptable are blocked, while some web sites that are unacceptable are not. Each night, a new content database is uploaded to our content filtering software. As changes around the world are made, new and recently re-categorized web sites are added to the database. One of the major challenges facing content filtering are web sites that have multiple purposes. An example would be a web site that provides a message board system for students to discuss a topic but also has educational content, such as pictures, documents, movies, etc. In one scenario, the web site could be listed as "social networking," since students can communicate back and

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forth through either a chat room or a message board. In another scenario, the web site could be listed as “education,” since it contains relevant information on a topic with the primary goal to educate. Generally, the more restrictive of the two categories “wins,” resulting in a valid educational web site to be not allowed.

3. What web categories do we block or allow?

Web Category	Staff	Students
Abortion – Pro Life, Pro Choice	Allowed	Allowed
Adult Material – General, Adult Content, Lingerie, Swimsuit, Nudity, Sex	Blocked	Blocked
Adult Material – Sex Education	Allowed	Allowed
Advocacy Group	Allowed	Allowed
Business and Economy – Financial Data and Services	Allowed	Allowed
Education – Cultural, Institutions, Materials, References	Allowed	Allowed
Entertainment – General	Allowed	Allowed
Entertainment – MP3 and Download Services	Blocked	Blocked
Gambling	Blocked	Blocked
Games	Blocked	Blocked
Government – Military, Political Organizations	Allowed	Allowed
Information Technology – General, Computer Security	Allowed	Allowed
Information Technology – Hacking, Proxy Avoidance,	Blocked	Blocked
Information Technology – Search Engines and Portals	Allowed	Allowed
Information Technology – URL Translation	Blocked	Blocked
Information Technology – Web Hosting	Allowed	Allowed

Internet Communication – General	Allowed	Allowed
Internet Communication – Email	Allowed	Blocked
Internet Communication – Text and Media Messaging	Allowed	Allowed
Internet Communication – Web Chat	Blocked	Blocked
Job Search	Allowed	Allowed
Militancy and Extremist	Blocked	Blocked
Misc.	Allowed	Allowed
News and Media – General, Alternative Journals	Allowed	Allowed
Racism and Hate	Blocked	Blocked
Religion	Allowed	Allowed
Shopping	Allowed	Allowed
Shopping – Internet Auctions, Real Estate	Blocked	Blocked
Social Organizations	Allowed	Allowed
Society and Lifestyles	Allowed	Allowed
Society and Lifestyles - Alcohol and Tobacco, Personals and Dating, Social Networking and Personal Sites	Blocked	Blocked
Special Events	Allowed	Allowed
Sports	Allowed	Allowed
Tasteless	Blocked	Blocked
Travel	Allowed	Allowed
Vehicles	Allowed	Allowed
Violence	Blocked	Blocked
Weapons	Blocked	Blocked

4. How can I request a change in whether a site is blocked or unblocked?

When a valid web site is blocked, a user can submit a work order (<http://www.dysart.org/it/trackit.htm>) requesting a change in categorization. Generally, the process will take up to 24 hours to be completed. Working with the Educational Services Department, we review the web site requested and determine if it should be re-categorized. If Educational Services feels that the web site should remain blocked, they will offer alternative web sites to visit instead of the one originally requested. Similarly, sometimes a website is

accessible when it should not because it has no educational value, or is otherwise inappropriate. In such cases, you can also submit a work order requesting the site to be blocked.

5. Why are some students/staff able to access websites that are blocked?

Unfortunately, not all technology solutions are perfect. Often times, where there is a will, a way will be found to get what one wants. A common “way” is through the use of proxy servers, which work by masking the actual destination web address. For example, a proxy server can be used to open a window to other websites and trick the web content filter into thinking that only the proxy server is being accessed, thereby allowing through content that might otherwise be blocked. Our third-party web content filter is aware of close to 99% of these proxy servers and has specialized logic to identify others as they move around. However, since not all technology solutions are perfect, the best practice is effective classroom management and reporting issues to the IT helpdesk.

Summary

The Information Technology Department’s 1st priority is to provide as rich an educational experience as possible for students through providing technology and other tools. We work very hard to ensure that technology tools (including the Internet) are accessible, reliable and safe. It’s important to remember however, that the Internet is a big place and while the district takes all possible precautions to ensure a safe and educational experience, sometimes websites are accessible that should not be and valid websites are blocked. When this occurs, please submit a professionally worded request to the IT helpdesk and the IT department partnered with Ed Services will review and correct as necessary.