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1. Considering the requirements of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), how can the librarian or the IT Specialist meet the ethical obligations of access?

“Swimming pools can be dangerous for children. To protect them, one can install locks, put up fences, and deploy pool alarms. All these measures are helpful, but by far the most important thing that one can do for one’s children is to teach them to swim.” – National Research Council 2002 Report ‘Youth, Pornography, and the Internet’

A library is so much more than a depository for books. Instead, a library a place where those seeking knowledge on a variety of topics have the freedom to learn. There was a time in which patrons were limited to items on the shelves, but with the expansion of the Internet, users can search for information that was once available sometimes at only one location globally. The Internet has changed the way patrons use the library and has revolutionized the role of the librarian. Unfortunately, with more freedoms, comes the threat of more dangers. In 2000, Congress passed an act to help minimize the threats to users of the Internet, including the users in the library. This act has put librarians in an ethical bind due to the requirements set forth that violate our professional organization’s Code of Ethics. Unfortunately, because librarians are not above the law, it is nearly impossible to adhere to both the CIPA laws and fully abide by the ALA Code of Ethics to grant access to all.

In 2000, Congress passed the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the Neighborhood Children’s Internet Protection Act (NCIPA). CIPA requires any elementary or secondary school that receives funds under the E-rate Program, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and LSTA funds, have installed “technology protection measures” or filters on all computers used to access the Internet by minors and adults to protect against visual depictions of child pornography, obscenity, or material “harmful to minors” as defined under federal law. For the purposes of CIPA and NCIPA, “minors” are considered to be those under the age of seventeen. Many states, including Pennsylvania, have additional measures in place requiring schools and libraries to adopt an Acceptable Use Policy requiring the use of software programs to filter various visual depictions.

Article V of the Library Bill of Rights discusses the fundamental value of intellectual freedom. This section addresses the protections granted to library patrons in regards to the information they seek. “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.” In addition, the American Library Association Code of Ethics addresses the topic of intellectual freedom in section II in its statement, “We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.”

It is very clear that a school librarian cannot adhere to both the CIPA requirements and the values of intellectual freedom asserted in both the Library Bill of Rights and the ALA Code of Ethics. Librarians are not above the law, and regardless of our personal convictions surrounding the idea of filtering access, one must follow the requirements set forth by our employers and the government. However, librarians can, and should, do what they can to minimize the restrictions our patrons face. Some of the websites blocked by certain filters include the FBI, Planned Parenthood, Ebay, and the Bible. All of these websites provide some

type of information, but due to some “visual depictions”, the powers-at-be have deemed them inappropriate, and therefore they are filtered.

Although the Internet has changed the career of a librarian to include more duties surrounding electronic resources, it has not deserted its roots in print. Therefore, a librarian can do everything in his/her power to continue acquiring print resources to meet the needs of their students. If the CIPA laws prevent access to website on certain subject a librarian can acquire print resources on the subject. In addition, the librarian can continue to educate their patrons on responsible searching habits. This way, when the user is at a location in which he or she can search the material they desire, they can find the information they seek without the fear of encountering any “harmful” material. Finally, a librarian can help by not adding to the problem. Censorship versus selection is a long argued battle and librarians need to be consciously aware of why they are or are not acquiring certain materials. By keeping aware of one’s purchasing habits, one can avoid the risk of filtering even more access to patrons.

While these attempts come nowhere near to the value of “upholding the principles of intellectual freedom” and “resisting all efforts to censor library resources” as set forth in the ALA Code of Ethics, it is better than accepting defeat. We may not be able to provide access to everything for our patrons, but we can help by not adding to the problem.