

Testimony by Mr. Scott Day
Concerned Citizen on Educational Technology
House Committee on Education
March 15, 2012 Hearing on SB 104

My name is Scott Day and I am testifying today as a concerned citizen and former public educator on the unlimited access to technology that our schools & libraries provide and I am here as a proponent for SB 104. I live outside of Ozawkie, KS and am a patron of the USD 340 Jefferson West school district. I am a co-owner of Day Insurance Solutions, LLC, a health insurance agency in Topeka, KS. I also serve as a Commissioner on the KS State Employees Health Care Commission and as State Treasurer of the KS Association of Health Underwriters.

Introduction:

I am concerned about the current status of our educational system's use of technology and the internet and the negative effects that technology without proper monitoring and supervision can have on our students. This bill, SB 104, has the potential to require schools and libraries to set up proper internet monitoring programs and to limit the access of students to inappropriate pornographic and social media sites in Kansas. Both of these items would be desirable results for our youth in Kansas.

SB 104 seeks to require school districts and public libraries to implement technology protection measures that restrict access to obscene, inappropriate and visual depictions online.

Technology has such great educational potential...so what's the problem?

The problem is that the technology is so advanced...and our youth are so adept at utilizing the technology...and our educators and public librarians are too naïve, uneducated, and under motivated to prevent abuses. I have learned the hard way...if you are going to provide access to technology...you have to put in full time monitoring programs to try to prevent abuses. And the teachers have to be checking the computers and iPads and cell phones ALL THE TIME...and they don't do that...it's impossible to monitor technology and teach a class.

Most schools and libraries block porn sites...so why the extra restrictions?

I am writing of the Day family's personal experience with schools and technology. We adopted a special needs 13 year old girl last year. But this wasn't an ordinary adoption...we adopted her from another family that lives in the same school district that we reside in...so there was not a change in schools! Our daughter has had a history of technology troubles within the school district in the 6th and 7th grades BEFORE we adopted her. Use of school computers and use of "friends" cell phones. There had been much communication between the previous family and the school. I don't know further details so I won't elaborate on the previous family.

But the school district with its technology and lack of supervision on its "public" computers, cell phones, and recently iPads has been a huge challenge for us. And the problem isn't just pornographic

web sites...it's the social media sites. Our school district does not restrict social media sites like Facebook (FB) & Twitter. AND they don't monitor the use of "smart" cell phones in school.

I recently discovered that our daughter had created a FB account while in the 8th grade on school computers...even though we forbade her from creating such accounts. She had the account for 7 months before I discovered it. Our daughter was struggling in school and she asked if she could get help in the after school tutoring program. We later found out she was going in for 10 to 15 minutes of tutoring...then she was getting on FB and she was basically "sexting" through FB. We had asked about the after school tutoring and were assured that there was no unsupervised access to computers...guess they were wrong.

Once I was in her FB account...it made me sick. I found she had been communicating through private messaging with...in my opinion...a sexual predator from Oregon...a gang member from KC...enlisted military personnel from Fort Riley...and average teenage boys and classmates. And many of the communications would soon become sexual in nature...reading like a poorly written romance (pornographic) novel. I called all the parents of the students I knew were under aged and I could locate a phone number for.

We also discovered that our daughter would often go to school and borrow a friend's "smart" phone (we took her text only phone away previously) and could access FB through the phone. Later...I would enter my daughter's FB account...and I could see her classmates posting all day...taking pictures in classes...communicating with others all day long...through their phones.

The Schools Response

Since I knew this was a district wide problem...I took transcripts of the sexting conversations to the Superintendent of Schools...since several included male students of the district. I told him my intentions...I wanted the social media sites blocked from student access. He had concerns...some teachers use FB to communicate with their students and FB isn't all bad. He would meet with his technology committee to discuss...and would let me know what they thought. And he never called me back.

I would call and I would not get a return call. I had to stop at the district office to get a second meeting scheduled with the Superintendent. I had a second meeting and he was going to report back to me the Technology Committees report...no report back. They don't want to address the concerns and they are hoping I am going to go away. But I am not going away...I am giving SB 104 my attention...and I attended the March Board Meeting and I am attending the next school board meeting!

The school could not prevent my daughter from accessing FB, email, texting, or anything. The technology was unstoppable...so we pulled her from physical school and enrolled her in an online school. She works at a computer in our office that I can see the screen 100% of the time.

AND...in January 2013...the school issued to all High School students...a brand new iPad! It took our daughter exactly two days to figure out how to send a message to a boy's cell phone...and she did this right in front of us...she could type a message in about 10 seconds...hide the application...and appear to be working on school work when we would look at what she was doing...we were VERY lucky to catch her...most parents won't catch their kids. The iPad is in our possession and I am returning it to the school district. It is simply too difficult to monitor on our own.

The Schools Response Part II

I sent my Senate testimony on SB 104 to the Superintendent of Schools and my BOE representative and I received an immediate response. My wife and I had a very good meeting with the Superintendent, I presented to the Technology Committee, and I was given time to meet with the USD 340 Board of Education (BOE) for ten minutes in Executive Session at the March 11, 2013 board meeting to outline our experiences with technology and our concerns. And the BOE was sympathetic to our concerns but basically said that there was little they could “really” do since the technology is so advanced and that new applications are constantly coming out for students to access and the school board felt that trying to monitor all the technology would be a situation where they are just “chasing their tail”. The BOE voted to temporarily block FB until the end of the current school year and then they would evaluate it. They are also going to review their policies on cell phone usage and revisit with their staff enforcement of the policy.

Later the BOE discussed the implementation of the iPad program in the Middle School. USD 340 spent \$175,000 purchasing iPad’s for the HS and they were getting ready to spend \$145,000 at the MS to purchase an iPad for all the seventh and eighth grades. Discussion centered on timelines, programming, and whether to let the MS students take the iPads home, as they let all the HS students take the iPads home. Since I had just presented on the perils...they were concerned about if MS students were responsible enough to take the iPads home. Seventh grade probably shouldn’t, they would discuss further on the eighth grade. Since the district did not purchase monitoring programs for OFF campus utilization they would have to discuss this further! I couldn’t believe it! HS students are not responsible enough...let alone MS students?

It didn’t take me long...less than 12 hours...but I discovered that Abilene School District has a good reputation for technology innovation and I called and asked about some of their policies and procedures. First thing I found is that they would NOT allow iPads to leave the campus without proper monitoring programs. They have a couple of programs that if a student visits or uses restricted sites, applications, or downloads new applications the program sends a report of the iPads utilization that night to the Technology Coordinator...who turns it over to the Principal...who confiscates the iPad when the student walks in the door of the school the next day. Abilene blocks access to many social media sites and continues to research new ways and approaches to block current and future sites that may be used for non-educational purposes. With proper controls, Abilene School District has made technology a useful tool for educational purposes. That is obviously not happening in all our school districts.

Recommendations:

I support the enactment of SB 104 for several reasons: 1) Schools are rushing to technology and they can’t control it and they are not controlling the social media; 2) Strict WRITTEN policies are not enough...the internet and new technology is too great of a temptation for our children...who are not mature enough to be granted access to all this technology and internet; & 3) Schools and Public Libraries are providing free access to internet...with or without parent permission...they need to put up proper safeguards.

I recommend an amendment to SB 104. I recommend a clause be added that would require school districts to set up proper ON & OFF CAMPUS internet monitoring programs BEFORE they could make large technology purchases like iPads for all students. We the parents have NO say in this decision...and thus I would like schools to have to provide the monitoring programs...including social media...before they can make large technology purchases of this magnitude.