

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY POSITION PAPER

Mikva Challenge Education Council, January 2011

The Education Council at Mikva Challenge has concluded from our research and report, *Bringing Chicago Public High Schools into the 21st Century*, that our top recommendation is for **Chicago Public Schools to pass a new filtering policy that would unblock educational resources such as YouTube for teachers.**

Why is this important?

The current social media policy in CPS is that teachers are not able to use certain websites such as YouTube, Funbrain, and some News websites, even if they are using the website for educational purposes. The change in this CPS blocking policy is not only important to teachers but to students as well. The current policy limits the students' abilities to become more engaged in the classroom and gain knowledge about the world around them. Changing this policy would allow CPS to move toward the society that we currently live in by giving both students and teachers a wider variety of resources. The social media policy must be passed because the current policy is blocking certain websites that can and should be used for educational purposes.

Evidence for passing this policy

When President Obama took office he declared, "we will connect all of America to 21st century technology and telecommunication." In his 2011 State of the Union Speech, he highlighted the importance of both technology and education. Terry Mazany, interim CPS CEO, has also championed the importance of a 21st century education (Eight Forty-Eight). By failing to pass the social media policy we would be forfeiting the President's dream to prepare students for the 21st century.

Teachers Support This Policy

Across the nation, teachers continue to voice their opinions on the topic of using social media in the classroom.

- Teachers have stated that the social media policies as they stand now, do not allow students to explore or learn about issues around them on a larger scale. As one teacher expressed in the National Ed Week Online, *"Kids are going to be on a par with students from third-world countries with regard to technology if we keep on like this."*
- Teachers see a flaw in the current method of the CPS system, which limits teachers' access to social networking. One teacher shared these sentiments, *"I understand people's trepidation (fear) about some of the social networking sites, but I'm not sure what's gained by shutting down reality from our schools."*

Throughout Chicago, teachers have expressed the risks they take when incorporating outside sources in their lesson plan when relevant to the classroom topic.

- The Education Council met with over 50 teachers during the November Mikva-led P.D. and the December Tech Talk and all agreed that the CPS filtering policy should change. They claimed that blocking YouTube and other creditable sites causes them to change their lesson plan and decreases their flexibility in classroom instruction.

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- We heard stories of how teachers have to pre-download video content on zanzar or on a flash drive to bring outside materials such as videos and images from blocked sites into their classroom lesson plans. If their computer shuts down, the lesson is lost.

Students Support This Policy

Many adults take it for granted that the education in the classroom is sufficient and might think that books are the most accessible sources for youth to learn. Technological advancements allow one to seek research outside of the classroom. The internet is one of the main sources for learning in this century. The issue with this is that the policies currently block some useful educational content along with non-educational websites. In our survey, **93% of students use YouTube**. Two-thirds of students agree that YouTube can help students learn better, and 40% already use YouTube for their own learning purposes. Since students are already using YouTube on a daily basis, the website should be unblocked and made accessible for teachers to meet students at their level.

Here are some stories from Mikva students:

- Victor's physics teacher uses online demonstrations and flash diagrams to explain the lesson from online science websites. This reduces the need for physically showing the students how it works. Furthermore, everything on the computer is projected onto the classroom screen, making it more convenient.
- There are many students in CPS who have the opportunities to use computers in school. The students who go to the computer lab or the library in their school for educational purposes often give up because certain websites are not accessible. Instead, they walk away with no information or knowledge. This most affects students who do not have internet access in their homes.

In many Charter schools teachers have access to some blocked websites such as YouTube. The teachers would use YouTube to show students educational videos. In our experiences, teachers and students have used their privileges wisely.

- In Karina's social studies class at UNO Garcia Charter School, she was learning the 44 Presidents. Everyday they would use Youtube to look up the Presidents song. They would find pictures and sing the song aloud together. That helped them learn the Presidents more effectively.
- In Mercedes Personal Finance class, her teacher made every student create an account on a website called Everfi. Everfi is a website that has many lessons, games and tests about finances. They would learn how to budget, make good banking choices, how to pick good credit cards and much more.

How the policy should be implemented

Imagine...if teachers were given the liberty to expand their resources, harnessing the power of YouTube to show different world perspectives in their classroom.

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Ideas on how the policy should be implemented include

- Focus on training
 - In our report, we created a recommendation on teacher workshops. If teachers were educated on how to utilize clips of physics experiments off of YouTube in the classroom, different social media sites would not be misused.
 - "Only 10 percent of teachers [feel] 'very well prepared' to use computers and the Internet for classroom instruction" (Goral 2000). "Among the 90% who do not feel well prepared are those who have been in the field for ten or more years. This group may be reluctant to incorporate technology because they lack the technology skills needed. This lack of skills is due mainly to not having been trained or not having technology modeled during their early academic career" (Rosenfeld & Martinez-Pons, 2005).
 - According to Robert Runcie, Chief Administrative Officer of CPS, only 15% of teachers at the time were efficient with tech when he began. He has been working to change this, and we believe that it is important to continue this trend.
 - According to Charlie Martin, Technology Director at North Lawndale College Prep, "Teachers are given all this technology, but they have no idea how to use it. They become scared and intimidated by it."
- Infrastructure
 - If the policy is implemented, it can help teachers and students. However, there are obstacles that would interfere with this policy being implemented correctly. There might be more students than there are computers or the computers can fail to work properly due to technological malfunctions. It is important for CPS to commit to working to continue to solve those obstacles.
- Consequences for Abusing the Policy
 - There should be consequences for teachers or students who abuse the policy, but they should be determined at the school-level.

Resources

Mikva Challenge Education Council. "Bringing Chicago Public Schools into the 21st Century," Summer Policy Report, August 2010.

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<http://www.junauza.com/2008/11/12-barack-obama-quotes-on-technology>

President Barack Obama, 2011 State of the Union Speech.

Eight-forty-eight. "Interim CPS CEO discusses future of city's schools," Eight Forty-Eight, Jan 25, 2011. Posted online: <http://www.wbez.org/episode-segments/interim-cps-ceo-discusses-future-citys-schools>