

Issue-Specific List Serve Summary
On School Web Site Access
by Registered Sex Offenders
May 2010

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) sponsors and coordinates a number of list serves to promote communication, collaboration, and the sharing of ideas, information, and resources for school emergency management personnel. As a part of this communication, OSDFS manages list serves for current and prior Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grantees, prior Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) grantees, State Safe School Center Directors, and School Security Chiefs and law enforcement officials to discuss and respond to key emergency management issues. These list serves help provide OSDFS with a better understanding of past, present, and emerging issues in our nation's schools, as well as provide insights into possible solutions and strategies for addressing these issues.

On September 15, 2009, the U.S. Department of Education queried the State Safe School Center Directors and School Security Chiefs List Serves for feedback on one district's proposal to manage and monitor access to their schools' Web sites. The rationale behind this district's policy change was based on concern for student information (such as photographs) available for access by the general public via class Web sites and, specifically, their availability for viewing by registered sex offenders. For example, in cases where a student's household has one parent/caretaker/resident who is a registered sex offender and another who is not, the district wondered whether access to the school Web sites should be prohibited for both adults. The district, in an attempt to address these concerns, proposed a release/acknowledgement form for parents to sign regarding their child's image/identity on the Web site, and a "Do's and Don'ts" list for teachers on what is appropriate for posting on their Web sites.

The following report summarizes list serve members' responses to this query. Because the information shared via this list serve has broad applicability to the wider school emergency management field, OSDFS has redacted the identity of respondents and is posting this summary of responses for general reference.

This query elicited responses from two (2) School Security Chiefs and one (1) State Safe School Center Director. Policies described in these responses do not explicitly address issues of sex offender access to school Web sites; however, they do include parameters for ensuring security and privacy of information and that material posted to the school Web sites does not contain personal or identifying information. Respondents provided copies of either their Handbook or Regulations and included links to their district Web sites where school policies and regulations are posted for the public.

One respondent described a software application called “24/7 Learning” that is utilized to maintain secure access for parents to personal information about their student. This site is password-protected, and is used to distribute and post information to parents, teachers and staff. This district stated that since they directly control the content posted to their school Web sites, there are no specific parameters in their regulations to address the concern of sex offenders accessing the sites.

Although respondents stated their policies and regulations do not directly address school Web site access by registered sex offenders, one district provided a description of their established parameters for distributing and/or posting student pictures and student information. Specifically, pictures of students may be posted as long as no other identifying information (e.g., name or address) is provided. Regarding sex offenders’ access, the respondent reported that in their state information is only available on Level III offenders and that it may not be within the schools’ rights to deny access as long as these individuals have served their time and fulfilled their obligations to society. The Safe School Center recommended that since some communities communicate this information in different ways, school districts should contact their local law enforcement for further information, and seek guidance through legal counsel.

The policies and regulations provided by respondents also included *minimum* requirements and guidelines for school Web sites, such as inclusion of the school’s name and contact information and principal and key staff names and contact information. In addition, policies state that posted material must “serve the educational purposes of the school system;” these “educational purposes” are also defined in the attached policies.

The consensus of these three responses is to limit the amount of identifying information posted, inform parents of what is typically posted on school Web sites, and provide parents the opportunity to opt out of having personal information posted about their student on these public Web sites. Schools send home informational letters to parents notifying them of policies such as permitting the release of high school students’ names to military institutions and institutions of higher education. Students whose parents and guardians have requested that the school does not release certain information are placed on a list such as one district’s *Directory of Information Withhold List*, which site managers must consult and update as information is posted or requested for removal. In addition, schools have developed and employ guidelines such as the *User Responsibilities for Using Technology* and the *Students’ Rights and Responsibilities* handbook to disclose students’ rights to privacy and the schools’ rights to disseminate certain types of information. Since monitoring sex offender access would be difficult, a reliable defense to protecting students from exposure to harm is to reduce the amount of harmful information that can be obtained.