

# New Debate: Password Protected

## ***Do schools have the right to monitor students' online activity?***

When you post a message on a social networking site, you probably don't expect your teacher or principal to read it. Neither did a 12-year-old girl in Minnesota who wrote an angry message about a fellow student on her Facebook page. When school authorities read that note and other inappropriate messages written by the student, they demanded that she give them her password.

That incident, which led the American Civil Liberties Union to file a lawsuit, is one of several recent cases in which schools have disciplined students for bad online behavior outside of school. Many people believe schools have the right to punish students if their Internet activity leads to bullying or class disruptions. Others think that punishing students for what they do on the Web is the responsibility of parents, not schools.

Do schools have the right to monitor students' online activity? *Current Events* student reporters Joseph Maneen and Akash Bagaria each posted a side.

## **Watch What You Type**

I believe schools have the right to monitor students' online activity. Young people need to learn that when you post something on the Internet, there are consequences. Kids should not be misbehaving on social networking sites in the first place.

Second, inappropriate online activity often comes in the form of cyberbullying. Fourteen states have passed anti-cyberbullying laws, and other states are considering them. If a school catches a student bullying someone online before the police do, the student is less likely to end up in legal trouble.

Lastly, schools should have the right to punish students for online activity because doing so might save lives. If a student is bothering another student, the school could address the problem before the dispute gets physical. Peter Ivancic, a teacher from Haverhill, Mass., agrees. "If the students have done something worth taking the [social networking site] password, of course the school should take it," he says.

## Freedom Comes First

Schools do not have the right to monitor what students do online outside of school. Monitoring students' online activity is an invasion of privacy and a violation of freedom of speech. Imagine teachers checking students' cell phones or spying on their after-school conversations. Tracking students on the Internet is essentially the same thing.

There should be a level of trust between teachers and students. Trust strengthens people's values of commitment and responsibility. Teachers should have faith that their students will follow the honor code and not partake in anything immoral online.

Finally, the role of educators is to teach, not to monitor kids outside the classroom. Parents should oversee their children's actions and guide them in the right direction. Maria Shepard, a teacher at Princeton Day School in New Jersey, agrees. "If the device is not school-owned and is not being used on school campus, schools [should not] monitor [a] student's online activity. ... If an issue arises, the student's parents could manage it."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. According to the passage, how many states have passed anti-cyberbullying laws?
  - A 10
  - B 12
  - C 14
  - D 16
  
2. The passage shows two sides of this debate: Should schools have the right to monitor students' online activity? All of the following are arguments AGAINST schools having the right to monitor students' online activity EXCEPT
  - A monitoring students' online activity violates their freedom of speech
  - B students need to learn that there are consequences to their actions
  - C teachers don't have the right to monitor students outside of school
  - D parents, not educators, should oversee their children's actions
  
3. The author enhances the reader's understanding of the debate in all of the following ways EXCEPT
  - A by showing both sides of this debate
  - B by including quotes from educators
  - C by stating several facts about the issue
  - D by showing why one side is right
  
4. Read this sentence from the passage: "Trust strengthens people's values of commitment and responsibility."

In this sentence, the word **commitment** means

  - A loyalty
  - B privacy
  - C separation
  - D competition
  
5. What was the author's purpose for including the opening paragraph ("When you post...") in the passage?
  - A to describe how inappropriate online behavior should be handled
  - B to give an example of an incident that is the basis for this debate
  - C to explain the significance of Americans being able to openly debate
  - D to persuade teenagers to only post friendly messages on Facebook

6. Which side of the debate is teacher Maria Shepard on?

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7. Why are states passing anti-cyberbullying laws? How do you know? Please provide evidence from the text.

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

\_\_\_\_\_ school authorities read several inappropriate messages written by a 12-year-old girl in Minnesota, they demanded that she give them her Facebook password.

- A First
- B After
- C But
- D So

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Some people believe that schools don't have the right to monitor what students do online outside of school because it is an invasion of privacy and a violation of the freedom of speech.

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

(do) What? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? because it is an invasion of privacy and a violation of the freedom of speech

10. **Vocabulary Word:** violation: the breaking of a law or right.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_