



Are Your Children Safe? An Internet Caution

There has been a tremendous rise in the use of what are known as “social” and “blogging” web sites. Among the most popular are sites such as **MySpace.com** and **LiveJournal.com**. **MySpace** has become so popular that it has gained national interest, most notably from the perspective of Internet safety for children.

The Ranchos area and Golden Valley Unified School District is not immune from this. We have, in-fact, discovered several entries on the site from students in our schools. If you look for yourself, you might be surprised at what you read.

It is not uncommon for our children to be more computer literate than we are, however as parents, it is imperative that we be aware of what our kids are doing on the Internet! If not careful, information garnered from our kids’ entries on these sites can open the door to all sorts of predators.

What can you do about it?

First and foremost, supervise what your kids are doing on the Internet. Be aware of the sites they are visiting and the activities they pursue online. Limit the time your kids spend online. Kids are spending more and more time online these days – a recent survey found a growing trend for kids between the ages of 12 and 18 to spend more time online than any other activity, including watching television, sports, etc., and you need to face the reality that the majority of this time is not spent researching school projects. There is also a number of software products available that can help prevent your children from accessing potentially harmful information. NetNanny is one such product (<http://www.netnanny.com>) although it is extremely important to understand that none of these products are 100% effective.

What is Golden Valley Unified School District doing about this?

We do everything in our power to prevent access to any material that is inappropriate for kids at school. Again, there is no method that is 100% effective, however we use a three tiered system in conjunction with the Madera County Office of Education that includes access control on routers at the District, a content filtering system at MCOE, and finally a firewall for Internet access. Usage is constantly monitored and new information is added to our safeguards on a daily basis. We are also now looking at ways to educate the Ranchos community about how to deal with this.

Should I be concerned?

The most important thing is for you to be informed. You can look at these sites and search for your kids. Most of the kids are oblivious to the fact that the information they post is available for anyone to read, including their parents, teachers and everyone. The ramifications of that are pretty frightening, especially when you realize that most kids have no predilection against posting their real e-mail address, home address or even phone number. Inform your children and let them know you are aware of what is going on and help surf the Internet safely.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Information Systems Department at 645-7500 or email techinfo@gvUSD.k12.ca.us and always check the District’s website for information at <http://www.gvUSD.k12.ca.us>.