I.   Introduction

My name is Carrie Gardner. I am the Coordinator of Library Media Services at the Milton Hershey School in Hershey Pennsylvania and a Ph. D. Candidate at the University of Pittsburgh. The opinions expressed during my testimony are mine alone and do not necessarily represent those of either institution.   Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the issues surrounding our children and the Internet.

II.   Role of a School Library Media Center

The school library plays a unique role in the education of America's children. It is the one academic unit in the district that serves every student regardless of their course selection or academic ability. There are four main missions of school libraries:

Promote literature and reading.
School libraries provide our young people with quality literature. Exposure to literature promotes the acquisition of reading skills that students must have in order to be successful in school and later life.

Provide information that supports the curriculum.
School libraries provide resources our young people need in order to complete their class assignments. The days of using only a textbook to learn and produce from are gone.

Teach our young people how to find, process and use information.
School librarians provide instruction so students become critical consumers and efficient users of information. Employers and institutions of higher education tell us that our 18 year-olds must know how to use e-mail, mine information from the world wide web, and efficiently use technology to accomplish tasks. School librarians work each school day to help students master these skills so they can lead productive lives during this digital age.

Provide information students need as they grow into adulthood.
Because our young people can not drive, they often can not access the information available at a public library. Because of this, school library media centers contain information about the world we all live in. Young people use this information for all sorts of different tasks: to obtain The Boy

Scout Eagle Award, to become a better athlete, or to discover if what their uncle is doing with them is "normal."

III. Our Young People

School libraries serve America's children. I would like to paint a picture of those children:
1 in 2 will live in a single parent family at some point in childhood.
1 in 3 is born to unmarried parents.
1 in 3 will be poor at some point in their childhood.
1 in 5 is born to a mother who did not graduate from high school.
1 in 5 has a foreign-born mother.
1 in 6 is born to a mother who did not receive prenatal care in the first three months of pregnancy.
1 in 6 has no health insurance.
1 in 8 never graduates from high school.
1 in 12 has a disability.
1 in 24 does not live with either parent.
1 in 4 girls will be sexually abused by the age of 18.
1 in 7 lives with a family member who abuses drugs or alcohol.

Our young people practice a variety of religions and have varied ethnic backgrounds. Thanks to the almost ubiquitous presence of television, radio and the Internet, they know about every hungry child in Africa, shooting, rape, robbery, and murder in their town, state, nation and the world. They start to carry the weight of the world with them at a very early age.

IV. The Intersection of School Libraries, Young People and the Internet

Two benefits of the Internet to our young people include:

The amount of information available.   Access to the Internet provides school libraries with an unprecedented opportunity to provide students with a HUGE amount of information from very reliable sources along with a HUGE amount of, shall we say—misinformation, opinions, and advertisements.

The "instant" delivery of information. The vast amount of information on the Internet is accessible within seconds. Having information available at such a quick pace allows teachers, school librarians and students to spend the majority of their time evaluating and using the information, instead of searching for the information.

In order to support the curriculum, middle and high school librarians and the young people they serve face situations such as these every day:
Students in speech class debate capital punishment, needle distribution programs and other social issues in their quest to fine-tune their debating skills. Persuasive speech topics for students as young as 8th grade often include gun control and abortion.   Economics students need statistics on HIV/AIDS infection rates in Africa in order to complete assignments on the economic impact of the disease. Health students study how HIV, syphilis, herpes and a host of other diseases are transmitted in hopes that they will take appropriate precautions.

The curriculum taught in every school district includes topics that make adults uncomfortable, but are necessary so our young people are engaged learners and discovering the information they need to understand the issues that will affect their adult lives.

During my time as a building-level school librarian I watched, day in and day out, as students casually browsed the web looking the information they needed. They weeded through countless sites looking for those that provided the information they needed or wanted. Rarely were they sidetracked by a catchy web site. When armed with the skills needed to navigate, understand and use the Internet, they do just fine.

V.   Scenarios in Place

School districts have taken a number of different approaches to student Internet access.

Unlimited
Students and adults have no technological restrictions to reaching information on the Internet.

Filtered
Scenarios include those where students can only use a filtered computer but the adults have unfiltered access. Other districts filter all computers. There are a variety of filter products available. Some work by blocking all sites and allowing access to only selected sites. A survey in the November issue of School Library Journal showed that 58.3% of school districts filtered Internet.

Filtered Everywhere but in the Library
Many districts filter everywhere but the library. They recognize that the mission of the school librarian is to teach the young people to handle information.

Parental Permission
Some districts have instituted policies that require parents to sign a permission slip before their young person is allowed on the Internet. Other districts have taken the opposite approach and give every student access unless their parents have signed an "opt-out" form.

Student Acknowledgement Forms
Districts have passed policies that require students to sign a form which states the do's and don't of Internet activities.

Teacher Use Only
Some districts insist that adults be at the keyboard and mouse. Students are not allowed to physically touch an Internet accessible computer.

No Internet Use in the District
A few districts in the country feel that the Internet is such a dangerous place that it should not be in the district. Some have gone so far as to say that no information from the Internet can be used with students.

VI.   The Road Less Traveled

The purpose of a K-12 education is to prepare young people to be productive citizens. Employers, colleges, trade schools and common sense tells us that in order for our young people to work in the global economy, tackle the social issues of the day, and have fulfilling lives, they must be able to navigate the Internet. This ability is not genetic or acquired via osmosis.

Children must be taught how to deal with the racism, violence, sexually explicit information, and every other trait, both good and bad our society has to offer both in real life and cyberspace.

It is the road less traveled to teach every child how to use, understand, and at times ignore what they find on the Internet. If we don't equip our youngsters with these skills, we run the risk that they will stumble upon access at a friends house, the church office, the public library, Grandma's house, even the school library; and engage in, at best an inappropriate behavior and at worst, a behavior which causes them physical or emotional harm.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

References

II.   Role of the School Library Media Center

Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning. Association for Educational Communications and Technology and American Library Association Chicago: IL, 1998.

This volume provides standards that if met, provide students with solid background in information retrieval, use and synthesis.

American Association of School Librarians Web Sites:
www.ala.org/aasl/ip_nine.html: Standards for Student Learning

www.ala.org/aasl/positions/ps_roleschool.html: The Role of the School Library Media Program

Krashen, Stephen D. The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research. Libraries Unlimited, Englewood: CO, 1993.

This volume provides references to the benefits of reading.

Haycock, Ken. What works: Research about teaching and learning through the School's Library Resource Center. Rockland Press, Seattle: WA, 1992.

III.   Our Young People

The State of America's Children Yearbook 2000
www.childrensdefense.org/keyfacts.html

V. Scenarios in Place

The Commission on Online Child Protection web site lists filter products along with research studies on their use.
Main web site: www.copacommission.com

A University of Pennsylvania study
www.copacommision.com/papers/filter_effect.pdf