### Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of Internet Safety in Schools

#### What is this research about?
This study investigated preservice teacher candidates’ perceptions of students’ internet safety within Southern Ontario schools. Specifically, the researcher explored whether preservice teachers believed their students were involved in unsafe internet practices and whether schools were being sufficiently proactive about on-line student safety.

#### What did the researcher do?
In the spring of 2002, 116 preservice teachers (enrolled in a Bachelor of Education program at a university in southern Ontario) completed a survey questionnaire. The survey questions covered a range of topics including:

- the amount of time students used the internet at school and at home;
- the location preservice teachers believed their students used the internet;
- the supervision of internet use, by school staff;

#### What you need to know:
This study examined preservice teacher candidates’ perceptions of student internet safety and found that, while over half of the respondents reported that students were never unsupervised while using the internet at school, the degree of this supervision varied. Respondents also believed that few schools took a proactive approach about internet safety by speaking to students about the dangers, signing internet safety contracts, or having a designated staff member assigned to help with safety-related issues. This suggests that schools may want to consider taking proactive steps to better prepare students for on-line environments.

- the closeness of the supervision by school staff;
- the reasons preservice teachers believed their students were going online (retrieval of information,
communicating via email or instant messaging);

- and the proactive steps preservice teachers believed their placement school was taking to ensure students were aware of the risks of internet use.

The preservice teacher candidates who completed the questionnaire were in school placements, teaching students from a wide age range (ages 6 - 18). Of the 116 teacher candidates, the majority (86 out of 116) were working with students within the age range of 7-15 years.

The researcher analysed the completed surveys using statistical methods.

What did the researcher find?
Preservice teachers who responded to the survey questionnaire reported that they believed most students used the internet in schools for less than two hours per week and that students used the internet to:

- retrieve or gather of information;
- read or send emails;
- use on-line communication programs that allow students to communicate with others in real time.

Over half of the respondents believed that their students never had unsupervised access to the internet at school but there was a range of opinions on the closeness of that supervision (from a teacher being present in the room, although not closely watching what students were doing online, to closer forms of supervision).

Finally, preservice candidates had the perception that few schools engaged in proactive practices such as talking to students about internet safety or asking students to sign an internet safety contract that outlines responsible internet use. It was also relatively rare for schools to have a staff member designated to help students with on-line safety issues.

How can you use this research?
Teachers and administrators can use this research to begin conversations about student internet use and safety provisions in their schools. Developing partnerships with community agencies, such as police and health professionals that can provide information on safe internet use, is one way to increase staff, student, and parent knowledge of internet safety. Also, as technology develops, teachers and
administrators may wish to consider the safe use of emerging technology.

**Original Article:**

**About the researcher:**
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**About this summary**
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