

## Information and Background on Questions about Database Content in Libraries (10/22/18)

### Issue:

- A **lawsuit in Colorado** has drawn attention to the content in electronic databases available in libraries.
- After a parent challenged the databases in **Utah**, the Utah Education and Telehealth Network (UETN) temporarily shut off access to the EBSCO databases pending investigation, and on 10/19, **they voted unanimously to restore access to all K-12 Utah students.**
- **An Indiana-based advocacy group sent a letter to Indiana school superintendents 10/22.**
- **Misinformation is raising questions about databases beyond the scope of the Colorado lawsuit or UT challenge.**

**Background:** The Thomas More Society filed a lawsuit against EBSCO Industries and the Colorado Library Consortium on 10/12/18. The complaint alleges that EBSCO “knowingly provides sexually explicit and obscene materials to school children” and that the Colorado Library Consortium “purchases from EBSCO and knowingly brokers sexually [sic] explicit, obscene and harmful materials to Colorado school children.” This was brought on behalf of Pornography is Not Education, a small Colorado group led by Robin and Drew Patterson.

Attention to this lawsuit has expanded attention beyond EBSCO databases to Gale, Proquest and Overdrive. Parents and advocacy groups have challenged databases in other states, now including Indiana. An Indiana-based advocacy group sent a letter to public school superintendents on 10/22/18, claiming EBSCO databases, as a part of Indiana’s INSPIRE virtual library, are “pandering obscenity to minors.”

### Explaining Databases

People do not necessarily understand databases. Databases are collections of published material made available online. Content includes mainstream magazines, newspapers, books, guides, car repair manuals, educational videos, photos and imagery, genealogy and more. Databases offer searching tools and other features -- designed to help individual patrons and students find what they are looking for.

**INSPIRE** is a cost-effective online collection that provides access to academic resources, testing and career center, teaching books and other mainstream library resources. Managed by the Indiana State Library, INSPIRE has been supported by the Indiana General Assembly, matched by federal funds, and other sources since 1998.

### Databases in K-12 Schools

Electronic databases provide real research capabilities and access to magazines, journals, etc. extremely economically for the good of all. INSPIRE is one of the databases made available to all schools and libraries.

- Database content comes from mainstream magazines, newspapers, and journals.
- There are different collections within the overall database so that age-appropriate collections may be selected for specific grade levels.
- Certified school librarians are needed to help guide searches and to teach research skills. Teacher librarians are able to monitor responses to research to ensure age appropriate searches and responses.
- There are no ads in EBSCO and other primary database subscription programs used by libraries and schools.
- If content in mainstream resources are deemed inappropriate, the argument the parents have is with the publisher of the magazine, newspaper, etc. not the database.

### Four Steps Library Leaders Might Consider:

1. **Know your Library** – Have at your fingertips your library’s Collection Development Policy, Challenge/Reconsideration Policy, names and types of databases available in your library and your library’s filtering system to comply with CIPA (Children’s Internet Protection Act), as applicable.
2. **Inform your key Administrators and Staff** – Provide the facts. They will appreciate hearing about this possible situation from YOU before they hear or read about it from someone else. (see page 2)
3. **Refresh your staff** –Remind staff about policies in #1 above and how to handle related questions, challenges or media calls.
4. **Prepare possible responses** - It may be helpful to prepare responses in advance a call. Save yourself the stress by writing out a few key points, which you can share with key folks in #2 above (see page 2).

The phrases above were developed by combining ideas and key phrases from materials provided by ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom, Colorado Library Consortium and Indiana Library Federation.

## Sample Responses – School Setting

### Simple statement affirming Intellectual Freedom

*[SCHOOL LIBRARY NAME] stands by the right of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment. Intellectual freedom is one of the core values of the library profession; it promotes access to information and guides the defense against censorship. [SCHOOL LIBRARY NAME] includes print and digital materials in its collection based on a collection development policy as approved by our [SCHOOL BOARD/(AUTHORITY NAME or TYPE)] on [DATE].*

### Informing your Supervisor/Board members/Administrators in ADVANCE of a question

*Hi, [INSERT NAME],*

*I wanted to give you a heads up about an issue that was raised in another state that may pop up here. We are aware that a conservative advocacy group in Indiana has raised questions about INSPIRE. I want to let you know so that you are not caught off guard. You may receive an email or a call or may see a post in social media that suggests we are “pandering obscenity to minors.”*

*Here is what happened. A small group of individuals in another state are working to ban access to ALL of the electronic content certain schools and libraries subscribe to through certain database vendors. Like all schools, libraries and colleges in Indiana, we have access to INSPIRE, a collection of news, magazines, scholarly journals, career testing and teaching books, as provided through State Government.*

*I want to assure you that we follow state and federal laws related to CIPA (Children’s Internet Protection Act) and we utilize filtering technology to control internet access. We are diligent in managing our collections, whether those are in printed books or online databases.*

*If we receive a question or complaint, we are going to respond with the same professionalism and respect we show in any material challenge situation. We have policies and procedures guiding us so that our [SCHOOL] is best served.*

*If you have questions, please let me know so that we can talk about this. As always, I appreciate your support and advocacy for our [SCHOOL] library and electronic databases.*

*[SIGNATURE]*

### Response to a Concerned Parent/Community Member

*Online databases and digital resources are used in tens of thousands of schools, libraries and institutions around the world. LIBRARY/SCHOOL NAME promotes access to information in various formats including online research databases. However, our library does provide filters to screen out pornography and explicit content. Our librarians are highly trained to help [patrons/students] find sources and materials that meet their individual research needs. Our staff believes caregivers should take an active role in their children’s internet usage. It is important to teach students how to weed through and understand the wide array of information available online instead of relying only on filters, restrictions and censorship.*

### Response to Question/Possible Challenge

*It sounds as though you have a material challenge. Here is a [LINK TO/COPY OF] our policy and procedure involving such things. Our library values the perspectives of individual in our community whom we serve and takes seriously well-established principles around the right of library users to read and seek information.*

### Response to Question/Possible Challenge via email or social media

*Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Do you live in the [SCHOOL DISTRICT]? If so, we ask that you reach out to us directly. We take material challenges seriously, and we can walk you through the procedure so that your concerns are addressed with due process and consideration.*

## Sample Responses – Public Library Setting

### Simple statement affirming Intellectual Freedom

*[PUBLIC LIBRARY NAME] stands by the right of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment. Intellectual freedom is one of the core values of the library profession; it promotes access to information and guides the defense against censorship. [PUBLIC LIBRARY NAME] includes print and digital materials in its collection based on a collection development policy as approved by our [BOARD OF TRUSTEES/(AUTHORITY NAME or TYPE)] on [DATE].*

### Informing your Supervisor/Board members/Administrators \*

*Hi, [INSERT NAME],*

*I wanted to give you a heads up about an issue that was started in another state. We are aware that a conservative advocacy group in Indiana has raised questions about INSPIRE. I want to let you know so that you are not caught off guard. You may receive an email or a call or may see a post in social media that suggests we are “pandering obscenity to minors.”*

*Here is what happened. A small group of individuals in another state are working to ban access to ALL of the electronic content certain schools and libraries subscribe to through certain database vendors. Like all schools, libraries and colleges in Indiana, we have access to INSPIRE, a collection of news, magazines, scholarly journals, career testing and teaching books, as provided through State Government.*

*I want to assure you that we follow state and federal laws. We have policies in place that address selection and use of the library’s electronic resources. We are diligent in managing our collections, whether those are in printed books or online databases.*

*If we receive a question or complaint, we are going to respond with the same professionalism and respect we show in any material challenge situation. We have policies and procedures guiding us so that our [LIBRARY] is best served.*

*If you have questions, please let me know so that we can talk about this. As always, I appreciate your support and advocacy for our library.*

*[SIGNATURE]*

### Response to a Concerned Parent/Community Member\*

*Online databases and digital resources are used in tens of thousands of schools, libraries and institutions around the world. LIBRARY NAME promotes access to information in various formats including online research databases. Our librarians are highly trained to help [patrons/students] find sources and materials that meet their individual research needs. Our staff believes caregivers should take an active role in their children’s internet usage. It is important to teach students how to weed through and understand the wide array of information available online instead of relying only on filters, restrictions and censorship.*

### Response to Question/Possible Challenge

*It sounds as though you have a material challenge. Here is a [LINK TO/COPY OF] our policy and procedure involving such things. Our library values the perspectives of individual in our community whom we serve and takes seriously well-established principles around the right of library users to read and seek information.*

### Response to Question/Possible Challenge via email or social media

*Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Do you live in the [PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT]? If so, we ask that you reach out to us directly. We take material challenges seriously, and we can walk you through the procedure so that your concerns are addressed with due process and consideration.*

**\*NOTE for difference between School and Public Library versions:** While public libraries follow state and federal laws and library policies, Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) does not apply to all public libraries.

The phrases above were developed by combining ideas and key phrases from materials provided by ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom, Colorado Library Consortium and Indiana Library Federation.