Research Brief Addendum 2, October 21, 2026

Content filters, YouTube and exposure on school devices

Prepared for the ARPS parent working group. Question asked: parents report young students using school Chromebooks to reach YouTube, TikTok and pornography, and say the filters do not stop them. What does the public record say, and who else is raising it? Sources are linked on the claim they support. Items in orange are secondhand or unverified and should not go on a slide without a check.

Summary

The record supports three statements and not a fourth. Filters are porous, and the vendors, Google and the federal filtering law all say so in their own documents. Secondary students use workarounds at scale, and the methods are mass-distributed on YouTube and TikTok. Districts in several states have responded in 2026 by blocking YouTube on elementary devices or removing devices from the youngest grades rather than relying on filters. What the record does not contain is any measurement of how often this reaches K-5 students, in Amherst or anywhere else. No elementary survey exists, and no Amherst-Pelham, Hadley or Easthampton account has been published. The local parent reports the group is hearing would be the first written record for this district.

1. National data

The Center for Democracy and Technology's fifth annual EdTech survey (January 2025; 1,316 students in grades 9 to 12, 1,006 teachers in grades 6 to 12, 1,028 parents) found that 75 percent of teachers report students have used workarounds to get past school technology restrictions, and 62 percent of students say they have done so. Only 15 percent of parents say their school asked for input on what is filtered. CDT, Out of Step; coverage in CalMatters.

Common Sense Media's Teens and Pornography (January 2023; 1,358 teens aged 13 to 17) found 73 percent had seen online pornography, average age of first exposure 12, and 15 percent first saw it at age 10 or younger. On school devices, 13 percent of all teens had viewed pornography on a school-issued device, and among those who saw it during the school day, 44 percent did so on a school device. Common Sense report; EdWeek write-up. Secondary sources quote the school-day figures with two different bases (41 percent versus 30 percent saw pornography at school). Pull the exact wording from the PDF before putting a school-day number on a slide; the 13 percent figure is consistent across sources.

Both surveys cover middle and high school. No survey of elementary students or K-5 teachers on filter bypass or exposure exists. The nearest thing is a self-selected Montgomery County, MD PTA survey (January 2026, 1,003 responses) in which parents wrote that "elementary students

easily get around restrictions on their Chromebooks." MCCPTA report. Treat it as anecdote.

2. What the vendors and Google say about their own filters

Linewize, a major K-12 filter vendor, published a guide for administrators (updated May 2026) listing how students get around filters: web proxies, VPN extensions, personal Google accounts, guest mode, proxy scripts, and proxy links "embedded in Google Docs." Its conclusion is that "no filter or firewall is foolproof." Linewize. GoGuardian's equivalent post (updated June 2026) describes blocking as "a reactive and time-consuming process." GoGuardian.

Google's Workspace for Education administrator documentation says turning YouTube off for a student organizational unit "only limits a user's access to YouTube when signed in," that students "can still view embedded YouTube videos" in Classroom and on third-party sites, and that all users "can still link and preview videos in Docs." Google admin help. On Restricted Mode, Google says the Strict setting "is the most restrictive, but it doesn't block all videos." Google admin help, YouTube. YouTube's page for school administrators says YouTube is off by default for under-18 users in Google Workspace for Education and that enabling it for students requires parental consent renewed annually. YouTube for school administrators. The practical question for Information Systems follows from this: is YouTube on for the K-5 organizational units, at which restriction level, was parental consent collected, and is signed-out YouTube blocked at the network level, since Google's toggle does not cover it.

The Wall Street Journal reported in April 2026 that an internal Google document called Restricted Mode "trivially easy for students to bypass," with students logging out of managed accounts or sharing links in Slides and Docs. Reported secondhand via TechSpot; the WSJ original was not read. In the same story a Wichita seventh grader watched more than 13,000 YouTube videos on his school account in three months. NBC News reported in January 2026 on internal Google documents from the social media litigation, including a 2018 slide conceding "no way to block unsafe content, comments, ads"; Google said the documents "mischaracterize our work." NBC News.

3. How widely the workarounds circulate

A YouTube search on October 21, 2026 for unblocking a school Chromebook returned, among the top results, "How to Disable ANY Admin/School Extensions (GoGuardian, Securly, etc.)" with about 430,000 views, "how to bypass websites in school chromebook 2026-2027" with about 261,000, "DISABLE GOGUARDIAN On SCHOOL CHROMEBOOK!" with about 222,000, and "50 Unblocked Websites For School Chromebooks (in 2026)" with about 93,000 views in one month. New "mystery unblocker" link videos were posted within hours of the search, which is how proxy lists stay ahead of filters. TikTok hosts discovery pages for the same queries. School IT forums describe the same loop from the other side; a Jamf forum thread on a Google Sites games page ends with "You can't restrict it," and Lower Merion's IT director told the

Philadelphia Inquirer that blocking games is "at times, it's like Whack-a-Mole." Jamf thread; Inquirer, March 24, 2026.

4. The federal filtering law has no effectiveness standard

The Children's Internet Protection Act requires schools receiving E-Rate funding to have "a technology protection measure" that blocks obscene content and material harmful to minors. Compliance is shown by certifying the filter "was installed and was working during the funding year." There is no standard for how well it works. USAC CIPA page. In June 2026 the FCC opened a review asking whether CIPA "sufficiently protects children from inappropriate and harmful content" and noting that parents "may have limited control over school-issued devices." FCC notice, WC Docket 26-133. FCC Chairman Carr, announcing it: "Kids are ultimately finding pornography, and that's a problem." FCC release.

5. Litigation

Roe v. Google (N.D. Cal., filed October 17, 2025) is a proposed class action by a Utah family alleging that an 11-year-old's school Chromebook, on the district's "high restriction" setting with a third-party filter, led him from Pokémon searches to pornography. Google moved to dismiss on Section 230 grounds, arguing courts "are not school boards or legislatures." No ruling as of this writing. Coverage. Allegations only; the complaint itself was not read.

Seven Lower Merion, PA families sued their district in federal court in August 2026 after the district ended the parent opt-out from devices, alleging children "encounter pornography, violent images, and violent or disturbing video games through their school devices." The district denies the allegations and calls the harms "vague and speculative." Lower Merion does not assign individual devices before grade 5. Inquirer, August 27, 2026; The 74.

In March 2026 a Los Angeles jury found YouTube and Meta negligent in the first social media addiction trial, assigning YouTube 30 percent of a $3 million award; Google is appealing. Scientific American. More than 1,000 school districts are plaintiffs in the related litigation.

6. What districts did in 2026

Northshore School District, WA blocked YouTube on all PreK-5 student devices at home and school from June 30, 2026, after 85 percent of about 400 PreK-5 staff supported it. Northshore. Prince William County, VA blocked youtube.com and the app on all student devices in May 2026, stating there is "not an effective, reliable way within YouTube" to limit students to a single assigned video. PWCS. Jordan School District, UT ended direct student YouTube access on Chromebooks from August 18, 2026, routing approved videos through a separate player. Jordan. San Diego Unified turned off YouTube, streaming and non-instructional games on student devices and is phasing out individual devices in TK through grade 2. EdSource. Los Angeles Unified's June 2026 policy prohibits "student-led use of YouTube." K-12 Dive. Berkeley Unified began blocking YouTube on elementary and middle school devices in October 2026 and

disabled Gemini. Berkeleyside. Methacton, PA ended individual devices for K-1 after a parent showed the board violent games reachable from a classroom resources page, and the board asked for a public channel to report filter workarounds. PerkValley Now. McPherson Middle School, KS took back all 480 students' Chromebooks in December 2025 and moved to carts because students used them for "YouTube, games, and teasing classmates." Fortune.

On October 5, 2026 Fairplay, Protect Young Eyes, Schools Beyond Screens, Smartphone Free Childhood US and others sent an open letter to 150 districts asking them to disable YouTube and Gemini on school devices. Open letter. Utah's SB 88 (effective July 1, 2026) requires parent-accessible monitoring on school-managed devices and, on request, an allow-list filter that permits only approved sites. Utah SB 88. No Massachusetts bill addresses filtering on school-issued devices; the pending bills cover personal phones and social media.

7. Massachusetts

The Boston Globe surveyed parent campaigns on April 24, 2026 across Scituate, Melrose, Arlington, Winchester, Northampton, Fall River and Cambridge. Northampton elementary parents were "worried about the use of YouTube videos in place of teacher-led story time." Arlington shares devices through grade 2 and keeps devices at school through grade 5. Fall River stopped sending middle school Chromebooks home. Globe. Pioneer Valley Regional (Northfield) will remove laptops and tablets from preschool through grade 2 classrooms in January 2027. Western Mass News. Cambridge's May 2026 usage audit noted that some students "try to hack their devices" to reach social media. Globe. Boston parents petitioned the School Committee in October 2026 to block YouTube, social media and games on devices and disable generative AI. Hoodline. A Blackstone-Millville parent told that committee in 2022 that a classmate had reached pornography on a district Chromebook. Citizen Portal summary, paywalled. Nothing was found from Amherst-Pelham, Hadley, Easthampton or Springfield.

8. Firsthand accounts

Emily Cherkin's First Fish Chronicles published reader-submitted screenshots on October 15 and 19, 2026. Part 1; Part 2. Cases include a second grader who found pornography and was reportedly told by a teacher to "have a moral compass and learn to scroll past," a Seattle student with Securly installed reaching explicit song lyrics through a YouTube link, an eight-year-old shown gambling ads inside a typing program, Gemini reachable through Google Classroom on a fifth grader's laptop, and a fourth grader playing gambling-style games during free choice time. All are self-reported screenshots not verified by any district or news outlet. Useful as illustration and as a method, not as evidence. Her method is the practical one for Amherst parents: test the child's own device, screenshot what appears, date it, and bring it to the meeting. A Wake County, NC parent did this in 2024 after her eight-year-old asked what a porn star was; the district said it "could not guarantee 100% protection." Pavement Education

Project.

9. What the evidence does not show

It does not show how many Amherst elementary students have reached inappropriate content, or how often, or by what route. It does not show that filters fail for most students most of the time; the CDT figures are self-reports from older students who have the motive and skill. TikTok access on Chromebooks is undocumented beyond Pew's usage figures. The district's own filter configuration, YouTube settings and incident log are unknown to us, which is why action item 2 and the Information Systems questions matter more than any national number.

10. What this changes in the deck and the survey

The exposure block on slide 1 can rest on CDT and Common Sense for the national picture and on Google's own admin documentation for why YouTube is porous; the local sentence should say "Amherst parents report" until the group has dated screenshots. Action item 2's request "to test for inappropriate content exposure opportunities" now has a precedent in Methacton. The Information Systems questions should add: is YouTube on for K-5 organizational units, at what restriction level, with what parental consent, and is signed-out access blocked at the network. One item could go into the teacher survey: how often, in a typical week, a student in your class reaches non-instructional video, games or inappropriate content on a school device. That would be the first elementary data on the question anywhere.

Compiled October 21, 2026 from web research. Reddit, TikTok and the NBC and WSJ originals could not be read directly; where a quote is secondhand it is marked. Companion to the Research Brief Draft 2 and Addendum 1 (October 2026).