



# **Commonwealth of Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners**

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## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:**

### **SURVEY OF INTERNET ACCESS IN MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

**August 2000**

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*Summary of Findings: Survey of Internet Access in Massachusetts Public Libraries*  
August 2000

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In June 2000, a survey, (see Appendix A), was mailed to all of the 371 public libraries in Massachusetts to gather information about public Internet access.

The survey instrument was developed with input from the Board of Library Commissioners and agency staff, the Massachusetts Regional Library System Administrators and staff, and library directors.

A total of 284, (76%), surveys were completed and returned.

Throughout this report, the results from the Massachusetts' survey will be compared with the results of a national study conducted by The Library Research Center of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois for the American Library Association, ([Survey of Internet Access Management in Public Libraries](#). The Library Research Center, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois: June, 2000).

## **SUMMARY**

The survey revealed the following:

99% of reporting libraries have public access to the Internet.

Of those libraries with public Internet access:

86% have acceptable use policies.

38.7% have staff monitor public use of the Internet.

66% have sent staff for Internet training.

25% require parental permission for children to use a library computer to access the Internet.

16% use filters on their public access computers.

Of those libraries using filters:

62% use filters on computers only in the children's area.

49% have experienced technical difficulties with filtering software.

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# SURVEY FINDINGS

## **GENERAL**

Of the 284 public libraries returning the questionnaire, 281, (98.9%), reported having computer terminals with public access to the Internet.

**table 1: public access Internet terminals**

population group (total reporting)	public access Internet terminals percent of total	regional library system members (total reporting)	public access Internet terminals percent of total
under 2,000 (36)	35 97.2%	Boston (2)	2 100%
2,000 - 4,999 (42)	40 95.2%	Central (52)	52 100%
5,000 - 9,999 (53)	53 100%	Metro West (33)	33 100%
10,000 - 14,999 (41)	41 100%	Northeast (41)	40 97.6%
15,000 - 24,999 (48)	48 100%	Southeast (85)	85 100%
25,000 - 49,999 (44)	44 100%	Western (71)	69 97.2%
50,000 - 99,999 (16)	16 100%		
over 100,000 (4)	4 100%		

## **ACCEPTABLE USE POLICIES**

In Massachusetts, of the libraries with public Internet access, 242, (86%), report having an acceptable use policy. In the ALA sponsored national study 94.7% of the libraries with public Internet access had a "formal (written) policy or guidelines." In only 82, (34%), of Massachusetts public libraries with acceptable use policies is there a distinction between adults

and minors.

All but ten libraries make the acceptable use policy available to the public in one or more of the following ways: at a public service desk, posted near computers, posted in the library, or on request.

More libraries, (195), impose consequences for noncompliance with the acceptable use policy than require a user to sign the policy, (72). Nearly fifteen times, (163 versus 11), as many libraries invoke loss of Internet privileges rather than loss of library privileges when a user has violated the acceptable use policy. Some libraries also have other consequences for non compliance such as speaking directly to the patron or asking the patron to leave for the day. Twenty libraries use a combination of consequences to deal with violators.

**table 2a: acceptable use policies by population group**

population group (total Internet access)	acceptable use policy percent of total with Internet access	signature required percent of total with policy	consequences for non- compliance percent of total with policy
under 2,000 (35)	26 74.3%	9 34.6%	19 73.1%
2,000 - 4,999 (40)	28 70.0%	11 39.3%	23 82.1%
5,000 - 9,999 (53)	47 88.7%	18 38.3%	39 83.0%
10,000 - 14,999 (41)	35 85.4%	13 37.1%	28 80.0%
15,000 - 24,999 (48)	45 93.8%	8 17.8%	36 80.0%
25,000 - 49,999 (44)	42 95.5%	9 21.4%	32 76.2%
50,000 - 99,999 (16)	15 93.8%	3 20%	14 93.3%
over 100,000 (4)	4 100%	1 25.0%	4 100%

**table 2b: acceptable use policies by regional system**

regional library system members (total Internet access)	acceptable use policy percent of total with Internet access	signature required percent of total with policy	consequences for non-compliance percent of total with policy
Boston (2)	2 100%	1 50%	2 100%
Central (52)	46 88.5%	21 45.7%	41 89.1%
Metro West (33)	31 93.9%	0	22 71.0%
Northeast (40)	37 92.5%	8 21.6%	33 89.2%
Southeast (85)	78 91.8%	31 39.7%	59 75.6%
Western (69)	48 69.6%	11 22.9%	38 79.2%

## **PARENTAL PERMISSION**

Directors of seventy-two public libraries, 25% of those with Internet access, reported that parental permission is required for minors to access the Internet in their libraries. This is less than the two-thirds reported in the national study conducted for ALA.

The national study found that the parental permission requirement correlated inversely to the population served. This is true also in Massachusetts, except for either end of the population spectrum, the under 2,000 and the over 100,000 groups.

**table 3: parental permission**

population group (total Internet access)	parental permission required percent with access	regional library system members (total Internet access)	parental permission required percent with access
under 2,000 (35)	9 25.7%	Boston (2)	1 50.0%
2,000 - 4,999 (40)	14 35.0%	Central (52)	20 38.5%

5,000 - 9,999 (53)	17 32.1%	Metro West (33)	0
10,000 - 14,999 (41)	12 29.3%	Northeast (40)	4 10.0%
15,000 - 24,999 (48)	10 20.8%	Southeast (85)	33 38.8%
25,000 - 49,999 (44)	7 15.9%	Western (69)	14 20.3%
50,000 - 99,999 (16)	2 12.5%		
over 100,000 (4)	1 25.0%		

## **MONITORING USE OF THE INTERNET**

Staff in 109, (38.7%), public libraries monitor use of the Internet. Most of these staff members, 84%, monitor all people using library computers to access the Internet. The rest of the libraries have staff who monitor only children's usage of the Internet. It is noteworthy that staff monitoring of Internet use increases as the population size of the community increases.

Several directors said that because the computers are located in close proximity to the reference desk, the staff can see the computer screens. Others said that they monitor on an informal or infrequent basis.

**table 4: monitoring use of the Internet**

population grouping (total Internet access)	monitoring of use percent of total with access	regional library system members (total Internet access)	monitoring of use percent of total with access
under 2,000 (35)	11 31.4%	Boston (2)	0
2,000 - 4,999 (40)	14 35.0%	Central (52)	20 38.5%
5,000 - 9,999 (53)	19 35.8%	Metro West (33)	12 36.4%
10,000 - 14,999 (41)	18 43.9%	Northeast (40)	20 50.0%



15,000 - 24,999 (48)	19 39.6%	Southeast (85)	33 38.8%
25,000 - 49,999 (44)	18 40.9%	Western (69)	24 34.8%
50,000 - 99,999 (16)	8 50.0%		
over 100,000 (4)	2 50.0%		

## **FILTERING**

Only 45 library directors reported using filtering techniques on computers in their libraries. That is only 16% of those libraries with public access to the Internet. The national study reported very similar results. In that study 16.8% of libraries reported use of filtering. As in the national study, Massachusetts libraries in larger communities are more likely to use filters. In the group of 50,000 to 99,999, 62% of the libraries use filters while in the under 2,000 group no libraries report using filters. In 28 of the 45 libraries, (62%), filtering software is used only on computers in the children's area.

Visitors to the library are informed of the use of filters to Internet access in several ways. Library directors reported posting the information at a public service desk, near the computers and in a general spot in the library. Additionally the library's web site, the scroll bar on the computer and inclusion in the acceptable use policy were mentioned.

All but two of the 45 libraries use filtering software. The other two use an existing search engine to provide a filtering screen for them. The most popular software, Cyber Patrol, is used by 31 libraries. The remaining libraries use one of the following: SurfWatch, Sonic Wall, Net Nanny and CYBERSitter. Site blocking and key word blocking features are used by all libraries except three. These libraries reported blocking chat rooms and site families, and using proxy-based filtering.

Over half, (24), of the libraries using filters reported that staff override the software to meet the reference needs of children. Although most directors, (22), indicated that it was required only rarely.

Only six of the 45 libraries allow users to self select the filtering software. Most of the libraries that use filters on the children's computers, (33 out of 41), have non-filtered computers

available elsewhere.

The survey asked directors if they had experienced any technical problems with the filtering software. Almost half, (49%), of the libraries that use filtering software reported encountering technical problems. Half of those libraries had computers freeze when using the software and several mentioned memory problems. The rest had other problems such as conflicts with other software and email, frequent updates to manage, slow computer response time and random and inappropriate blocking of web sites.

**table 5: filtering**

population groups (total with Internet access)	use filtering percent with access	children's only percent with filters	regional library system members (total with Internet access)	use filtering percent with access	children's only percent with filters
under 2,000 (35)	0	0	Boston (2)	2 100%	1 50.0%
2,000 - 4,999 (40)	1 2.5%	1 100%	Central (52)	4 7.7%	2 50.0%
5,000 - 9,999 (53)	7 13.2%	5 71.4%	Metro West (33)	11 33.3%	9 81.8%
10,000 - 14,999 (41)	6 14.6%	3 50.0%	Northeast (40)	10 25.0%	6 60.0%
15,000 - 24,999 (48)	7 14.6%	5 71.4%	Southeast (85)	12 14.1%	7 58.3%
25,000 - 49,999 (44)	11 25.0%	8 72.7%	Western (69)	6 8.7%	3 50.0%
50,000 - 99,999 (16)	10 62.5%	4 40.0%			
over 100,000 (4)	3 75%	2 66.7%			

## **TRAINING**

At least some staff at 66% of libraries responding to the survey question asking about training, (177 out of 268), have attended Internet access workshops offered by the regional library systems. Fourteen libraries have sent all of their staff for training.

Only 90, (33.5%), libraries have offered Internet training workshops for their users. The national

survey found that 46.2% of libraries providing public access to the Internet offered classes or workshops for users of the library.

**APPENDIX A: Survey: Internet Access in Public Libraries**



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**Internet Access in Public Libraries**

**Return to: Joyce Cureton by June 30, 2000.**

**Questions? Contact Dianne L. Carty at any of the above numbers or  
dianne.carty@state.ma.us.**

1. Does your library have computer terminals with public access to the Internet?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_  
If **no**, please sign on the reverse side and return this form.  
If **yes**, please continue with the rest of this survey.
  
2. Does the library have an "acceptable use" or other policy controlling public Internet access?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_  
If **yes**,
  - a. does the policy differentiate between adults and minors?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
  - b. how is policy made available to the public?  
\_\_\_ at public service desk \_\_\_ posted near computers \_\_\_ posted in library  
\_\_\_ available on request
  - c. are there consequences for non-compliance with the use policy?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_  
If **yes**, what are the consequences?  
\_\_\_ loss of library privileges \_\_\_ loss of Internet privileges  
\_\_\_ other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Are users required to sign an acceptable use form?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
  
4. Is parental permission required for minors to access the Internet?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
  
5. Does library staff monitor the Internet usage by patrons?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_  
If **yes**, all patrons \_\_\_ minors only \_\_\_
  
6. Does the library use technological measures (e.g., filtering software) to block the public from accessing certain Internet web sites ?  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_  
if **yes**,
  - a. what technological measures are used? (check all that apply)

- filtering software, please list: \_\_\_\_\_
- third party (outsourced on-line)
- existing search engine blocks (e.g., Yahoo)
- b. on which public access computers are these measures used?
  - computers in children's area only
  - computers outside of the children's area only
  - computers both inside and outside of the children's area, but not all
  - all of the computers in library
- c. can the user self-select these filtering measures on some or all computers?
  - yes  no
- d. if terminals in the children's area use filtering measures, can children use non-filtered terminals elsewhere?
  - yes  no
- e. how is public informed that filtering measures are used?
  - at public service desk  posted in library  posted near computers
  - other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

7. If filtering software is used,
- a. what types of filters are used?
    - site blocking  keyword blocking
    - other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. does staff override filtering software to satisfy the information needs of minors?
    - yes  no
    - If **yes**, how often?
      - more than once per week  once per week
      - once per month  rarely
  - c. have you had technical problems with the filtering software?
    - yes  no
    - If **yes**, (check all that apply)
      - memory problems/conflicts  causes computers to freeze
      - other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Have library staff attended Internet access workshops offered by the regional library systems ?  
(topics covered include: filtering, access and use policies, etc.)  
yes, all staff  yes, some staff  no

9. Has the library offered Internet access workshops for their patrons ?  
(topics covered include: filtering, access and use policies, etc.)  
yes  no

person to contact for more information:

name \_\_\_\_\_ title \_\_\_\_\_

telephone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B: Total Number of Surveys Returned by Population Group and Regional Library System**

population group	population group total in group	population group total reporting	regional library system	regional library system members total in system	regional library system members total reporting
under 2,000	59	36 61.0%	Boston	3	2 66.7%
2,000 - 4,999	54	42 77.8%	Central	72	52 72.2%
5,000 - 9,999	70	53 75.7%	Metro West	38	33 86.8%
10,000 - 14,999	55	41 74.5%	Northeast	54	41 75.9%
15,000 - 24,999	53	48 90.6%	Southeast	101	85 84.2%
25,000 - 49,999	58	44 75.9%	Western	103	71 68.9%
50,000 - 99,999	18	16 88.9%	total municipalities = 351 total libraries = 371 (towns with no library = Hawley, New Ashford, Washington)		
over 100,000	4	4 100%			