EBSCO Information Services (EBSCO) Has Enhanced Its Efforts to Limit Inappropriate Content in Products for Schools While Providing Valuable Tools to Enhance Student Education

EBSCO Information Services (EBSCO) has a long history of providing students, teachers and librarians with access to information to enhance the educational experience. We offer a range of resources, including several tailored for elementary, middle and high school libraries, that aggregate mainstream content from a broad range of trusted publishers. For example, students in schools that subscribe to our *Middle Search Plus* product can enhance their learning through access to more than 55,000 primary source documents; more than 1.4 million relevant photos, maps and flags; more than 103,000 biographies; and articles from more than 170 magazines. Schools also have the option to add a database that provides access to over 350 national and local newspapers, and transcripts of news broadcasts.

EBSCO employs school educators and librarians with advanced degrees to oversee and determine appropriate content for inclusion in our K-12 databases. First and foremost, the basic criteria governing content decisions is to ensure that the materials are educational, support school curriculum, applicable subjects taught in specific grade levels, and that content is age-appropriate (in reading level and in specific text).

Because EBSCO is also the largest subscription agent for K-12 schools, we have detailed knowledge of the specific publications to which schools subscribe. In selecting content to include in specific databases, we use this subscription information, along with various sources of title level reviews, rankings, Lexile measurement of text and staff review of each publication. Further, we discuss content needs and specific content inclusion with those directly teaching and assisting students through customer focus groups, advisory board meetings and larger market research. Given the vast amount of available information from these reviewed publications, we also use various filters, human curation and technology such as algorithms to restrict inappropriate content from these school products. This is an ongoing process and the rapidly changing nature of language and the continual influx of new terminology requires a consistent effort.

Our aim is to select the most appropriate, educationally-valuable content to include in these databases without imposing EBSCO beliefs or bias in the selection process. While most schools using EBSCO products do not specifically remove publications, some may opt to exclude a particular publication that they prefer not be made available to their students. While our processes have determined that the content in each database is educationally-valuable and age-appropriate, there is always a level of subjectivity where one school may have an opinion that is very different from their peers in other schools/school districts. As such, EBSCO offers the ability for any school to remove any particular content source, including a magazine title, at their discretion. We provide the service teams and support documentation to make it easy for schools to remove titles from databases.

In February 2017, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation called to the attention of our company several articles that the organization deemed inappropriate for a K-12 audience. EBSCO thanked the organization for sharing their concerns and we reviewed our processes to identify why this questionable content was available, and to continue our efforts to restrict inappropriate content in our products for schools.

Since we spoke with NCOSE in February, EBSCO has taken the following steps:

- Communicated the criteria governing our content decisions and selection process to NCOSE, while taking tangible steps to further refine that process. These steps include reviewing each selective article to ensure it meets the standard for inclusion and conducting more frequent reviews and updates for our filters, workflow and policies.
- Removed publications and questionable content from our K-12 school-oriented databases, based on conversations with NCOSE and further evaluation of our databases.
- Reinforced that our libraries and school districts have the ability to work with our support and training staff to remove questionable content from EBSCO databases.

On Friday, June 23, EBSCO sent a notice to NCOSE elaborating the steps we've taken to address their concerns. However, it has come to our attention that NCOSE recently flagged additional articles they deem inappropriate to a young audience. We have reached out to the organization, as we've been unable to replicate the search results they mentioned to reporters. We have reason to believe they may be searching databases that are not intended for a K-12 audience. We will continue to reach out to the organization so we can work together to better understand their concerns and determine what databases they are searching.

In tandem, we are working with our technology team to create a new filter that will ensure search results are within the bounds of what school administrators and parents would believe are acceptable and age-appropriate. We expect the filter to go live within the year.

EBSCO support staff will continue to provide free and substantial training services to librarians and school administrators that enable them to remove questionable content from EBSCO databases.

We understand and value NCOSE's concerns, and the concerns of parents and school administrators. EBSCO will continue to offer valuable research content to students, teachers and librarians, while working with partners like NCOSE to assess concerns and improve our products.

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