TexQuest Resources

Overview of Access and Safety Procedures

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Introduction

This report describes processes and controls in place to protect Texas public school students using resources provided by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) through the TexQuest program. TexQuest provides online access to thousands of resources for K-12 students through statewide contracts with respected companies that specialize in providing e-resources.

The open Internet contains many dangers for children. TSLAC endeavors to create a safe online environment in which students can explore a huge range of library materials to assist teachers and their students from elementary to high school and even students preparing for (and at times participating in) college level work. TexQuest aims to support students in their research, homework, and academic studies without risk of exploitation or exposure to inappropriate materials.

Background

TexQuest is a TSLAC program that provides shared access to online information resources for millions of Texas public school students. Each year, students conduct approximately 45 million information searches and download over 20 million educational resources through TSLAC-provided TexQuest electronic resources. Students in all grades rely on these resources as they pursue their study of all aspects of science, humanities, and social sciences. The materials include full text journal and magazine articles, encyclopedias, literature guides, and electronic books.

TSLAC staff, commission, vendors, school districts, and advisory groups are very much aware of the dangers of the internet. Open searching for information via standard internet search engines would potentially expose students to a wide range of dangerous circumstances from online predators to explicit content that is harmful to minors. TexQuest is a safe space where students from kindergarten through high school can explore research materials curated and grouped in age-appropriate collections. Districts have the ability to opt in or out of the use of a specific collection for a specific campus location.

The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) is federal legislation (47 CFR §54.520) enacted by Congress in 2000 that requires that schools and libraries that participate in E-rate discounts for telecommunications services have an Internet Safety Policy in place. That protection must block or filter access to pictures that are (a) obscene; (b) child pornography; or (c) harmful to minors.

How TexQuest keeps students safe: Five levels of protection

TSLAC and the partner organizations that cooperate to offer TexQuest resources— including product vendors and school district personnel—take the safety of K-12 students seriously. For these reasons, there are no fewer than five specific levels of

curation and control to ensure that material that is age inappropriate and harmful to minors not be accessible by students.

The five levels of curation and control are as follows:

1. **Curation** – The materials in these e-resources are selected by subject matter experts to be appropriate for audiences within the K-12 spectrum. Some resources are narrowly curated for elementary, middle, or high school students, including students in advanced placement courses. Materials in the core databases are grouped together in collections that are tailored to early grades, middle-school, and high-school. Where needed, TSLAC can require additional curation or customization.

2. **Vendor's internal filters** – Among the over two dozen discrete information products in the TexQuest array, all but two have in place automated filters of their materials before they reach the end user. The two exceptions are the Britannica School suite from Encyclopaedia Britannica and TeachingBooks.net, a fully curated resource of supplemental material to assist in English language arts and reading instruction. While those two resources do have automated filters for any links to external content (e.g., YouTube videos), the resources themselves are created and curated by the respective companies and do not require filtering.

3. **School district filters** – Because nearly every school district in the state participates in the E-rate program, virtually all districts participating in the TexQuest program are required by the CIPA to use content filters to block content that is either (a) obscene; (b) child pornography; or (c) harmful to minors. Vendors confirm that their products do not bypass these filters. Each district's filter can restrict the type of content available to students.

4. **Configurable access** – Districts have the ability to opt in or out of the use of a specific resource for a specific campus location. Districts can also create campus-level sub-accounts that allow resources to be enabled or disabled by a campus so that elementary school students can be directed to elementary school content, while only high school students can access content appropriate for upper grades. TSLAC staff will work with individual districts to support local control and tailor access to community standards.

5. **TSLAC intervention** –The TSLAC Commission has adopted a TexQuest Collection Development Policy for TexQuest materials. If the presence of explicit or otherwise age-inappropriate material is brought to the attention of TSLAC staff, the TexQuest Support Center, or our K-12 advisory committee, the material will be reviewed and, if it is found to be inappropriate, removed for all districts in the state. This removal happens at the level of individual journals, magazines, or e-books and is not reversible. TSLAC staff rely on assistance in reviewing

TexQuest materials from the TexQuest Support Center at ESC Region 20, TSLAC's K-12 Advisory Committee, and a team of 13 content reviewers.

Content Review by Team of Experts

To further ensure that resources provided to Texas students support academic achievement, are age-appropriate, and free of material harmful to minors, TSLAC has engaged a panel of 13 local K-12 library experts to review content and identify any potentially inappropriate material. This group is comprised of professionals with at least 20 years of experience in school and public libraries and a demonstrated breadth of experience in librarianship and classroom instruction. Collectively, this group of ten librarians bring to their review decades of experience selecting materials for K-12 library use that will ensure the success of students in Texas.

TexQuest Collection Development Policy

In August 2020, the TSLAC Commission adopted the TexQuest Collection Development Policy. This document states the selection criteria for materials included in TexQuest, describes the processes by which information resources are selected, and contains a process for reconsideration of materials. Any person who objects to any material in TexQuest can ask that the item or items be reconsidered. Materials can be reported by school librarians and other district staff or by students or parents who can contact TSLAC directly using the TexQuest content reconsideration form available online. TSLAC staff have notified school districts that the forms are online and simple to complete. Any material so reported will be reviewed by TSLAC, and a response will be provided to the concerned party. Individuals may also contact their student's school district for other local options.

Roles and Responsibilities

Each of the partners that cooperate to make TexQuest resources available to Texas K-12 students have specific responsibilities to ensure that the content is age-appropriate and of the highest academic quality. Those roles and responsibilities are as follows:

Vendors

- Offer quality and appropriate collections of resources that meet the targeted needs of the K-12 community.
- Ensure TexQuest resources are curated or filtered to ensure safety.
- Provide districts with the capacity to tailor access to resources by target populations (e.g., campus access).
- Curate collections to ensure appropriate content, understanding that this does not require article-by-article review.
- Do not use any technology that prevents the use of home filters for non-school access.

- Provide TSLAC and districts with the tools to remove content deemed to be inappropriate through a formal re-consideration process, whenever possible at the article, image, or item level.
- Will comply with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations protecting children from harmful materials.

TSLAC

- Require that resources provided to Texas public libraries or Texas public schools do not contain materials harmful to children as defined by the Texas Penal Code §43.24 "Sale, Distribution, or Display of Harmful Material to Minor." (Effective beginning in 2021.)
- Require that vendors implement technological protection measures meeting the requirements of 47 U.S.C. Section 254(h)(5) where appropriate given the nature of the resource. (Effective beginning in 2021.)
- Require vendors to provide accurate, current, and quality resources to meet the needs of the diverse K-12 community and educators.
- Conduct a robust selection review process that allows educators to test and use potential resources.
- Consult with experienced school librarians through the K-12 advisory committee and other review groups to ensure that content included in the TexQuest program is educationally relevant and age-appropriate.
- Working with an educational partner, operate a TexQuest Support Center to provide school districts with a timely process for the consideration of any content issues that arise.
- Provide training and support to school districts to implement any tailored access to resources at the school district level.

School Districts

- Educate students on effective use of digital resources.
- Provide filtered access on the campus and through school issued devices.
- Determine and implement targeted access to TexQuest resources based on local needs.
- Contact vendors for assistance disabling overall district access to a given resource.
- Contact TSLAC with questions or concerns.

Conclusion

Through collective purchase, conducted according to state procurement rules and assisted by a peer group of K-12 librarians across the state, TSLAC provides access to these materials at a fraction of what the cost would be if every district were to subscribe

individually. Districts pay a standard participation fee of 29 cents (FY 2021) per student to access the TexQuest e-resources. The estimated annual cost avoidance for districts participating in TexQuest is approximately $137 million. Currently, 73% of districts statewide participate in TexQuest, including 92% of all K-12 students in the state.

Five specific levels of controls and curation are in place to ensure that materials offered to K-12 students in Texas are of the highest quality and are free of materials harmful to minors. TSLAC, product vendors, and school districts actively monitor content to make sure students are never exposed to those materials which are to be blocked according to the CIPA: (a) obscene; (b) child pornography; or (c) harmful to minors. All other materials will be curated according to age appropriateness and value in support of student research and study.

According to TSLAC's TexQuest Collection Development Policy, "TexQuest provides resources that include differing points of view." In the event that a member of the public finds any item in the TexQuest collections offensive, the policy contains a process to ask for *reconsideration* of that item.