

2022-2023 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

To learn more about this event, please visit:

<https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

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Case 1: Internet Use at School

The administration at River City Middle School is considering the purchase of a new software that will monitor students' internet usage while they are using the school's wifi network. This program is designed to flag internet searches that might indicate that students are struggling with their mental health or at risk of doing harm to themselves or others.

If the program detects certain keywords or a pattern of searches, it flags the student and their search history. A school counselor then meets with the student to determine if the student needs help and if parents need to be contacted. Some teachers at River City Middle School think that the school should purchase this software. They believe it would help struggling students to get the support they need early on, especially if they are scared to ask for help. These teachers also think that the tracking software will reassure anxious parents who would want to know if their child was expressing violent tendencies online. Other teachers, however, are concerned about the use of the tracking software. They worry, for example, that the software threatens students' right to privacy by tracking all student online use in order to find content to flag. Additionally, students wonder if they will be able to defend themselves if the system wrongfully flags their search history. Some families think that the existing firewall, that already blocks certain website content, is enough to keep students safe at school.

Match Question: Should River City Middle School buy and use this tracking software?

Study Questions:

1. Is there a limit to a school's responsibility to prevent harm to students?
2. Do students have a right to privacy when using the school's internet?
3. What obligation, if any, do schools have to notify the students and/or parents about the tracking software?

Inspired by the National High School Ethics Bowl Case: