



October 17, 2018

The Utah Educational Library Media Association (UELMA) supports the reinstatement of the EBSCO database by the UETN board.

One of the purposes of UELMA is to interact with local, state and national organizations on the issues related to school library media programs. UELMA is an affiliate of AASL (American Association of School Librarians). One of their goals is to “to prepare students for life-long learning, informed decision making and the love of reading and the use of information technologies”. UELMA does not represent the interests of a “few librarians” but hundreds of library professionals in Utah schools, all of whom serve the purpose of educating students to become productive and responsible digital citizens.

The removal of the EBSCO databases from Utah’s Online Library for K-12 students is a clear example of infringing on the personal right of intellectual freedom. According to the American Library Association “it is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored. Intellectual freedom encompasses the freedom to hold, receive and disseminate ideas.”

Allowing a minority group with a specific agenda to persuade a board of educated professionals in restricting access to valued academic resources for hundreds of thousands of Utah students, some of whom are required to do University level research in their International Baccalaureate Programs, Advanced Placement coursework and Concurrent Enrollment credit courses, is removing the ability of Utah students to develop the skills to be savvy, ethical users of information which is **required** and expected for higher education levels. The UETN will be doing a great disservice to students who will lag behind peers with advanced experience in navigating academic level research. If we limit their ability to access information and develop the skills needed to navigate around objectionable content as well as evaluate the authority and validity of materials online, including scholarly journals and thousands of periodicals that school libraries cannot afford to purchase, we are not effectively teaching our own Utah Library Media Core Curriculum.

Standard 2 of the Utah Library Media core, found on the uen.org website, is to *comprehend literary and informational texts*. **Strand 2** of that standard is Information and Research:

“Students need the lifelong skills of selecting information from a wide variety of sources, assessing its worth, and applying newfound knowledge to problems, preparing them for learning, doing, and problem solving in college, career and throughout life. Teacher librarians will instruct students in a multi-step research process that is adaptable. **As students gain research skills, they develop self-confidence in solving information problems in an environment where information resources and technologies have become increasingly complex.**”

In a recently published article in Meridian Magazine, *When “Safe Places” Are No Longer Safe for Your Children*; <https://ldsmag.com/when-safe-places-are-no-longer-safe-for-your-children/>, Ms. Peck states that schools and school libraries are “no longer safe places and that libraries are exploiting children by spoon feeding them pornographic images, videos, and illicit sexual articles through databases that have been marketed to schools and libraries as “safe and secure.” This seedy material is promoting risky sexual behaviors — including prostitution recruitment services”.

This is insulting to our students, our educators and administrators. We strongly oppose such inflammatory accusations and unsubstantiated claims. Utah school libraries are more often than not considered by students to be one of the safest and most welcoming spaces in the school where they are supported in their academic efforts, not to promote the searching of illicit and obscene material. There is a difference between an adult intentionally and specifically looking for inappropriate content on an unfiltered network versus a student in a class setting with guided instruction and a specific educational purpose. It is so much easier for a student to use a common search engine (filtered or not) to seek out nefarious content rather than searching a specific database.

School Librarians are parents too and it is their responsibility to protect and educate students from all backgrounds. We agree that inappropriate content that does not meet curricular standards has no place in our Utah schools. We acknowledge the changes that EBSCO has already made, which shows the proactive approach to address the concerns raised and willingness to provide more active filtering controls.

As James La Rue from ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom stated in *Education is not Pornography*, <https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/?p=16002> “There isn't substantiated evidence that students are using it [EBSCO] the way these parents are (to deliberately look for titillating content). In fact, there is considerable evidence (based on aggregated search analytics) that students use EBSCO just the way you'd hope: to do their homework, to study up on educational topics.”

Teachers and librarians are taking a position against closing access to the EBSCO database specifically for these reasons, that students are using it for the purpose for which is intended. In all the years it has been used by teachers and librarians with thousands of students, if this had been a real concern, teachers and librarians would be the first to bring it to the attention of school administrators and the UETN board.

The aim to get rid of any information that may offend someone is a near impossible task in the present digital world in which we all must live. Whatever decision the UETN board makes will force Utah to become the model of what or what *not* to do in the effort to protect our children from information deemed unsuitable by a select group.

In a letter addressed to the Utah Board of Education this month, Elaine Shelburne, M.L.S., M.Ed. Teacher Librarian at Bonneville High School in Ogden District raises a critical concern of all educators, that “censoring or banning a huge source of information is not educating anyone but is creating a black hole of ignorance in our youth. Instead, help provide the tools that students need.”

“Indeed, perhaps we do the minors of this country harm if First Amendment protections, which they will with age inherit fully, are chipped away in the name of their protection.” — Judge Lowell A. Reed, Jr. (*ACLU v. Reno II*, 2000)

Respectfully,

Lorraine Wyness, UELMA President
Selena Campbell, UELMA Past President

