

# Cherry Creek schools ditches EBSCO student database after prolonged complaints about accessible porn

By GRANT STRINGER, Staff Writer - September 14, 2018

**AURORA** | The Cherry Creek School District is switching research databases after two years of allegations from some parents that the databases contained pornography.

Cherry Creek schools spokesperson Abbe Smith said students will no longer have access to research databases provided by EBSCO, which contain thousands of scholarly and popular magazine articles for research projects. Sources for include articles from *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health* magazines.

Students will have access to another research database service, Gale, which has what Smith said are tighter filter controls.

EBSCO officials deny that any information available to students via their databases is pornographic.

For two years, parents Drew and Robin Paterson appeared at school board meetings and told administrators they found "inappropriate materials and true pornography" with simple database searches through their child's EBSCO account, which was provided by the school district.

EBSCO databases contain links that transport readers onto public Internet pages, where school district filters catch inappropriate materials, said Smith, but only if the reader is searching from a school district computer where the filters are applied.

Smith said Cherry Creek worked with EBSCO, a major, international supplier of educational databases to schools, for about one year to prevent "objectionable" content from being accessed through the database and tighten search filters, but the district was "not satisfied" with the result.

EBSCO spokeswoman Jessica Holmes said the academic contractor "does not license any pornographic titles, yet content from our databases is erroneously being labelled pornographic. The content being questioned is from mainstream magazines."

The debacle began when Paterson said his wife logged onto their child's EBSCO account at home and searched something akin to "seventh grade biology human physiology," because she is an immunologist and has an interest in science.

The first search result was a magazine article titled, "Orgasms for all," said Paterson, though he said his wife can't remember which magazine the article came from. He added that the results only got more explicit as they continued to search and followed various links. "There were plenty – images and graphic text from adult, erotic fiction."

Paterson said he found information on prostitution and an "endless stream of advertisements for sex toys, mostly from Adam and Eve (a sex toy retailer)."

At some Cherry Creek school board meetings, Paterson and his wife read aloud from articles they found to be inappropriate for schoolchildren and distributed flyers, creating regular admonitions from school officials about vulgarities in the public venue.

Matthew Heffron, a lawyer from the pro-family Thomas More Society, said he represented the Patersons as they raised persistent concerns to the Cherry Creek school board and administrators. Heffron said he was "days" away from filing a lawsuit.

"They've had a lot of pushback," Heffron said, citing "dark humor" from administrators who he said didn't take the Paterson's concerns seriously.

EBSCO builds enormous databases partitioned for student age brackets, including K-8, high school, undergraduate, graduate and post-doc work, as well those for public libraries.

EBSCO also cited an article by Christopher Ferguson, a psychology professor at Stetson University in Florida, who wrote that using databases "seems like a remarkably inefficient way to access porn, given how much easier real porn would be to access with a simple Google search."

Paterson is "just happy that they've made the right decision," he said of the school district, and he said a group of concerned parents in Colorado will be looking closely at the new Gale databases.

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