Monitor Editor-in-chief Mitchell Walther wrote the following story for the Journalism Association of Community Colleges’ on-site opinion-writing contest. Students watched the same speech and then had an hour to write their stories.

MITCHELL WALThER Editor-in-chief

The Internet can be a beautiful and terrifying place. In recent years, countless advances have offered us sites and applications of which we never dreamed, and new crimes and social issues of which we never conceived.

 Sexting, cyber-bullying and social deprivation have become dirty words in the parenting and education world. How do we protect our kids from issues only they can see on their tiny little screens? By offering them a safe place to talk and by having a healthy conversation over a child’s online shoulder.

Above the Fray has conversation – bad conversation. Its mission statement cites终生 groups that it ran over a period of four weeks. During his JACC presentation, Dodson said the groups were split into age sections of 11-to-14 and 15-to-18. That is, 24 students spread over a decade of a young person’s life.

The study showed that 47 percent of parents did not have the right to see what was on their phones. The study did not specify which half of the decade of children felt this way. This is crucial because you cannot parent an 11-year-old the same as you can a 17-year-old. This should be painfully obvious to Above the Fray and Dodson.

The 11- to 14-year-olds have just finished getting a basic handle on language, and are just truly discovering empathy. Why are we trusting them with smart phones, tablets or laptops? In an interview, comedian Louis C.K. said he wasn’t going to buy his kids cell phones, because children need to “build an ability to be yourself and not be doing something. That’s what phones have taken away.”

Then there are the 15-to 18-year-olds. These are rebellious, unorthodox people taking their steps toward adulthood. They are forging the new ground before them, and need to be allowed to stake their claim.

Trust is earned, and hopefully a teenager can at least earn a chance at privacy. Their account information and private texts are theirs alone. Sorry, Dodson: There is no “obligation” for parents to see what their kids are doing online.

The solution to all this is not security, it’s genuine interest. For all his involvement with the subject, Dodson showed weariness and disinterest in online endeavors.

When commenting on the rise of “fandoms,” Dodson told parents, “You’ll probably hate it,” but get involved anyway. Feigned interest will only ensure that your child never tells you what they are passionate about.

Interest should be the key for parents. You’d be interested if your kid scored a touchdown, so be interested if they garner more than 11 likes on Instagram. You’d be interested in that “A” they got in computer science, so be interested when their tweets get re-tweeted by Leonardo DiCaprio.

Parents need to learn to be involved in their own social media. Don Prewitt, known on Instagram as @Don62, is a parent of six. He is also an Instagram celebrity, known for his #ViewformBelow series. His kids are also on Instagram, and they enjoy seeing one another’s photos. There is a shared respect and therefore, Don Prewitt is able to talk with his children about what they are up to on the Internet, because they feel he is invested in it, just like they are.

There is a balance to involvement. Be interested and ask questions, but don’t hound.

Above the Fray has a good heart. So do the parents and teachers who are trying to find a way to meet their children with understanding. But the key to online parenting is an open mind and a willingness to see the Internet as something new, not just another play-ground.

Monitor brings home JACC state awards

MITCHELL WALThER Editor-in-chief

Most of the Monitor staff attended the Journalism Association of Community Colleges’ State Convention in Sacramento two weeks ago.

JACC puts on a statewide convention each year as an opportunity for community college journalists to learn, compete and network together.

More than 400 students from around the state joined us at the Doubletree Hotel in Sacramento to engage in some healthy competition. The Monitor, for its part, took home several awards.

Monitor staff writer Maria Garcia-Hernandez tweets during the Journalism Association of Community Colleges’ State Convention in Sacramento.

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