

WITH INCREASED EDTECH COMES INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY

Expanded online learning is here to stay, so more work is needed to protect privacy and keep students safe

MARCH 2021

A year has passed since our education system was disrupted, with schools being forced to transition overnight to remote learning due to the global pandemic. Since then, students and their families have seen the best—and the worst—that education technology and data have to offer. Technology and data have enabled important educational services like instruction delivery in students' homes, relationships with caring adults in their lives, and mental health services during a time of crisis. On the other hand, too many students have not been connected with their schools due to inequitable access, and some have even been harmed by “Zoombombings” that inflicted traumatic experiences and cybersecurity attacks that shut down their schools.

Last year the [Center for Democracy and Technology](#) (CDT) commissioned research on the views of those who have the most at stake: parents, teachers, and students. This report updates those findings among parents and teachers with new polling data that shows changes from last spring and summer to February 2021. Our research shows that the need and demand for data and technology continues to grow, but attention to privacy, security, and responsible data use is not keeping pace. While schools are making progress, and support for online learning among teachers and parents remains strong, important gaps in student privacy remain. To address these deficiencies, education leaders and practitioners should take the following actions:

- 1 | **Continue to establish and update privacy-forward policies**
- 2 | **Better equip teachers to use technology responsibly**
- 3 | **Address the latest privacy and security risks that pose the greatest threats to students**
- 4 | **Engage parents in privacy protection**
- 5 | **Embed privacy protection in efforts to close the homework gap**

The need and demand for responsible use of education data and technology continues to grow...

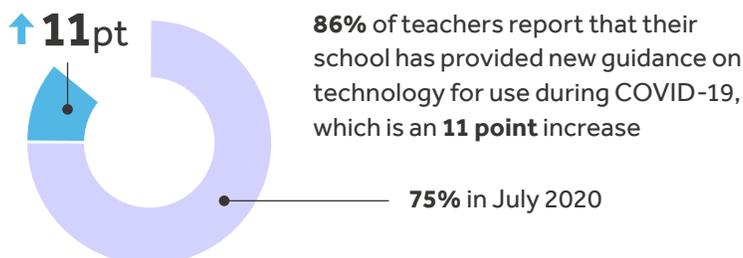
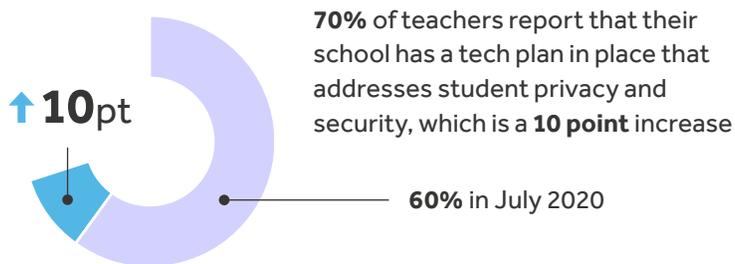
Education leaders and practitioners can build on this momentum and meet parent and teacher demand by taking the following actions:

1 | Continue to establish and update privacy-forward policies

INSIGHTS

Education technology (edtech) has filled a critical role in supporting students during COVID-19. **85 percent** of teachers and **74 percent** of parents describe education technology as “very important” for remote schooling as a result of COVID-19. Looking ahead, **85 percent** of teachers and **74 percent** of parents express they are likely to support online learning as part of their children’s classroom instruction once campuses re-open.

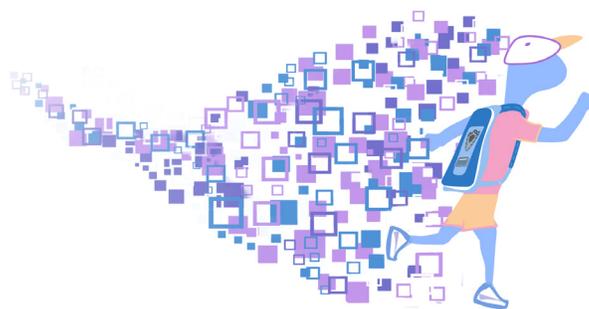
Just as support for online learning remains strong, schools have also taken action to protect privacy and ensure technology is used responsibly. Compared to last July, teachers report growth in school policies...



ACTION

Set privacy-forward policies

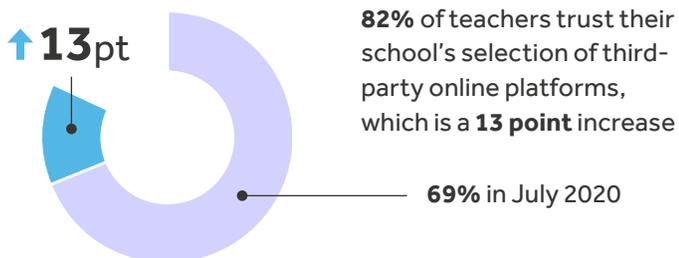
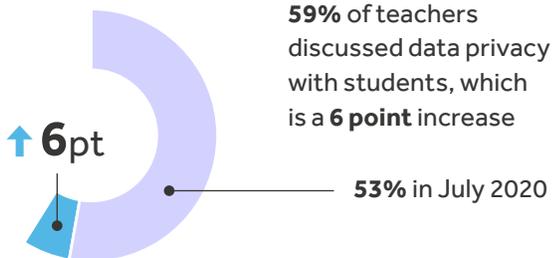
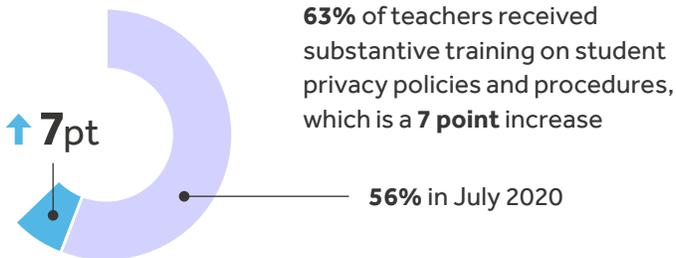
Our previous research indicates that teachers who work in schools with technology policies that address privacy and security are more likely to be aware of privacy issues, receive more training, and have more conversations with students about protecting their privacy than their peers at schools without technology plans. Therefore, education leaders and practitioners should continue to establish privacy-forward policies and guidance as well as update them on an ongoing basis to reflect changes in data and technology.



INSIGHTS

As reliance on edtech has increased and more schools have set proactive policies around its use, teachers are becoming more aware of student privacy considerations. **66 percent** of teachers report familiarity with their school's student data privacy policies and procedures, an increase from 59 percent in July 2020.

This growing awareness has helped teachers build their capacity to address student privacy considerations. Teachers report increased engagement since last July with responsible edtech practices across several key dimensions...



ACTION

Help teachers protect students and their privacy

It is not enough to set policies and issue guidance; teachers and others on the front lines of protecting student privacy need to be aware of expectations and trained on how to meet them. Education leaders and practitioners can continue to build capacity in their teaching staff by implementing privacy protection training, communicating clearly about privacy and security best practices, and engaging teachers when making technology-related decisions.

The adoption of privacy-forward policies, as well as progress in helping teachers protect privacy, has likely helped schools secure trust in their use of student data. **73 percent** of parents report that they trust their children's school with the student data it collects; similarly, **89 percent** of teachers trust that their school will not inappropriately use students' information.



...but more work remains to close gaps in student privacy protection and digital equity.

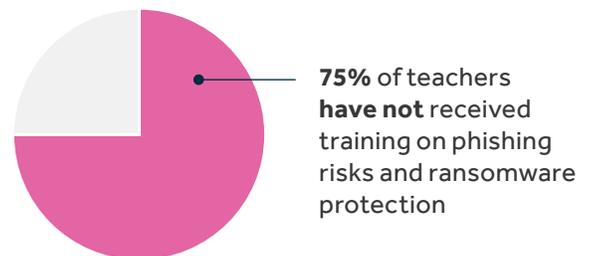
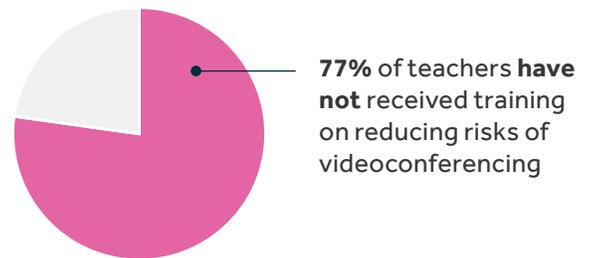
Although support for education data and technology remains strong, privacy policies and practices have not caught up to ensure that the increased use of data and technology is done responsibly and solely helps students and their families. Specifically, education leaders and practitioners should focus their attention on closing the gaps in student data privacy and security by taking the following actions:

3 | Address the latest privacy and security risks that pose the greatest threats to students

INSIGHTS

Critical gaps remain in school policies around privacy protection, and **four in ten** teachers remain concerned about the privacy and security of student data, the same as last summer. As previously noted; the percentage of teachers who have received training on student privacy has increased. Although this progress is promising, **37 percent** of teachers still report receiving no substantive training on privacy policies and procedures.

Despite “Zoombombing” and cybersecurity attacks posing serious threats to students over the past year, few teachers report they have received training on these issues...



ACTION

Address emerging privacy threats

Education leaders should make sure that training, guidance, and communications around privacy and security practices respond to emerging risks. This is particularly important as schools continue to grapple with the implications of COVID-19, which has introduced evolving privacy concerns throughout the past year.

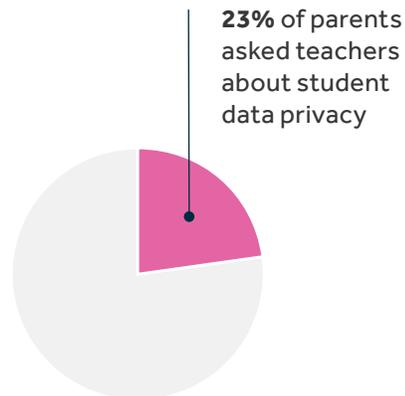


4 | Engage parents in privacy protection

INSIGHTS

Parents continue to demonstrate concerns about student privacy issues. **Six out of ten** parents express concern about student privacy protection, unchanged since last summer. Moreover, **44 percent** of parents report their concern about student privacy protection increased since before COVID-19, compared to 37 percent in summer 2020.

More parent engagement is needed around their children's data privacy...



ACTION

Engage parents on privacy

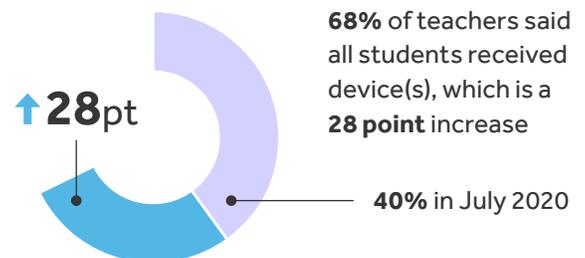
School staff and education practitioners can foster parent engagement in privacy protection by informing them about school technology decisions and providing the support they need to facilitate online learning during COVID-19 and after students return to school in person.

5 | Embed privacy protection in efforts to close the homework gap

INSIGHTS

The homework gap—also known as the digital divide and which refers to inequities in student access to internet connectivity and devices used for school, such as laptops and tablets—has presented serious obstacles to learning during the pandemic for large portions of students across the country.

Since last July, teachers perceive that schools have significantly increased device distribution efforts, especially providing devices to all students (e.g., one-to-one programs)...



ACTION

Embed privacy protection in efforts to close the homework gap

Education leaders should protect student privacy at the outset of efforts to close the homework gap, including minimizing data collection when determining which families need support, minimizing student activity tracking on devices and while using the internet, preventing secondary use of this information, and building capacity among students and their families to effectively use expanded access and simultaneously protect their privacy.

THE TASK AHEAD

Despite reported frustrations about online learning, support for current and future usage of education technology and data remains strong, and schools are showing progress in their efforts to address student privacy. However, schools have not kept pace with the expansion of edtech, so student privacy and security risks remain.

For education leaders, the task ahead is to determine how, not if, education data and technology can work for students and their families. Much remains undetermined about how to strike that balance, but one thing is certain: the use of education data and technology should not and cannot come at the expense of student safety and well-being. To learn more about student privacy, including more in-depth data and additional COVID-19 implications, visit cdt.org/civictech.



Survey methodology

Commissioned by the Center for Democracy and Technology, Edge Research conducted online surveys with 1,002 U.S. parents of K-12 students and 405 U.S. teachers of 3-10th grade students in February 2021. Parents and teachers were of students at public schools including a mix of Title I and non-Title I eligible schools. Teacher survey respondents were recruited through an online non-probability sample. Parents took their survey via an online omnibus survey. Quotas were set to ensure the samples were representative by grade bands and U.S. region.

The 2020 surveys of teachers and parents were conducted online with 1,227 U.S. parents of K-12 students (May 2020) and with 1,009 U.S. teachers of 3-10th grade students (July 2020).