

# Sustained Surveillance: Unintended Consequences of School-Issued Devices

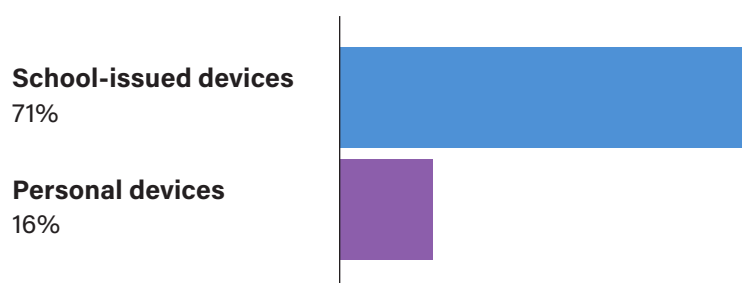
The expansion of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a **significant increase** in the distribution of school-issued devices to educate students at home. With the provisioning of school-issued devices, schools and districts *also* expanded the use of online monitoring software that can track student activity. In addition to the pandemic, misperceptions about the requirements of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) also have contributed to expanded monitoring.

- **Previous CDT research** found that during the first several months of the pandemic, the number of teachers reporting their school had some form of device distribution program rose from **43%** to **86%**, and this amount has continued to grow since then.
- **81%** of teachers report that their school uses some form of monitoring software.
- Of teachers who indicate their school uses student activity monitoring software, only **one in four** report that monitoring is specifically limited to school hours — one in three report that monitoring takes place only on days that school is in session and nearly as many (30 percent) say that student activity monitoring is conducted all of the time.

## Privacy and security on personal devices are a luxury not all can afford.

School-issued devices tend to enable tracking of student activity to a much greater extent than personal devices do. Because students who are reliant on school-issued devices may be subject to more pervasive monitoring, this suggests that students in higher-poverty districts are subjected to a higher degree of monitoring than students in wealthier districts, who are more likely to have access to personal devices.

### Teachers report monitoring software use on...



*“If a student has their own device, [my view is that]... I’m not your parent, so I’m not going to monitor anything that you do on your own device.”*  
 — District administrator

## Parents, teachers, and other school community members express concerns about the use of data from monitoring software in disciplinary contexts.

The majority of teachers (57%) and parents (61%) are concerned that online monitoring could harm students if it is used to discipline them or is shared and used out of context.



An area of future investigation is whether monitoring software leads to more intersections with disciplinary authorities.

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## Monitoring tools create a chilling effect on student self-expression and raise concerns about misuse of student content.

58% of students who report that their school uses monitoring software agree with the statement: “I do not share my true thoughts or ideas because I know what I do online is being monitored.”

80% report being “more careful about what I search online when I know what I do online is being monitored.”



47% of teachers and 51% of parents are concerned that student online activity monitoring could have unintended consequences like “outing” LGBTQ+ students.

*“[Students’ online] traffic 24/7 is going through our web filter... There’s no limitation on that. If they’re on our device, it doesn’t matter what time of day or what day of the week — their traffic is going through our web filter.” — District administrator*

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## There must be more accountability and protections for student privacy.

Actors at all levels are now taking action to address the impact of student activity monitoring software. CDT has called on school districts to ensure they **protect student privacy in their efforts to close the homework gap**, including addressing the privacy and equity concerns that arise when student activity monitoring occurs in students’ homes. Vendors of student activity monitoring software should provide increased transparency about their products and better protect students and their privacy. And at the federal level, there is a need for policymakers to clarify CIPA’s monitoring requirement and adopt policies to codify student privacy practices as federal funds are dispersed to provide school-issued devices.

Learn more by visiting <https://cdt.org/insights/student-activity-monitoring-software-research-insights-and-recommendations/>