

# Navigating the New Normal: Ensuring Equitable and Trustworthy EdTech for the Future

**C**atalyzed by the rapid expansion of remote learning brought about by COVID-19, education technology continues to occupy a large, evolving role in K-12 instruction even as schools make steps toward leaving the pandemic behind. Many technologies adopted to accommodate remote or hybrid learning have been incorporated into districts' long-term technology platforms, and teachers are seeking ways to apply skills learned in the past year and a half. Parents, teachers, and students, the three key stakeholder groups with the most to gain — and lose — from the way these tools are implemented, are paying attention to the privacy and equity implications of these technologies.

CDT surveyed parents, teachers, and students about their views toward student privacy, security, data use, and equity issues. The surveys, conducted this past summer, follow up on previous CDT research conducted in the [summer of 2020](#) and [spring of 2021](#). Several key themes emerged from our findings:

1. Parents, teachers, and students want to play a greater role in protecting privacy:
  - a. Parents' concern has risen, but pathways to participation are limited;
  - b. Well-trained teachers will serve as student privacy ambassadors;
  - c. Students want to participate in decisions about their own data.
2. Use of technology in disciplinary contexts is growing, but with mixed support.
3. Ongoing attention to technology's equity impacts is necessary.
4. Online learning is here to stay even as in-person learning returns.



## Parents, Teachers, and Students Want to Play a Greater Role in Protecting Privacy

While parents, teachers, and students reported differences of opinion on many topics, they all agreed on one thing that school leaders should heed: they want to play a greater role in protecting privacy.

## *Parents' Concern has Risen, but Pathways to Participation are Limited*

Parent concern about student privacy and security protection has risen since the spring, growing from **60 percent** in February 2021 to **69 percent** in July 2021. This increase in concern is correlated with parents' growing reported awareness of school technology use: **52 percent** of parents report awareness of their school's technology plan, compared to **43 percent** in 2020.

Parents feel even more responsible than last school year for the protection of their children's data, with **60 percent** of parents identifying themselves as one of the most responsible stakeholders for protecting students' privacy and security, up from **52 percent** in 2020. Meanwhile, parents are placing less perceived responsibility on school administrations for these needs: **45 percent** of parents identified them as one of the most responsible stakeholders, down from **52 percent** in 2020. Despite this increase in perceived self-responsibility, parents note a major gap in whether their input has been solicited:

**Parents who believe it is very or somewhat important for schools and districts to engage them about how they plan to use student data**

93%

**Parents who report that their school or district has asked for their input to inform how the school uses student data and technology**

44%

## *Well-Trained Teachers Will Serve as Student Privacy Ambassadors*

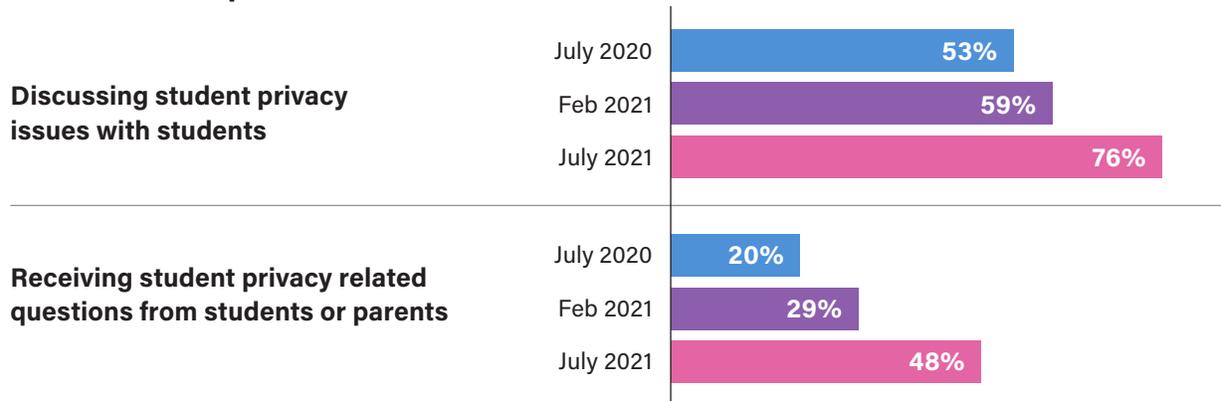
Training related to student privacy issues continues to grow more prevalent, with **66 percent** of teachers reporting that they had received substantive training on this topic, compared to **56 percent** in 2020.

Importantly, these trainings have a major positive impact on teachers' familiarity with student privacy issues, as well as their perceived roles in engaging parents and students about these topics, for instance by explaining school data policies to them or helping educate them about digital literacy concepts:

Teachers who...	Received training	Did not receive training
Express familiarity with school's student data privacy policies and procedures	82%	35%
Report that taking an active role in addressing student privacy issues with <i>parents</i> is appropriate	92%	67%
Report that taking an active role in addressing student privacy issues with <i>students</i> is appropriate	97%	83%

Additionally, teachers report more dialogue about student privacy with parents and students alike. Some of these conversations were prompted by parent or student inquiries, while others were initiated by teachers themselves:

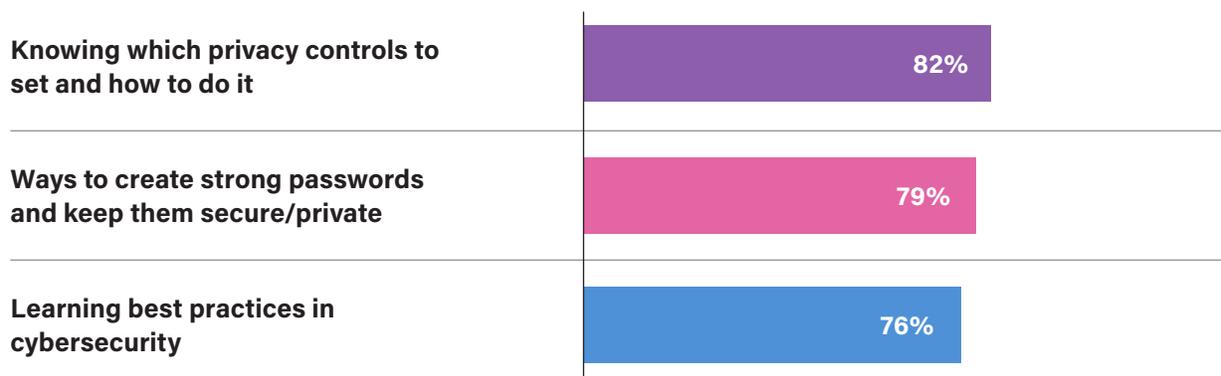
### Teachers who reported...



## *Students Want to Participate in Decisions About Their Own Data*

Students themselves play an important role in the responsible use of online learning tools, and in some ways have more capacity to engage in strong data practices than their parents. **78 percent** of students report receiving guidance or support around the use of school technologies, compared to **34 percent** of parents. Like parents, students want to learn more about privacy and security practices:

### Students report they would like to learn about the following topics to help them keep their data secure/private...



*Moreover, 82 percent of students surveyed agree they should have a say in the way their data and information is collected and used by the school, but only 26 percent report they have been asked for input around these issues.*



## Use of Technology in Disciplinary Contexts is Growing, but with Mixed Support

Roughly **half (48 percent)** of teachers report their school is considering or has decided to implement online learning when students cannot attend class for disciplinary reasons (e.g. detention, suspension). Moreover, **70 percent** of teachers agree that online learning can enable students to keep up with their peers while they are temporarily out of school for disciplinary reasons.

At the same time, concerns about new technologies being used for disciplinary purposes persist, specifically in the form of monitoring student activity on school-issued and personal devices. **81 percent** of teachers report that their school uses some form of monitoring software, and **43 percent** of teachers whose schools or districts use student activity monitoring software report that it is used to identify violations of disciplinary policies. Despite this extensive use in K-12 schools, **65 percent** of parents and **60 percent** of teachers are concerned that using monitoring software for disciplinary purposes, or sharing and using monitoring data out of context, could bring long-term harm to students.



## Ongoing Attention to Technology's Equity Impacts is Necessary

To avoid inequitable impacts from the use of education technology, it is important to ensure both that the benefits of technology are realized by all students, and that the risks of technology use do not fall disproportionately on any particular groups of students. To the former point, when teachers were asked about the impacts of school-approved technology on two student subgroups — students with disabilities and multilingual learners — most teachers reported that technologies benefitted these students at least as much or more than the larger student body:

Teachers report*:	Students with disabilities benefit from school-approved technology to a...	Multilingual learners benefit from school-approved technology to a...
Greater extent than other students	40%	44%
Same extent as other students	41%	40%
Lesser extent than other students	14%	12%

\* For both categories, 5 percent of teachers reported not sure.

The survey also explored a frequently cited area of potential risk of school data and technology, namely, sharing data with law enforcement or other external agencies. When asked about student data being shared with law enforcement, **61 percent** of parents expressed that they were very or somewhat concerned; disaggregated by race, **69 percent** of Black parents, **54 percent** of Hispanic parents, and **62 percent** of white parents expressed these concerns. Regarding health information, a majority of Black and Hispanic parents express comfort sharing health information (such as students' vaccination status or immunocompromised status) only with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the school district, to the exclusion of state governments, other teachers, law enforcement, and the broader school community.

---



## Online Learning Is Here to Stay Even as In-Person Learning Returns

Teachers anticipate that online learning and education technology will continue to play a large role going forward. **85 percent** of teachers report that these tools will play a bigger role in the current school year than they did prior to the pandemic. Of possible future uses of online learning technology, teachers and parents are most likely to support its use in facilitating instruction at times when school cannot be open in person: **47 percent** of teachers and **42 percent** of parents support online learning during snow days, health closures, and other barriers to in-person education.

That said, parents and teachers agree that online learning is not a replacement for in-person classroom instruction — **70 percent** of teachers and **73 percent** of parents believe that students who participate in it over the long term instead of receiving in-person instruction are more likely to fall behind their peers, raising questions of equity.

## Methodology

Commissioned by the Center for Democracy & Technology, Edge Research conducted online surveys of 1,663 U.S. parents of K-12th grade students, 1,001 U.S. teachers of 3rd-10th grade students, and 420 9th-12th grade students, fielded in June and July 2021.

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). The February 2021 surveys of teachers and parents were conducted online with 1,002 U.S. parents of K-12 students and 405 U.S. teachers of 3-10th grade students.