Tech for School Discipline?

Parents and Teachers of Students with Disabilities Express Concerns

A concerning trend in K-12 tech practices is the growing use of technology and data for disciplinary purposes. In the past few years, novel applications of school technology have resulted in student suspensions, interactions with law enforcement, and attempts to predict future criminal behavior. CDT's own research found that of the 81 percent of teachers reporting that their school uses student activity monitoring software, nearly half indicate that it is used at least in part to identify student violations of disciplinary policy. Part of what makes this troubling is that K-12 disciplinary practices have long been shown to disparately impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds, including students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are disciplined by school authorities at higher rates than non-disabled students. Disciplinary uses of school technology and data risk magnifying these inequitable outcomes by increasing potential touchpoints with disciplinary authorities, especially when these digital systems are not designed with students with disabilities in mind. CDT's research analyzes attitudes of parents and teachers of students with disabilities regarding disciplinary uses of technology and data,[1] in order to better understand how such applications impact these students. Specifically, the research found:
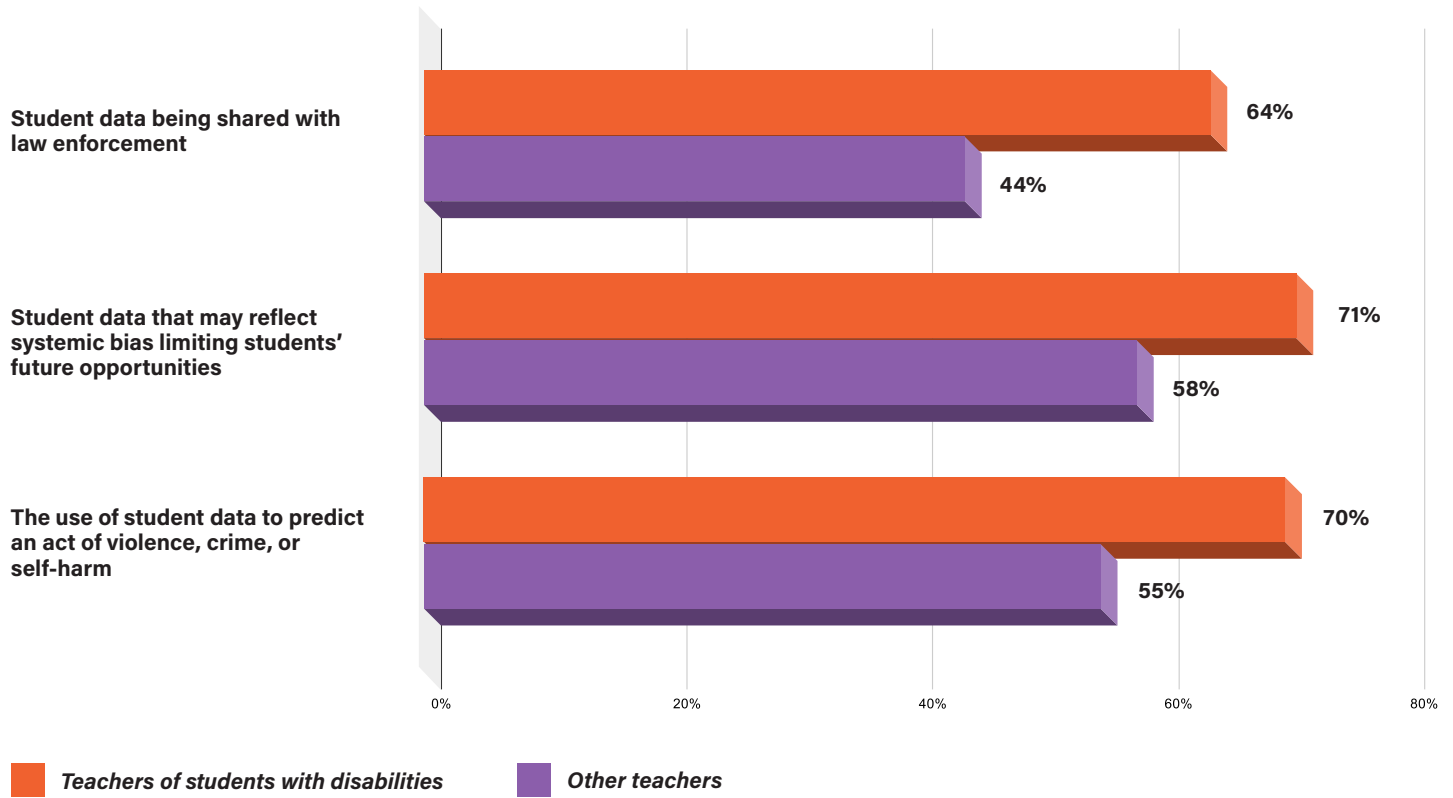
1. Teachers and parents of students with disabilities are especially concerned about disciplinary uses of student data.
2. However, teachers and parents of students with disabilities are more likely to report that the benefits outweigh the risks of student activity monitoring software.
3. Nevertheless, teachers and parents of students with disabilities show particular concern about disciplinary uses of monitoring software.

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1   Specifically, the research contrasts responses from K-12 teachers of students with disabilities versus strictly general education teachers, as well as responses from parents of K-12 students with individualized education plans (IEPs) or 504 plans (504s) — which are used to coordinate services for students with disabilities — versus parents of students who do not use these plans.
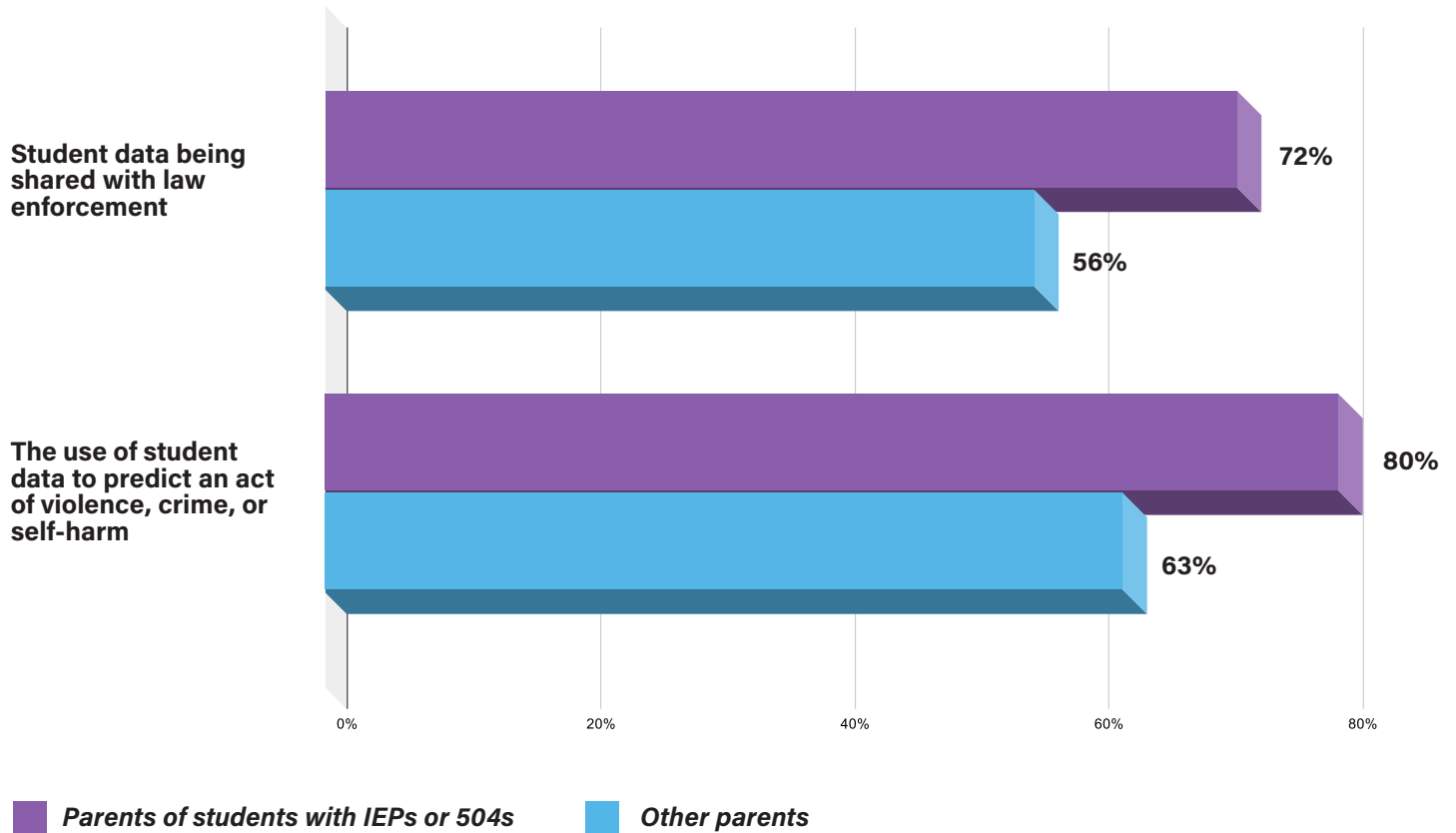
Teachers and parents of students with disabilities are especially concerned about disciplinary uses of student data.

When presented with a list of ways student data could be misused, teachers of students with disabilities were much more likely than other teachers to express concern about the risks of data use related to discipline or punishment. Parents of students with IEPs or 504s likewise reported higher concern about these scenarios relative to other parents.

Teachers who are concerned about:

Student data being shared with law enforcement
- 64%
- 44%

Student data that may reflect systemic bias limiting students' future opportunities
- 71%
- 58%

The use of student data to predict an act of violence, crime, or self-harm
- 70%
- 55%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80%

■ *Teachers of students with disabilities*   ■ *Other teachers*

Teachers and parents who agree that "the benefits of student activity monitoring outweigh concerns about student privacy":

Student data being shared with law enforcement

72%

56%

The use of student data to predict an act of violence, crime, or self-harm

80%

63%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

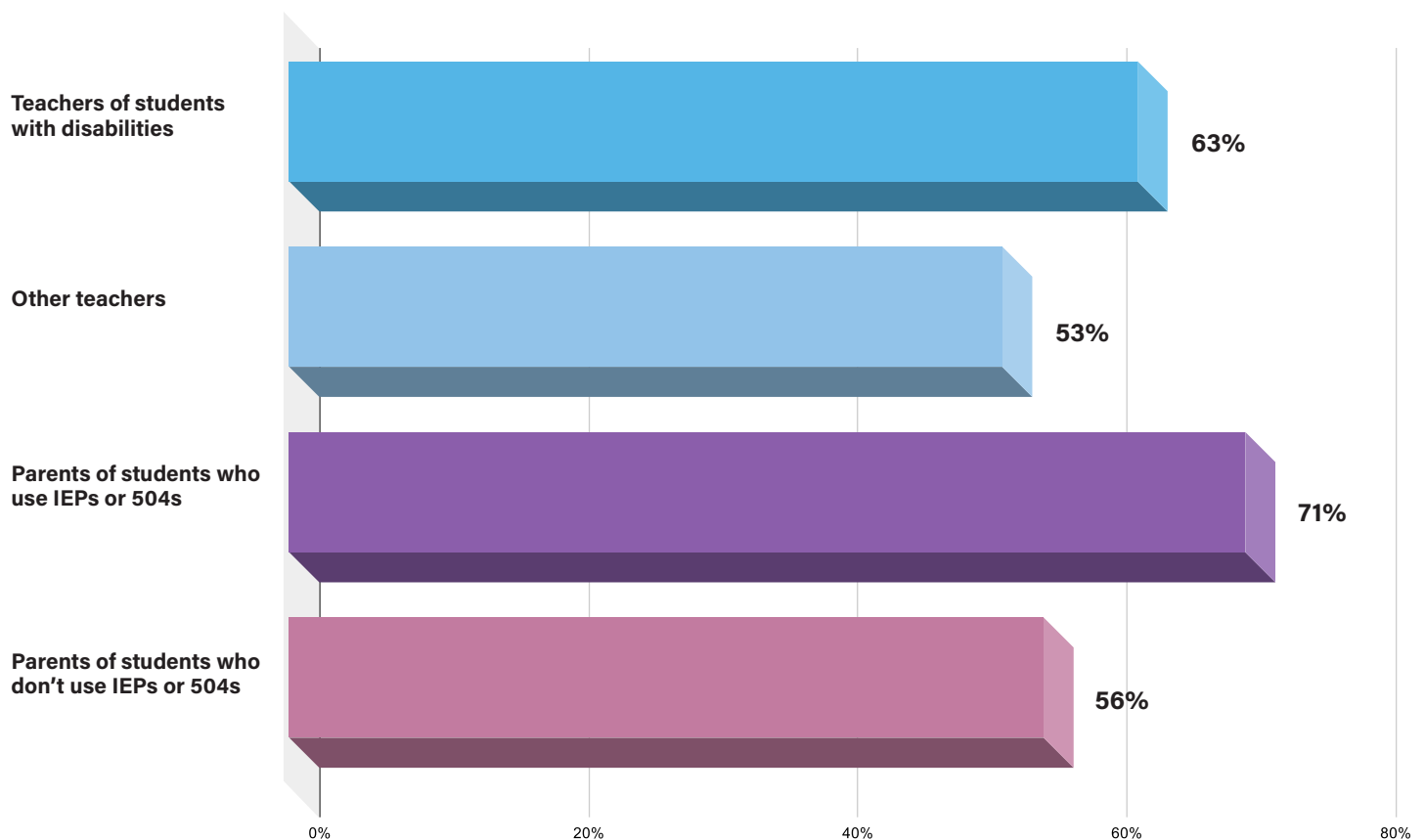■ *Parents of students with IEPs or 504s*   ■ *Other parents*

Teachers and parents of students with disabilities are more likely to report that the benefits outweigh the risks of student activity monitoring software.

When asked specifically about the use of student activity monitoring software, parents of students with IEPs or 504s were actually more supportive than other parents: **76 percent** of parents of students with IEPs or 504s agreed that the benefits of monitoring software outweigh the risks, compared to **54 percent** of other parents. Teachers followed a similar trend, albeit less dramatically: **70 percent** of teachers of students with disabilities report that the benefits of student activity monitoring software outweigh the risks, compared to **63 percent** of other teachers.

Nevertheless, teachers and parents of students with disabilities show particular concern about disciplinary uses of monitoring software.

In spite of this support, teachers and parents of students with disabilities show elevated concerns about the use of student activity monitoring software for disciplinary purposes:

Agree that "student online activity monitoring could bring long-term harm to students if it is used to discipline them or is shared and used out of context."

Teachers of students with disabilities	63%
Other teachers	53%
Parents of students who use IEPs or 504s	71%
Parents of students who don't use IEPs or 504s	56%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Conclusion

Across a range of questions about disciplinary uses of technology, CDT's research found that views of teachers and parents of students with disabilities diverged notably from their peers. While these views are not a perfect proxy for attitudes of students with disabilities themselves, they do help illustrate the equity risks for these students posed by disciplinary uses of technology.

To avoid exacerbating inequitable disciplinary practices, schools should engage communities in their uses of data and technology for these purposes, and in many cases, minimize the use of technology for student discipline and the incorporation of disciplinary data into predictive technologies. For a full set of recommendations on the use of student activity monitoring software, see our report, *Student Activity Monitoring Software: Research Insights and Recommendations*.