

Hidden Harms: Targeting LGBTQ+ Students

LGBTQ+ students are increasingly being targeted by novel policies and practices that threaten their privacy in schools, and monitoring student activity online is no exception. In fact, algorithms that scan students' messages, documents, and websites visited may include search terms like "gay" and "lesbian."¹ Although the stated purpose for targeting LGBTQ+ students with online monitoring efforts is to keep them safe, recent research from CDT suggests that they are being harmed instead, with 29 percent of LGBTQ+ students reporting that they or someone they know has been outed by this technology.² Additionally, LGBTQ+ students are more likely than their non-LGBTQ+ peers to be disciplined as a result of use of this technology, as well as to be contacted by law enforcement for criminal investigation.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that LGBTQ+ students are more concerned than their non-LGBTQ+ peers about their activities being monitored online, including:

- Where and when monitoring takes place, especially outside of school;
- Who has access to their information; and
- How this technology works, such as by scanning their messages.

LGBTQ+ students are concerned about student activity monitoring, especially outside of school.

As a general matter, LGBTQ+ students are more concerned about student activity monitoring than their peers. **27 percent** of LGBTQ+ students report they are

1 Mark Keierleber, "Don't Get Gaggled': Minneapolis School District Spends Big on Student Surveillance Tool, Raising Ire After Terminating Its Police Contract," *The74* (2022). <https://www.the74million.org/article/dont-get-gaggled-minneapolis-school-district-spends-big-on-student-surveillance-tool-raising-ire-after-terminating-its-police-contract/>.

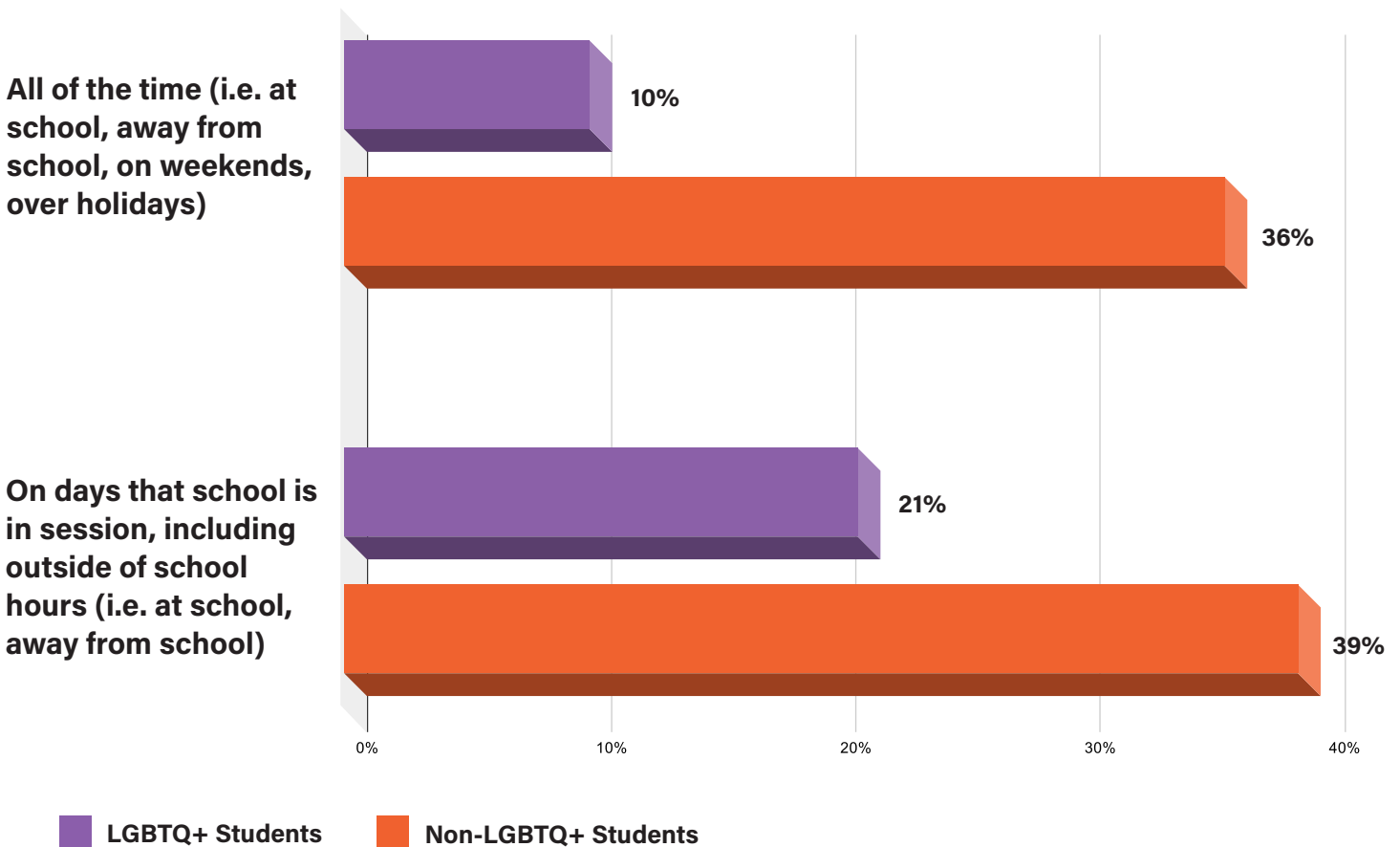
2 Elizabeth Laird et al., *Hidden Harms: The Misleading Use of Monitoring Students Online*, Center for Democracy & Technology (2022). <https://cdt.org/insights/report-hidden-harms-the-misleading-promise-of-monitoring-students-online/>.

uncomfortable with their school or district using this technology, compared to **14 percent** of their non-LGBTQ+ classmates.

Although only **12 percent** of students think that it is unfair for schools to monitor how students use devices provided by the school, they are significantly more concerned about schools monitoring their personal devices. That concern is particularly heightened for LGBTQ+ students. **63 percent** of LGBTQ+ students say that it is unfair for schools to monitor activities on their personal devices, compared to **42 percent** of their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Where, and when, monitoring occurs are questions that are top-of-mind for LGBTQ+ youth. In particular, LGBTQ+ students express less comfort than non-LGBTQ+ students with being monitored outside school hours.

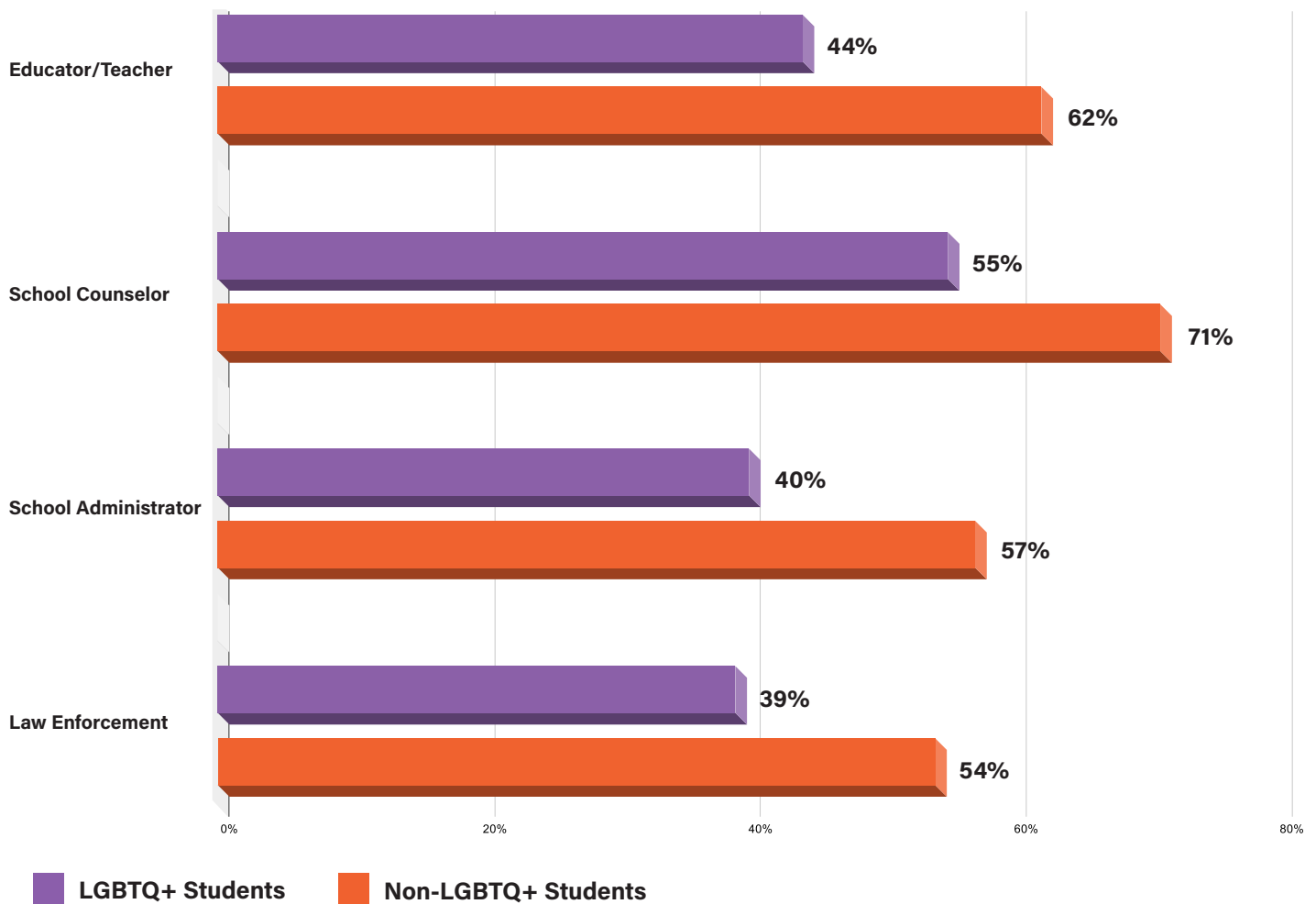
Comfort with monitoring student activity:



LGBTQ+ students are concerned about who has access to their information.

In addition to monitoring itself, LGBTQ+ students are also concerned about the sharing of data collected via student activity monitoring, especially information about gender identity or sexual orientation. **70 percent** of LGBTQ+ students agree that information collected via student activity monitoring that uncovers gender identity or sexual orientation should not be shared with anyone. Although previously released research suggests that students are more comfortable with those closer to them receiving alerts from student activity monitoring,³ LGBTQ+ students are less comfortable, across the board, with student activity monitoring data being shared with a range of stakeholders.

Percentage of students who report they are comfortable sharing data with:



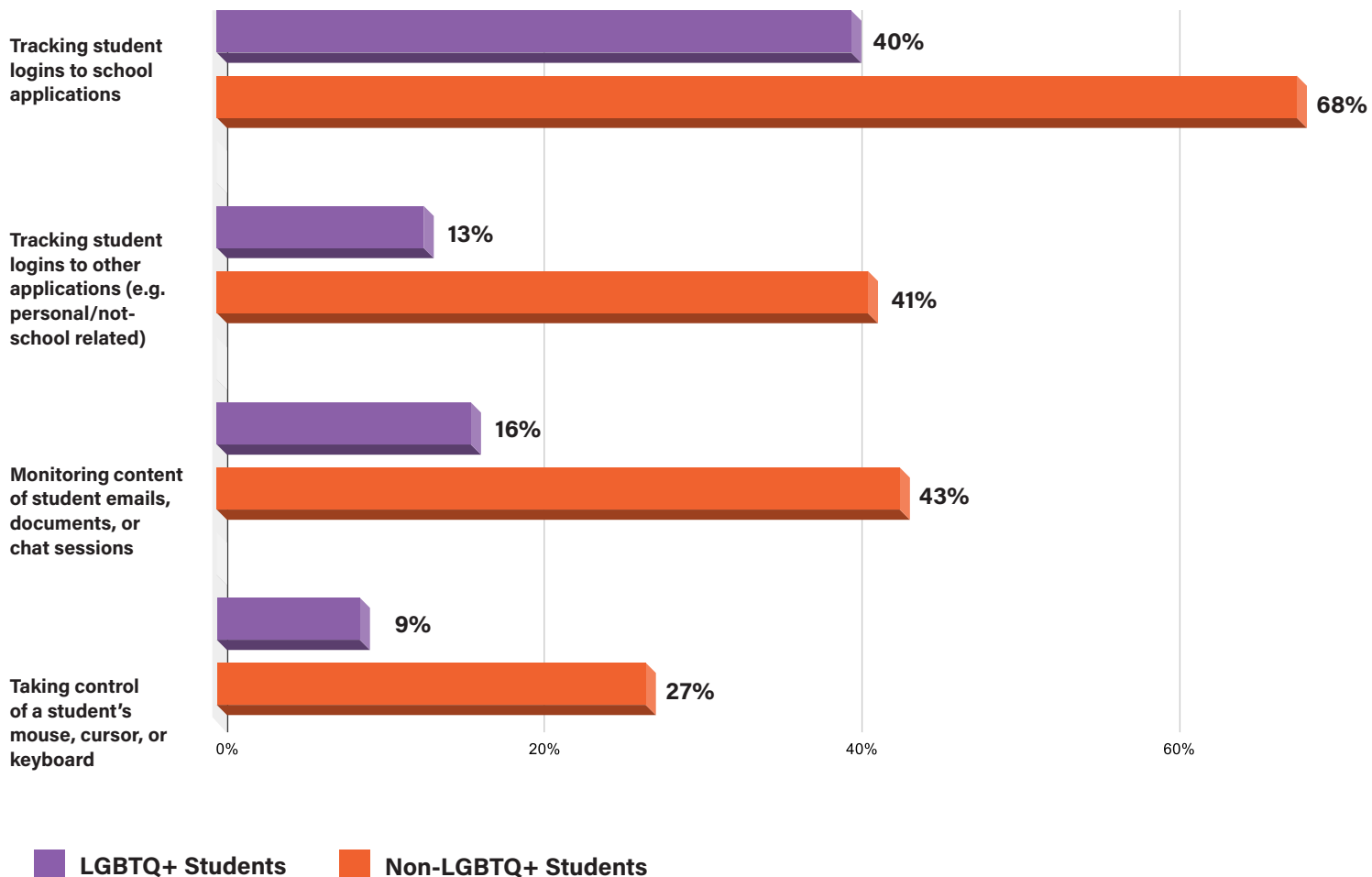
3 Elizabeth Laird et al., *Hidden Harms: The Misleading Use of Monitoring Students Online*, Center for Democracy & Technology (2022), <https://cdt.org/insights/report-hidden-harms-the-misleading-promise-of-monitoring-students-online/>.

The context in which data is shared matters to LGBTQ+ youth, especially with what is shared with their parents. **47 percent** of LGBTQ+ students think that it is appropriate to share alerts that a student is having a potential mental health crisis with their parents, compared to **63 percent** of non-LGBTQ+ students. A similar trend exists for when student activity monitoring signals that a student may have broken a school rule, with **38 percent** of LGBTQ+ students agreeing that it is appropriate to share this with their parents, compared to **55 percent** of non-LGBTQ+ students.

LGBTQ+ students are less comfortable with how student activity monitoring works, such as scanning their messages.

LGBTQ+ students are more concerned about specific features of student activity monitoring than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts.

Percentage of students who report they are comfortable with:



Conclusion


Not only are LGBTQ+ students being targeted for actions like discipline and law enforcement contact by student activity monitoring, LGBTQ+ students themselves are expressing concerns across the board with the use of technology. LGBTQ+ students take issue with the fundamental functions of student activity monitoring and are uncomfortable with tracking activities outside of the school as well as sharing their information with a range of stakeholders. A core pillar of using data and technology responsibly is to engage the individuals about whom information is collected, and LGBTQ+ students are clearly saying that this technology that is intended to help them is instead harming them. Education leaders should listen to those voices.




For more information from this research, see CDT's recent report on the promises and perils of student activity monitoring software, *Hidden Harms.*

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