

OFF TASK

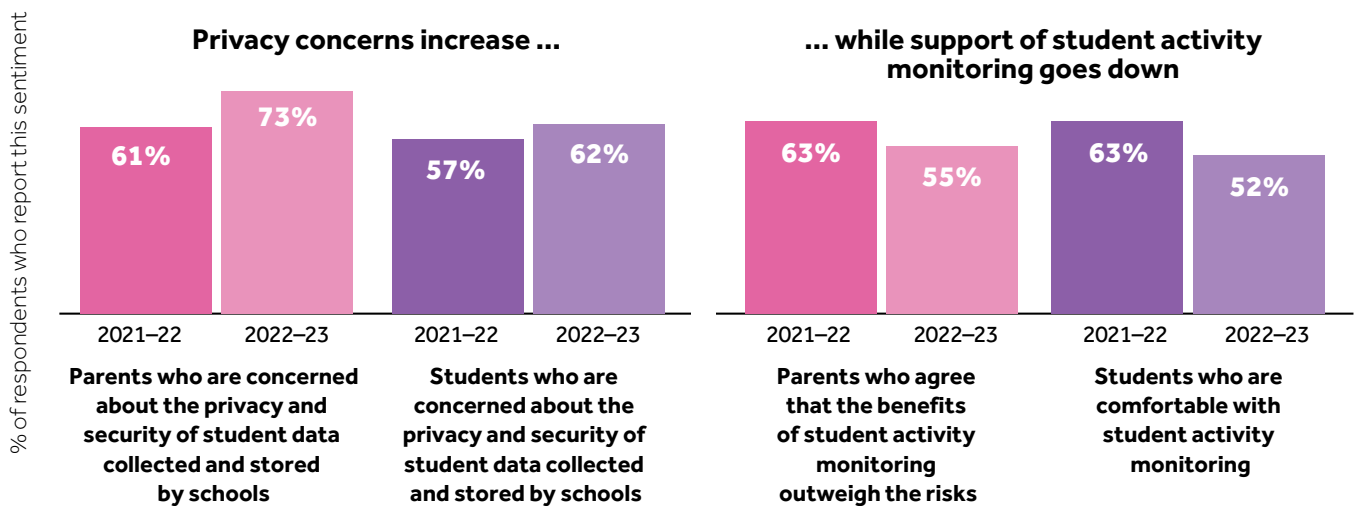
EdTech Threats to Student Privacy and Equity in the Age of AI



EDTECH-LASH LOOMS

Educational data and technology (edtech) is becoming increasingly entrenched in schools and poised to be used in even further ways with the advent of generative artificial intelligence (AI). But as technology plays a larger role, schools are failing to ensure that it is used in responsible, rights-respecting ways. Recent survey research from the Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) shows that in many ways, the opposite is occurring.

Unsurprisingly, this situation is sparking a backlash. For example, growing majorities of students and parents express concerns about how use of these technologies affects student privacy, and support for and comfort with student activity monitoring is dropping. Schools need to become more intentional about how they use these technologies to make sure they do not discriminate and cause other harms. Instead they need to ensure that technologies are deployed in ways that benefit all students.



FILTERING AND BLOCKING ONLINE CONTENT CAN AMOUNT TO A DIGITAL BOOK BAN

Nearly **100 percent** of teachers report that their school uses filtering and blocking software to restrict student access to online content. However, CDT’s research suggests that efforts to prevent access to certain types of content interfere with learning and are vulnerable to subjective, values-driven standards.

Nearly **three-quarters** of students whose school uses filtering and blocking technology report that this technology has made completing school assignments hard, with LGBTQ+ students even more likely to report this challenge. This sentiment is validated among educators, as approximately **half** of teachers whose school uses this technology agree that filtering and blocking has meant that “students are filtered or blocked from content that will help them learn as a student” or “grow as a person.”

This finding suggests that filtering and blocking has expanded to online content beyond what might be legally required to be restricted, paralleling national debates about banning books from school libraries. Approximately **one-third** of teachers agree that content that is associated with LGBTQ+ students or students of color is more likely to be filtered or blocked by their school, and only **27 percent** of parents have been asked for their input on what their school filters, blocks, or monitors.

STUDENTS CONTINUE TO EXPERIENCE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FROM MONITORING TECHNOLOGY AIMED AT KEEPING THEM SAFE

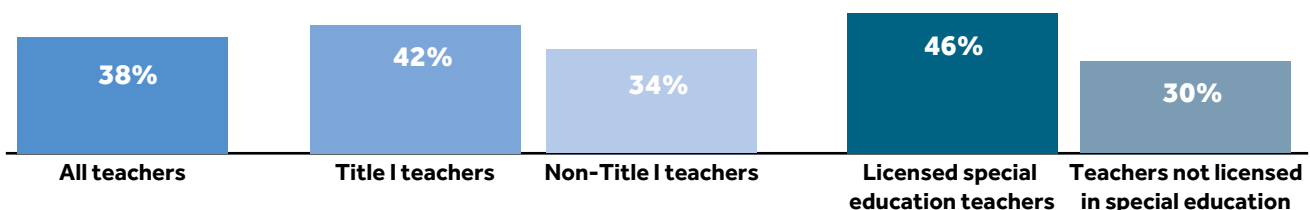
While the overall percentage of teachers reporting that their school monitors students’ online activities (**88 percent**) is consistent with the 2021–22 school year, they report an increase in schools monitoring students’ personal devices, with **40 percent** reporting use of the technology on personal devices in the 2022–23 school year.

Troubling trends identified in [CDT’s research](#) from 2021–22 unfortunately continued in the 2022–23 school year, as **two-thirds** of teachers whose school uses student activity monitoring report that students got in trouble as a result of monitoring or because of their reaction to being confronted about a student activity monitoring alert. Even more students report that they or someone they know was “outed” because of this technology, up **6 percentage points** to **19 percent** of students at schools that use this technology.

“So this whole experience kind of outed him and that’s like, for me that’s probably the most unfair thing. ... It was very traumatic.”

— Parent of a 9th grader

Know of a student who was contacted by law enforcement due to something the school’s student activity monitoring saw that student doing online



Law enforcement continues to play a prominent role in student activity monitoring. **Thirty-eight percent** of teachers whose school uses student activity monitoring software indicate that a student was contacted by law enforcement. Teachers in Title I schools and licensed special education teachers are more likely to report higher law enforcement involvement in students' lives because of student activity monitoring.

EDUCATION LEADERS SHOULD ACT NOW TO CURB FURTHER HARM AS STUDENTS ENTER THE AGE OF AI

CDT research shows growing use of generative AI, along with even more chaos, confusion, and negative impacts. While **58 percent** of students report having used generative AI in the 2022–23 school year, only **43 percent** of teachers say that they have received substantive training on this technology.

However, the lack of guidance and training has not stopped students from getting in trouble. **Half** of teachers report that a student at their school has been disciplined or experienced negative consequences for using or being accused of using generative AI on a school assignment, and licensed special education teachers are even more likely to report this consequence (**58 percent**).

Although generative AI has captured the education sector's imagination (and sparked fears), many technologies that students already use and interact with rely on AI, including filtering, monitoring, and blocking. One of the main risks of AI is that it will exacerbate existing inequities and limit educational opportunities for students, especially the most vulnerable.

Fortunately, robust and well-established civil rights frameworks can offer clarity (and enforcement) to ensure that these risks do not become even more common. To realize the benefits of AI and minimize the risks, the U.S. Department of Education should clarify and enforce existing civil rights protections for current and emerging uses of AI in schools. If the Department fails to do so, it risks undermining the very mission of schools: to ensure that *all* students learn and grow.

Learn more by visiting:

<https://cdt.org/insights/report-off-task-edtech-threats-to-student-privacy-and-equity-in-the-age-of-ai/>

The Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) is the leading nonpartisan, nonprofit organization fighting to advance civil rights and civil liberties in the digital age. We shape technology policy, governance, and design with a focus on equity and democratic values. Established in 1994, CDT has been a trusted advocate for digital rights since the earliest days of the internet. The organization is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and has a Europe Office in Brussels, Belgium.