



Screen Time's Impact on Learning

Screen time has become a regular part of our children's school day. Technology is often thought to enhance learning, but surprisingly little independent research supports this claim. The promises of screen time must be weighed against its negative impacts.



Positive Uses of Screens in Schools

In specific cases, screen time can help students gain unique skills that are valuable in the workplace or for independent learning: typing, spreadsheet creation, robotics, coding, video/music creation and editing, etc. In addition, some programs assist students with learning differences. Select supplementary videos and digital materials can also support learning.



Negative Impacts of Screens in Schools

In a [2022 EdWeek survey](#), 88% of teachers, principals, and district leaders said that as students' screen time increased, so did learning challenges. Student behavior worsened, too. Despite the EdTech industry's repeated promises to improve student learning outcomes, test scores today have fallen behind those in 2012, when the majority of classrooms were mostly tech-free.

There are numerous drawbacks to using screens in schools. Especially when screen time represents a significant percentage of the school day. Negative impacts include:

- **Isolation & underdeveloped social skills:** The relationship between student and teacher, a key factor in academic success, is interrupted or displaced. Today's 1-1 device programs also isolate students. Children learn best in community.
- **Decreased ability to work for intrinsic rewards:** [Many EdTech apps are gamified](#). This can kill students' intrinsic love of learning and undermine their ability to focus on work that is not designed to hit dopamine triggers.
- **Distraction & attention deficits:** [Internet access in class](#) fragments attention by driving students to watch movies, message friends, and engage in social media during school hours.
- **Health risks:** Screen use has been linked to eyesight damage, sleep loss, neck pain, obesity, increased stress, and [overstimulation of students' brains](#).
- **Privacy risks:** EdTech apps collect and sell sensitive student data without student or parental consent. (See Student Data Privacy Fact Sheet).

Benefits of off-screen learning: Numerous studies show better comprehension and retention from [learning on paper](#) vs screens. Off-screen activities are more cognitively rich and engage more perceptual systems (vestibular, kinesthetic, etc.).



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What Can We Do to Reduce Screen Time at School?



WHAT SCHOOLS & DISTRICTS CAN DO

- **Eliminate 1:1 programs for elementary students** (see 1:1 Programs K-5 Page) and limit use for middle and high schoolers to times when screens provide unique learning benefits.
- **Monitor time students spend on devices** and set specific limits (in-school + at home).
- **Assess digital/EdTech products** to determine if they add enough value to the educational experience to outweigh harms. To determine this, schools must assess:
 - Independent research showing benefit.
 - The harms of increased screen time, including distraction/off-task device use.
 - The risks to student privacy.
- **Use a limited number of EdTech products** to keep the workload for curriculum coordinators and administrators manageable.
- **Go phone-free** to decrease distraction and negative impacts (see Phone-Free School sheet).



WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- **Opt out:** Write your school that you do not want your child using digital products. Get a doctor's note (see Opt Out Page). See EdTech Law Center (in Resources ➡).
- **Search for allies:** Print resources and share them with your community, PTA, school board, teachers, and school administrators. Parents feel empowered when joining forces.
- **Advocate:** Ask your school for the list of approved digital products and their approval process. Share this list with other advocates.
- **Inquire:** Ask how much time your children spend on screens at school.



Resources

- [Global Education Monitoring Report \(UNESCO\)](#)
- [UNESCO Calls for Global Ban on Smartphones in Schools \(The Guardian\)](#)
- [The EdTech Triangle \(Everyschool.org\)](#)
- [The EdTech Report: Research to know right now about technology in the classroom \(Everyschool.org\)](#)
- [Personal Devices and Laptop Use in the Classroom \(ScreenStrong.org\)](#)
- [EdTech Law Center](#)