



# 1:1 Programs (K-5)

A 1:1 program refers to school-district initiatives to assign one personal device for every student. Districts advocate for these programs because of the promise of improved achievement outcomes, motivation, and engagement; to keep up with the digital world we live in; and to promote equity. These promises largely have turned out to be false ones.

## Prevalence of 1:1 Programs

The pandemic led to the expansion of 1:1 programs for all ages and grades. Prior to the pandemic, about 40% of elementary-school kids were provided personal devices. In the 2022–23 school year, nearly 95% of public schools surveyed reported providing students with personal digital devices, such as laptops or tablets (U.S. Department of Education).

Very few districts have since reevaluated their decisions, even though 1:1 devices are no longer necessary—and are in fact harmful—for the youngest learners.

## Realities and Risks of 1:1 Programs for K-5 Students



**Opportunity costs are particularly damaging for young learners.** Screen-based activities diminish human interactions, decrease play-based and tactile learning, reduce the cultivation of empathy, and deprioritize creativity. Device-based learning is often gamified. This causes students to pay attention to points or rewards earned instead of to comprehension or retention of content.



**1:1 programs increase cumulative screen time.** Study after study shows that excessive screen time is a health hazard, especially for young learners. School 1:1 programs inevitably increase daily totals for screen time above both pediatrician recommendations and parent preferences.



**Personal devices create a digital dependency.** Personal devices create unhealthy habits and lead to a cycle of dependency. Kids want or need the device more and more to feel entertained. They become less capable of entertaining themselves, struggle with attention and focus, and lose the motivation to do the hard, slow work that's required for most learning.



**Reading and writing on paper is better for children.** Studies show that tactile learning—writing with a pencil, reading physical books—offer superior forms of student engagement and knowledge retention.



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## What Can We Do to Eliminate 1:1 Programs in K-5 Classrooms?



### TIPS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

- Opt out of 1:1 devices.
- Keep 1:1 devices at school only; do not send home.
- Use classroom sets of devices instead of 1:1s.
- Keep devices stored out of sight when not in use.
- Avoid using devices as rewards or free-time choices.
- Set limits on screen time use in and out of the classroom.
- Choose screen-free reading/homework assignments.
- Offer high-interest screen-free activities.
- Learn how to monitor screen time on devices.
- Request safe configuration of devices (filters, removing browsers for youngest students, disabling Siri, etc.).



### TIPS FOR OPT-OUT ADVOCACY

- Seek across-the-board policy change instead of allowing for inconsistency.
- Pair policy change with community education and awareness about the benefits of screen-free or screen-minimalist K-5 classrooms.
- Advocate for a school or district whose tech philosophy outlines and enforces intentional use, rather than distracting or recreational use of technology.
- Equip and train teachers to use monitoring tools to limit in-class distractions and off-task activities.
- For teachers: If certain state or county assessments MUST be done on devices, make preparation targeted instead of allowing screens to become a default part of instruction.
- For parents: Organize and go to the school board or principal with the spirit of collaboration, backed by the information above.



### Resources

- [What the Massive Shift in 1:1 Computing Means for Schools](#) (EdWeek)
- [Survey by the U.S. Department of Education](#) (National Center for Education Statistics)
- [We Make More Virtuous Choices When Using Pen and Paper](#) (Harvard Business Review)