

Parents' Guide: What to Know and 4 Questions to Ask About Ed Tech in Schools

We encourage parents and caregivers to ask the following questions about any and every ed tech product in your child's school:

1 Is it safe?

- Any technology product used in schools should be safe by design, protective of children's privacy, and independently verified for safety and efficacy.
- If an app connects your child to the open internet, what systems does the school have in place to block access to inappropriate content (such as adult websites, online gambling), digital distractions (like social media, online shopping, and entertaining videos) or VPN servers where kids can get around school filters?
- Currently, no independent agency tests ed tech to confirm assertions from tech companies, nor are there federal-mandated data privacy protections in place beyond the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule ("COPPA"), which applies only to children under 13.
- Many products contain autoplay, streaks, rewards, notifications, algorithmic recommendations and other features designed to maximize engagement — which may inhibit the development of self-regulation and attention spans. An "educational" label should not exempt those design choices from scrutiny.

2 Is it effective?

- Too many companies claim their products are "educational" without any evidence. Prior to introducing any technology product to the classroom, districts should seek third-party verification that claims are substantiated, although currently no independent ratings agency exists.
- Even adults struggle to stay focused when "work" takes place on a screen where numerous apps are vying for attention. Before introducing a digital product to the classroom, educators should ask: *How might this help student learning?* and *How might this hurt student learning?*

3 Who has access to my child's data?

- Transparency is essential. Families should know which apps and products students are required to use, and what data these companies collect.
- What are the school's procurement standards/vendor control policies and do they prohibit — or enable — data sharing to third parties?

4 What other forms of learning, thinking or doing might it replace?

- Digital literacy does not require constant device use. To prepare for the future, students need to learn computer skills, information literacy and digital citizenship, but this is not the same as using technology to replace reading, writing and thinking. Carefully designed media literacy programs can help prepare students to eventually engage as thoughtful responsible digital citizens with technology made available to students in a limited way. Bring back the computer lab or computer cart!

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What Parents Should Know About Ed Tech

WHERE WE ARE NOW

For too long, schools have introduced ed tech products into classrooms without consideration for how excess screen time and product design might hinder student learning, disrupt the development of attention spans, or connect children to online harm. The rapid adoption of tech products in the classroom — and the displacement of time-tested, hands-on methods of learning — have resulted in drops in reading and math scores to some of their lowest levels in 25 years. This decline calls for schools to unite against an over-reliance on apps, screens and 1:1 distribution of devices and a return to hands-on learning that helps children thrive.

This moment also demands that lawmakers take swift action to update policies on tech product safety and student data privacy.

While the federal Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) from 1998 addresses data privacy for youth under 13, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) from 1974 protects the privacy of student education records, both policies are out of date. At MAMA, we support the bipartisan effort to update COPPA so data protections that currently apply to children under 13 would apply to all kids 16 and under. We also support states' efforts to protect students from ever-evolving technology through bills that limit screen time or prohibit technology in elementary school.

Here are some additional principles for how MAMA thinks about ed tech:

- Screen time displaces other critical learning experiences that are multi-sensorial. For that reason, screen time in school should be limited and purposeful, not the default.
- MAMA recognizes that technology can support learning and accessibility, and may be essential for students with disabilities or special needs. But more classroom technology does not automatically mean better education. To preserve time-tested forms of learning for most children, technology should be avoided in elementary school, used in a limited way during middle school, and utilized in high school only for select purposes.
- School-required technology carries a higher duty-of-care to child safety and privacy. Students cannot simply walk away from required devices or platforms. For that reason, schools and technology companies have a heightened responsibility to ensure any product a child is required to use is safe by design and protects student privacy. At a minimum, until federal standards are established, schools should insist all AI contracts meet the privacy and safety standards American Federation of Teachers established with Microsoft, as available here.
- Education policy should prioritize meaningful learning outcomes rather than incentivizing increased digital engagement. Extra time online may increase profit for tech companies, but it doesn't automatically equal more learning.
- Data minimization is best.
- For true safety, independent, third-party audits of all tech products should be the standard.
- Any ed tech contract with a school should prohibit feature "creep," or the addition of new features to a product that go beyond the original plan.

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Policies to Make Ed Tech Safe for Kids

- **Safety and Age-Appropriate Design Standards.** MAMA supports policies that require technology used by children to be designed with their developmental needs and well-being in mind, including protections from addictive features, manipulative design, harmful content and unsafe AI interactions.
- **Strong Privacy and Data Protections.** MAMA supports policies that limit the collection, use, sharing, and commercialization of children's data and ensure students do not have to sacrifice their privacy to participate in school.
- **AI Safeguards in Schools.** MAMA supports policies that establish clear guardrails for AI used in educational settings, including age-appropriate safety, transparency, appropriate human oversight, protections against harmful interactions and anthropomorphization, and limits on how student data can be used.
- **Parent and Family Transparency.** MAMA supports policies that give families clear, accessible information about what technology their children are required to use, why it is being used, what data it collects, and how it affects their child's school experience.
- **Responsible Ed Tech Procurement and Accountability.** MAMA supports policies that establish meaningful standards for how schools and districts evaluate, approve, monitor, and when necessary, remove technology used by students.
- **Intentional Technology Use.** MAMA supports policies that prioritize technology when it meaningfully supports learning while protecting opportunities for screen-free instruction, human connection, play, and other experiences essential to healthy childhood development.

THE FACTS

14 points
drop in U.S. 15 year-olds' reading scores since 2022, reaching the lowest level in nearly 25 years

OECD's 2025 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessment, September 2026



147 out of 300
average 12th grade math score in 2024, the lowest score ever reported

The Nation's Report Card (NAEP)

45%
the number of American students working below the NAEP Basic performance standard – the highest percentage ever recorded.

The Nation's Report Card (NAEP), 2024

$549.6 billion
projected size of ed tech market by 2033

Market.US: EdTech Market, 2025

94%
number of public schools that provide laptops or tablets to students for classroom use



U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, 2022

78%
total of school districts that report 1:1 device availability in grades K-12

CoSN: U.S. State of Ed Tech, 2026



7.5 hours
average daily time U.S. children age 8 to 18 spend watching or using screens, more than half their waking hours

AACAP, 2025

89%
portion of ed tech platforms that put children's data privacy at risk

Human Rights Watch Report, 2022

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