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School-Assigned Mobile Devices Support Efforts to Improve Educational Equity

Speak Up National Findings Reflect Current Educational Technology Experiences of Hundreds of Thousands of Principals, Teachers and Students

Washington, D.C. – Last year, 60 percent of school principals said their schools had implemented a one-computer-to-one-student program (1:1 program), an increase of 9 percentage points in one year. The principals and students experiencing those programs are seeing notable, preferred differences in technology use, and teachers who are regular users of digital tools see differences in important student outcomes. These are among the findings released today by Project Tomorrow in the first of a series of briefing papers based on the data collected last fall as part of their [Speak Up Research Project for Digital Learning](#) (Speak Up).

The brief, [The Educational Equity Imperative: Leveraging Technology to Empower Learning for All](#), examines the role of technology use in school as an enabler of equitable learning environments.

“We looked at data from principals who have implemented a 1:1 program where their students are assigned a laptop, tablet or Chromebook to use in school. Such programs aim to level the playing field by providing all students with the same access to technology tools and content. We then reported on the learning experiences and outcomes of the students using these devices in school,” explained, Dr. Julie A. Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow and the lead researcher on Speak Up.

Principals with 1:1 programs at their schools are more likely than other principals to report that technology use is effective in core academic subjects. For example, 53% of principals with a 1:1 program report that technology is used effectively in math classes at their school with resulting academic benefits. Only 43% of all principals say the same about technology usage in their math classrooms.

These schools are not just improving equity but enabling their students to realize the benefits of more effective technology usage in school. High school students with assigned access to a laptop or Chromebook are more likely to use those devices to personalize their learning process, to stay organized with their schoolwork and to leverage technology for more enhanced learning experiences than their peers with no access or only sporadic access. And, half (49%) of these mobile-using students say the skills they are learning in school are important for their future; only 39% of students without a mobile device hold that view.

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“The results of this Speak Up survey emphasize the importance of continued equitable access to affordable high speed broadband for our nation’s educators and students,” said Daniel A. Domenech, Executive Director, [AASA, The School Superintendents Association](#). “E-Rate has paved the way for equitably transforming this access in schools, and we see school districts across the nation continue to answer the call for ever more access and connectivity in myriad ways, from tablets to 1:1 initiatives. Perhaps the biggest takeaway, though, is the uniform support for continued access and its critical role in educational opportunity from all perspectives, including parents, students, teachers and administrators.”

“The investments that schools and districts are making in mobile devices and in particular, their decisions to assign these devices to individual students, may result in additional benefits beyond equity. Device access appears to increase student self-efficacy as learners and help to develop new sustainable mindsets for learning,” concluded Evans.

“We can’t expect students to build their future with the tools of our past. Reliable device access for each student is absolutely essential to maximize student learning. But as every school leader knows, mere access alone is not sufficient,” said JoAnn Bartoletti, Executive Director, [National Association of Secondary School Principals](#) (NASSP). “Digital devices provide the best value when students use them to create rather than just consume knowledge. We see evidence of that use nationwide as principals continue to build cultures that value student empowerment and motivate students to fulfill their greatest potential.”

The findings in the [Educational Equity Imperative briefing paper](#) are based on Speak Up data collected between October 2017 and January 2018 from 340,927 K-12 students, 34,833 teachers and librarians, 3,249 administrators, 23,159 parents and 4,611 community members representing more than 10,600 public and private schools and 3,200 districts.

“One of the biggest strengths of the Speak Up survey is not only its ability to capture the perspective from multiple roles (parent, teacher, student, administrator) but to have done so over multiple years,” said Joan Wade, Executive Director, [Association of Educational Service Agencies](#) (AESA). “The long-view of the Speak Up data indicates that while certain issues will come and go as it relates to education technology, connectivity and learning, the overarching recurring theme is nearly universal support for ensuring all students and schools have equitable access to affordable broadband. And despite the progress we’ve made, the fact remains there is more to do, and the Speak Up survey remains a critical partner in highlighting this reality and shining a bright light on all that connectivity can mean to schools and students.”

“We know that educational technology can help level the education playing field for all students, especially for students in challenged or under-resourced communities, but this promise is still unmet in too many communities,” said Dr. Tracy Weeks, Executive Director, [State Educational Technology Directors Association](#) (SETDA). “Reports like this one help draw attention to potential solutions to on-going equity challenges.”

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The briefing paper also evaluated the role of digital content usage by the teachers and its application to students' development of college and career ready skills - like critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and communications. The development of these skills is an important outcome for education in general, but it is especially important that all students have such learning experiences so that there is no inherent discrimination in potential college and career readiness.

Teachers using digital content report higher levels of student outcomes than teachers who are not using these tools. For example, 51% of teachers who use digital animations and simulations to illustrate abstract concepts to students report that their students demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving skills as a result of how they are using technology in their classroom. Only 43% of all teachers say that their technology usage is resulting in critical thinking skill development.

About Project Tomorrow & Speak Up

[Project Tomorrow](#) is the nation's leading education nonprofit group dedicated to ensuring that today's K-12 students are well prepared to become tomorrow's leaders, innovators and engaged citizens of the world. The Speak Up Research Project for Digital Learning is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow. Since 2003, the annual Speak Up project has collected and reported on the views of more than 5 million K-12 students, teachers, administrators and parents representing more than 30,000 schools in all 50 states. This represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder input on education, technology, schools of the future, science and math instruction, professional development and career exploration.

Project Tomorrow's research goal is to help build the capacity of education leaders to create new learning experiences that prepare today's students to compete and contribute to the global economy and society. To share the Speak Up 2017-18 national findings, Project Tomorrow is creating a series of briefing papers and infographics to address key topics in the effective use of technology to enable new learning experiences and empower educational effectiveness. Learn more at <https://tomorrow.org/speakup>

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