HIDDEN HARMS

The Misleading Promise of Monitoring Students Online

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AUTHORS:

Elizabeth Laird
Hugh Grant-Chapman
Cody Venzke
Hannah Quay-de la Vallee

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Executive Summary

The pressure on schools to keep students safe, especially to protect them physically and support their mental health, has never been greater. The mental health crisis, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and concerns about the increasing number of school shootings have led to questions about the role of technology in meeting these goals. From monitoring students' public social media posts to tracking what they do in real-time on their devices, technology aimed at keeping students safe is growing in popularity. However, the harms that such technology inflicts are increasingly coming to light.

The Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) conducted survey research among high school students and middle and high school parents and teachers to better understand the promise of technologies aimed at keeping students safe and the risks that they pose, as reported by those most directly interacting with such tools. In particular, the research focused on student activity monitoring, the nearly ubiquitous practice of schools using technology to monitor students' activities online, especially on devices provided by the school. CDT built on its previous research, which showed that this monitoring is conducted primarily to comply with perceived legal requirements and to keep students safe. While stakeholders are optimistic that student activity monitoring will keep students safe, in practice it creates significant efficacy and equity gaps:

- **Monitoring is used for discipline more often than for student safety:** Despite assurances and hopes that student activity monitoring will be used to keep students safe, teachers report that it is more frequently used for disciplinary purposes in spite of parent and student concerns.

- **Teachers bear considerable responsibility but lack training for student activity monitoring:** Teachers are generally tasked with responding to alerts generated by student activity monitoring, despite only a small percentage having received training on how to do so privately and securely.

- **Monitoring is often not limited to school hours despite parent and student concerns:** Students and parents are the most comfortable with monitoring being limited to when school is in session, but monitoring frequently occurs outside of that time frame.

- **Stakeholders demonstrate large knowledge gaps in how monitoring software functions:** There are significant gaps between what teachers report is communicated about student activity monitoring, often via a form provided along with a school-issued device, and what parents and students retain and report about it.

Additionally, certain groups of students, especially those who are already more at risk than their peers, disproportionately experience the hidden harms of student activity monitoring:

- **Students are at risk of increased interactions with law enforcement:** Schools are sending student data collected from monitoring software to law enforcement officials, who use it to contact students.

- **LGBTQ+ students are disproportionately targeted for action:** The use of student activity monitoring software is resulting in the nonconsensual disclosure of students' sexual orientation and gender identity (i.e., "outing"), as well as more LGBTQ+ students reporting they are being disciplined or contacted by law enforcement for concerns about committing a crime compared to their peers.

- **Students' mental health could suffer:** While students report they are being referred to school counselors, social workers, and other adults for mental health support, they are also experiencing detrimental effects from being monitored online. These effects include avoiding expressing their thoughts and feelings online, as well as not accessing important resources that could help them.

- **Students from low-income families, Black students, and Hispanic students are at greater risk of harm:** Previous CDT research showed that certain groups of students, including students from low-income families, Black students, and Hispanic students, rely more heavily on school-issued devices. Therefore, they are subject to more surveillance and the aforementioned harms, including interacting with law enforcement, being disciplined, and being outed, than those using personal devices.

Given that the implementation of student activity monitoring falls short of its promises, this research suggests that education leaders should consider alternative strategies to keep students safe that do not simultaneously put students' safety and well-being in jeopardy.

Introduction

Concerns about the ongoing youth mental health crisis, which has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, have fueled the expansion of student surveillance technology in the name of keeping students safe.[1] The return to in-person school, and the related resurgence of gun violence and school shootings, has added further pressure to investigate what students are doing and saying online.

Parents, students, and teachers have the most at stake in how schools use technology to respond to these challenges. To better understand the perspectives of these stakeholders, the Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) surveyed parents of students in grades 6–12, students in grades 9–12, and teachers of grades 6–10 to understand their opinions and experiences with the growing presence of surveillance in students' lives.* This research was conducted in the time period immediately following the school shooting in Uvalde, TX, which undoubtedly influenced responses as to the promises, and pitfalls, of monitoring students.

CDT's research found that schools have continued to rely heavily on technology, even with the return to in-person school that occurred in the 2021–22 school year. **Ninety-five percent** of teachers report that their school or school district supported students this past year by providing and/or maintaining tablets and laptops for students to use at school, at home, or both, and **96 percent** of teachers expect this practice to continue in the 2022–23 school year.

At the same time, concerns about student privacy remain high, especially among students and parents. **Sixty-one percent** of parents, **57 percent** of students, and **42 percent** of teachers report that they are very or somewhat concerned about the privacy and security of students' data and information that may be collected and stored by their school. These concerns remain largely consistent across various types of tracking software.

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* Throughout this report, "parent" is defined broadly to encompass biological parents, foster parents, legal guardians, and other primary caregivers.

Stakeholders are concerned when schools ...

Monitor publicly posted social media content on students' personal accounts
- Parents: 61%
- Students: 68%
- Teachers: 60%

Use remote proctoring software to determine if a student is cheating on an exam
- Parents: 62%
- Students: 63%
- Teachers: 63%

Use technology to track student activity online (e.g., student activity monitoring)
- Parents: 60%
- Students: 42%
- Teachers: 61%

% of respondents who report being concerned about these uses of student data

Parents
Students
Teachers

The remainder of this report will focus on student activity monitoring, a particularly widespread and potentially harmful practice of using technology to track student activity online. Student activity monitoring can log information such as the contents of students' emails, messaging, and documents; the contents of their screens; the date/time of their logins; and their internet search queries. It may also enable real-time visibility into what students are looking at on their devices.

Previous research showed that student activity monitoring has become increasingly common, especially on school-issued devices, for two primary reasons. Local education agencies (e.g., traditional school districts, charter management organizations) feel compelled to monitor student activity both to satisfy perceived legal requirements and to protect student safety, in particular students' physical and mental health.[2]

Teachers consistently report that student activity monitoring is widespread and increasing. **Eighty-nine percent** of teachers report that their school monitors student activity on school-issued and/or personal devices, up from **84 percent** in the 2020–21 school year. Teachers' responses also indicate that **80 percent** of this monitoring occurs on school-issued devices compared with **18 percent** on personal devices.

What Is Promised?

Parents, students, and teachers perceive that student activity monitoring promises a range of outcomes. In particular, stakeholders express support for tracking student activity online if it will keep students safe, and vendors pitch their monitoring tools to deliver this outcome.[3]

Parents and students show the strongest support for student activity monitoring when it is used to **keep students safe.** Approximately **8 in 10** parents and students are comfortable with using student activity monitoring to determine if there is an urgent need to keep others safe (for instance, to identify threats of violence). In addition, approximately **7 in 10** parents and students are comfortable with student activity monitoring to identify students at risk of self-harm or other mental health crises.

Previous research[4] and vendors' self-reporting[5] has shown that **discipline is not the intended purpose** of student activity monitoring. Unsurprisingly, stakeholders express concerns about using student activity monitoring for disciplinary purposes: Approximately **6 in 10** parents and teachers agree that student activity monitoring could bring harm to students if it is used for discipline.

> " [Student activity monitoring] should be used for well-being and well-being only. "
>
> — Parent of high school student

With these stated goals in mind, it is unsurprising that parents, students, and teachers express relative comfort with student activity monitoring. **Sixty-three percent** of parents and **68 percent** of teachers agree that "the benefits of student activity monitoring outweigh concerns about student privacy." Similarly, only **29 percent** of students believe that "it is unfair for schools to monitor how students use devices that schools provide."

These findings are situated within a general atmosphere of stakeholder trust in schools' use of technology and data: **70 percent** of parents trust their child's school with the information being collected about their child, and **51 percent** of parents view school administrators as having the most responsibility for protecting student privacy and security (more than any other person or entity involved in handling student data).

> " There's a difference between ... searching the kid's [device] because you think they're harming themselves — that's a good reason to search it — and just randomly [searching] it. That's just not okay. "
>
> — High school student

What Is Happening?

Parents, students, and teachers have high hopes for student activity monitoring. These expectations stand in stark contrast to how monitoring is actually used in practice, which often contradicts stakeholders' understanding, conflicts with stated goals, and threatens students' safety and well-being.

CDT's survey research arrives at four key findings about how student activity monitoring is actually being implemented:

- Monitoring is used for discipline more often than for student safety;

- Teachers bear considerable responsibility but lack training for student activity monitoring;

- Monitoring is often not limited to school hours despite parent and student concerns; and

- Stakeholders demonstrate large knowledge gaps in how monitoring software functions.

" The school's purpose is to teach me, not to monitor what I'm doing and make sure I'm a good person. "

— High school student

MONITORING IS USED FOR DISCIPLINE MORE OFTEN THAN FOR STUDENT SAFETY

Although parents and students show the strongest support for using student activity monitoring to keep students safe, teacher responses indicate that monitoring software is **more commonly used for disciplinary purposes** than for identifying threats to safety or for providing mental health support.

Seventy-eight percent of teachers whose school uses monitoring software report that students at their school have been flagged by the software for violating disciplinary policy. Comparatively, only **54 percent** of these teachers report that monitoring software has been used to refer students to a counselor, therapist, or social worker for behavior-related interventions, despite these kinds of interventions aligning more closely with stated goals of student well-being.

The emphasis on discipline is also evident in how teachers report the purposes of student activity monitoring.

Teachers whose school or district engages in student activity monitoring report that its purpose is to ...
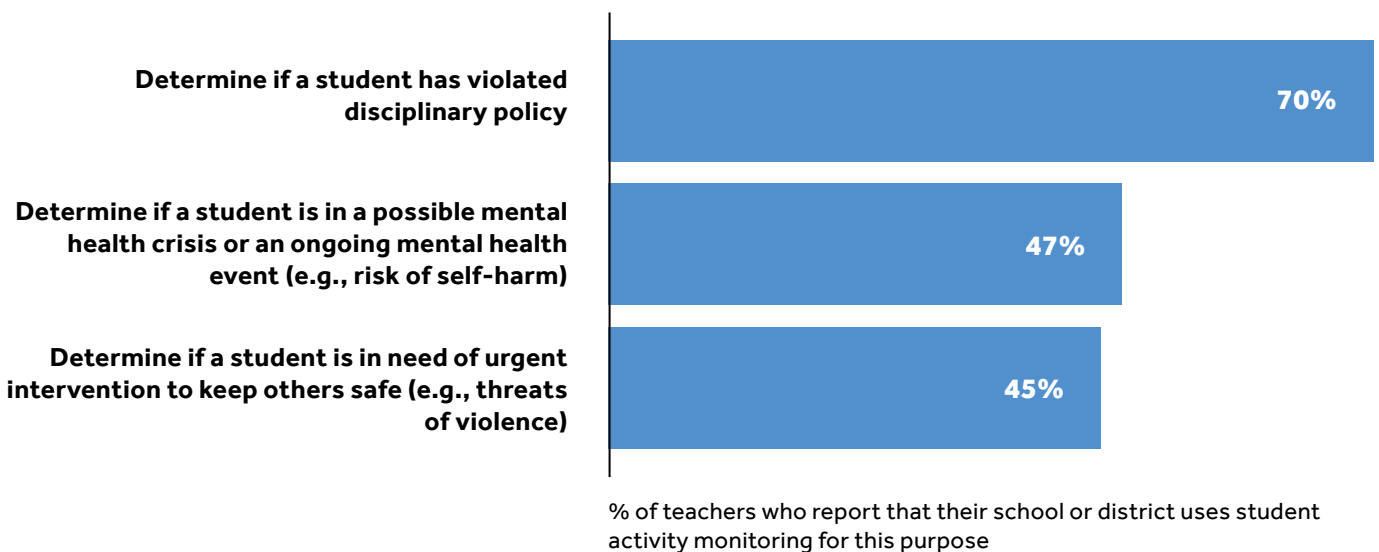
Purpose	%
Determine if a student has violated disciplinary policy	70%
Determine if a student is in a possible mental health crisis or an ongoing mental health event (e.g., risk of self-harm)	47%
Determine if a student is in need of urgent intervention to keep others safe (e.g., threats of violence)	45%

% of teachers who report that their school or district uses student activity monitoring for this purpose

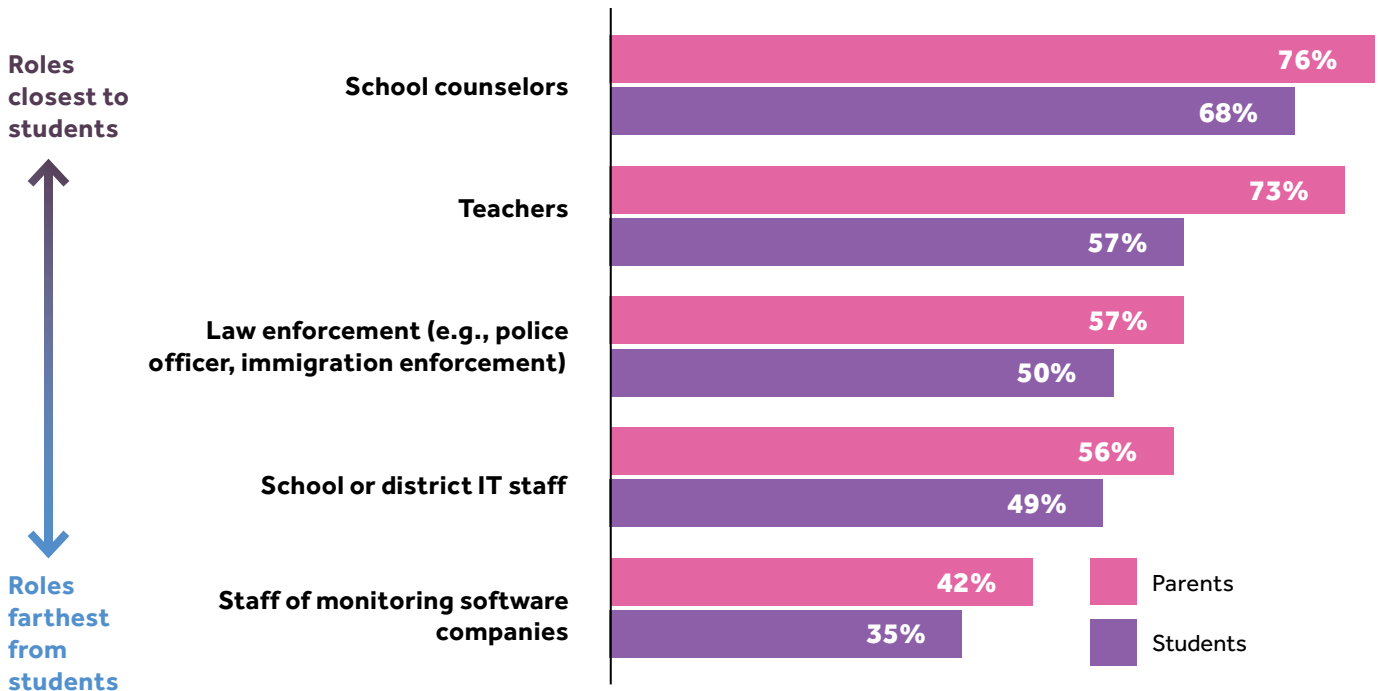# TEACHERS BEAR CONSIDERABLE RESPONSIBILITY BUT LACK TRAINING FOR STUDENT ACTIVITY MONITORING

Maintaining a student activity monitoring system can involve many individuals operating across schools and districts, software vendors, and third-party agencies. This survey research sought to understand who is involved in this process, what roles they play, and whom stakeholders trust to fill those roles.

Stakeholder trust

Students and parents are both generally **most comfortable with those closest to students** (e.g., school counselors, teachers) reviewing alerts generated by student activity monitoring, and they tend to be skeptical of the role of stakeholders furthest removed from the student (e.g., information technology [IT] staff, law enforcement). Parents and students report **the lowest levels of trust in staff of third-party companies** that provide the monitoring software.

Parents and students show varying levels of comfort with different individuals being involved in reviewing student activity monitoring ...

Roles closest to students

Roles farthest from students

Role	Parents	Students
School counselors	76%	68%
Teachers	73%	57%
Law enforcement (e.g., police officer, immigration enforcement)	57%	50%
School or district IT staff	56%	49%
Staff of monitoring software companies	42%	35%

% of parents/students who are comfortable with these individuals being involved in the review process

When asked who should be notified about alerts generated by student activity monitoring software, most parents (and to a lesser extent, students) say that parents themselves, more than any other entity, should be notified.*

> " I think anything that pertains to my child, I think you should notify me before you do it. "
>
> — Parent of high school student

Role of teachers

Survey data indicates that **teachers play an outsized role** in responding to alerts generated by student activity monitoring systems. **Forty-five percent** of teachers whose school uses activity monitoring report that they receive alerts at least once a week, and **17 percent** report receiving alerts daily. Despite these obligations, only **31 percent** of teachers whose school uses student activity monitoring report that they have received guidance about how to use these systems privately and securely.

The content of these alerts can range from relatively trivial (a student is not on task) to potentially very serious (a student may be at risk of self-harm or committing an act of violence). **Sixty-five percent** of teachers whose school uses activity monitoring report that they are responsible for following up on one or more of the six kinds of alerts presented in the survey.** These findings illustrate how, in many cases, the predominant burden of assessing and reacting to alerts generated by monitoring systems is falling to teachers, on top of their other responsibilities.

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* See Hidden Harms: The Misleading Promise of Student Activity Monitoring Research Deck slides 38, 55, and 62 at https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Hidden-Harms-The-Misleading-Promise-of-Monitoring-Students-Online-Research-Slides.pdf.

** The full list of alerts in the survey includes "tracking productivity/making sure students are staying on task," "determining if a student is in a possible mental health crisis or an ongoing mental health event," "determining if a student is in need of urgent intervention to keep others safe," "flagging potential destructive or illegal behavior by students before it happens," "determining if a student has violated academic disciplinary policy," and "determining if a student has violated nonacademic disciplinary policy."

Other important parties

Individuals outside of the school and furthest removed from the student play a prominent role in student activity monitoring, despite parents and students finding them least appropriate to address most scenarios. In particular, officials at other public agencies, school IT administrators, and the staff of software companies that provide and maintain student activity monitoring services are more involved in tracking and responding to students' online activities than stakeholders may realize.

Teachers report that third parties play an important role in responding to alerts after hours (discussed further in the next section). In particular, **37 percent** of teachers who say their school uses activity monitoring outside of school hours report that a third party focused on public safety (e.g., local police department, immigration enforcement) is responsible for following up on alerts in off hours. **Sixteen percent** of these teachers report the same for agencies focused on delivering public services (e.g., health or social services agencies).

In addition to other public agencies, school district IT administrators and third-party software providers have expansive access to the data collected through student activity monitoring, which is required to support the software. Moreover, content moderators employed by the software companies are often involved in the initial review of alerts.[6]

Given that third-party software providers have the most access to student activity monitoring data, parents' and students' low levels of comfort with these entities' involvement in monitoring demonstrate a striking misalignment of stakeholder expectations with reality. Despite overall support for student activity monitoring, this finding suggests that parents and students may not have a full understanding of all aspects of student activity monitoring, including the role that vendors play in conducting initial screenings of flagged behavior.

MONITORING IS OFTEN NOT LIMITED TO SCHOOL HOURS DESPITE PARENT AND STUDENT CONCERNS

Nearly half of students and teachers in schools that use student activity monitoring report that this monitoring takes place outside of school hours. Only **45 percent** of teachers report that student activity monitoring is limited to when school is in session.

Moreover, teachers report that their school's response to student activity monitoring alerts is less effective outside of school hours, even though reporting suggests the majority of alerts occur during this time.[7]

Teachers whose school uses student activity monitoring report that their school is less effective at handling alerts after school hours …

Effective during school hours — 77%

Effective after school hours — 60%

% of teachers who report that their school is effective at handling school alerts during/after school hours
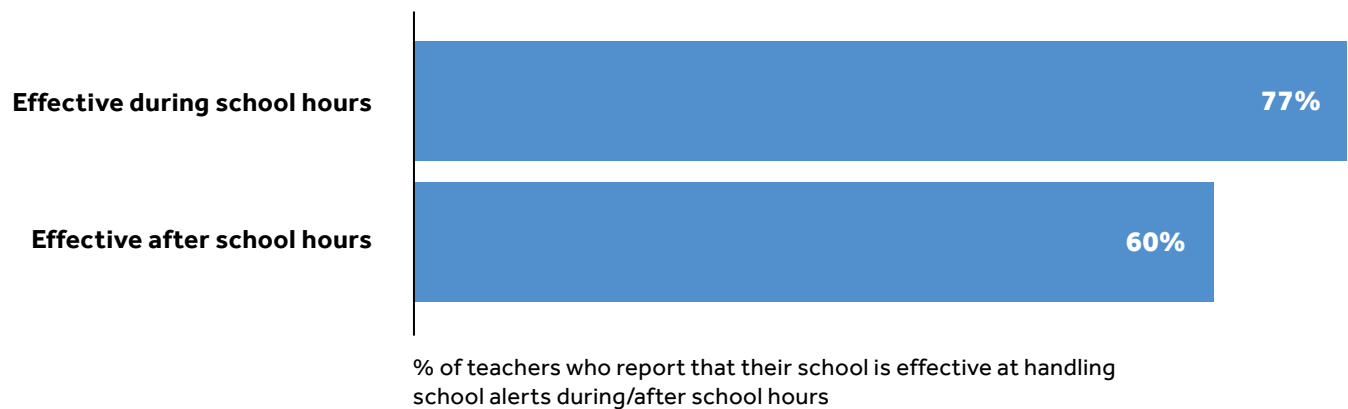
Monitoring outside of school hours also goes against parent and student comfort levels. The vast majority of parents **(73 percent)** and students **(63 percent)** are comfortable with students being monitored during school hours, but that proportion drops to **48 percent** of parents and **30 percent** of students when asked about monitoring student activity all of the time.

STAKEHOLDERS DEMONSTRATE LARGE KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN HOW MONITORING SOFTWARE FUNCTIONS

As described previously, most parents believe that the benefits of student activity monitoring outweigh the harms, but this research suggests that they might not fully understand how it works in practice. In fact, approximately **1 in 5** parents report that they do not know if their school uses student activity monitoring software. Additionally, what teachers report is being communicated to parents and students differs significantly from what parents and students report is being shared and what they retain.

Ninety-two percent of teachers report that a parent and/or student signs a form agreeing to the terms and conditions of how students' school-provided devices can and should be used, which is confirmed by **83 percent** of parents and **78 percent** of students reporting that they signed such a form. However, stakeholders do not agree on what is included in these forms, especially information related to student activity monitoring — for instance, what the school will be looking for, when it will be looking, and how it will be looking (e.g., using third-party software).

Stakeholders disagree about whether forms include details about how the school will track student activity online ...

Parents	Students	Teachers
47%	39%	65%

Report signing a form that addresses how the school will track student activity online

Report parents and/or students signed a form that addresses how the school will track student activity online
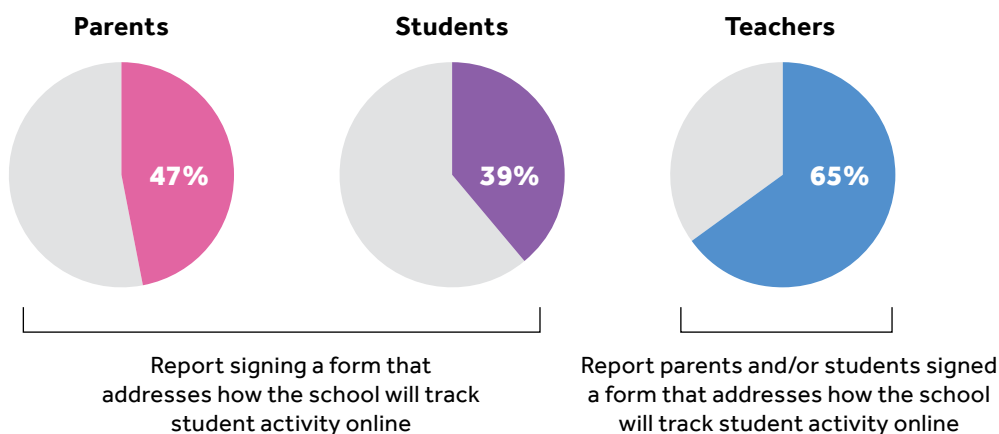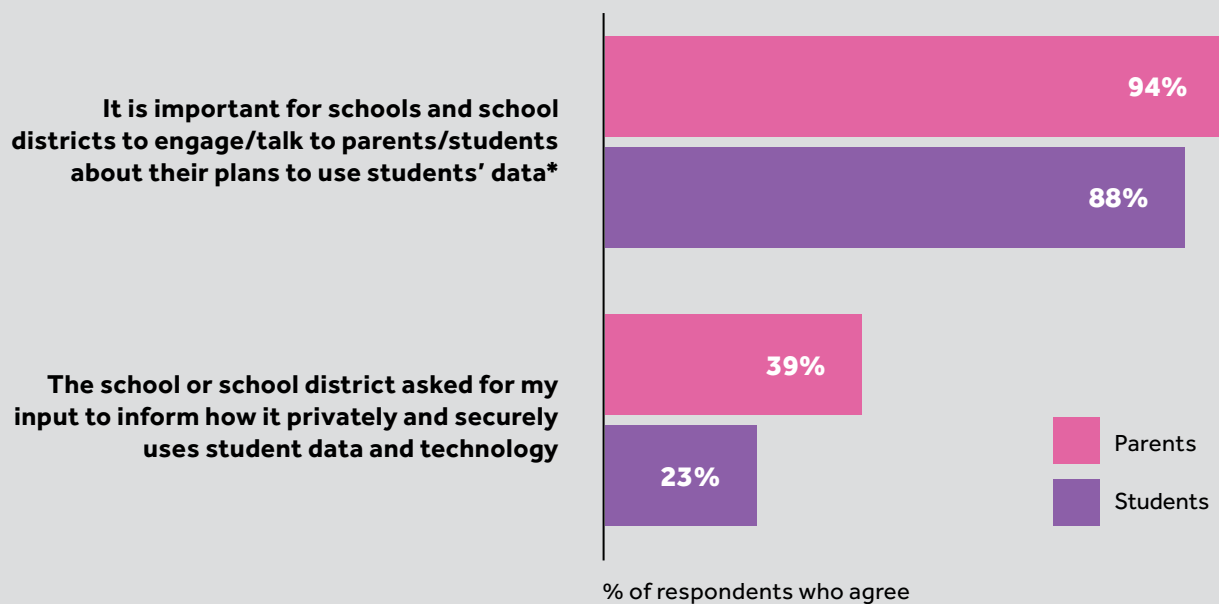
Moreover, the utility of such forms is disputed, as only **1 in 4** teachers report that the form is very effective at influencing how students use school-issued devices (e.g., students complying with the school's terms of service and usage agreements, understanding how their activity will be monitored online, and understanding the ways this data will be used).

Parent and Student Engagement on Monitoring Students Online

A core pillar of responsible data use is engaging those about whom information is collected.[8] In the case of education, information is collected about students and their parents. When it comes to using data and technology to keep students safe, engaging with these audiences has never been more important. In fact, **83 percent** of students agree with the following statement: "It is my responsibility to understand the rules associated with using devices issued by my school." **Eighty-six percent** of students feel that they should have at least some say in how their data and information are collected and used by their high school. However, only **45 percent** of students feel they actually have such a say.

Parents and students want to be engaged in how student data is used but report that schools are not doing so …

It is important for schools and school districts to engage/talk to parents/students about their plans to use students' data*	Parents: 94% Students: 88%
The school or school district asked for my input to inform how it privately and securely uses student data and technology	Parents: 39% Students: 23%

Parents
Students

% of respondents who agree

These findings suggest that education leaders need to do more work to engage parents and students in decisions about the use of data and technology, especially regarding their use of student activity monitoring.

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* In this question, parents were asked about the importance of engaging with parents, and students were asked about the importance of engaging with students.

Deep Dives on Student Activity Monitoring

In addition to the overall trends regarding student activity monitoring, CDT's research suggests four risks that could have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable:

- Students are at risk of increased interactions with law enforcement;

- LGBTQ+ students are disproportionately targeted for action;

- Students' mental health could suffer; and

- Students from low-income families, Black students, and Hispanic students are at greater risk of harm.

> " I've been in this situation [of engaging with law enforcement], and so it hits a little personal for me because it's like my child has this invisible target on their back. … It's a bit overzealous to want to bring law enforcement into this when [schools already have ways] to handle this without having to get law enforcement involved. "
>
> — Parent of high school student

STUDENTS ARE AT RISK OF INCREASED INTERACTIONS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

As noted previously, schools that conduct student activity monitoring rely on third parties to respond to alerts after hours, a practice that increases interactions between students and law enforcement: **37 percent** of teachers at schools that use student activity monitoring outside of school hours report that a third party focused on public safety, such as law enforcement, receives alerts from the monitoring system after hours. **Forty-four percent** of teachers report that one or more students have been contacted by law enforcement because of behaviors flagged by the student activity monitoring system, and **22 percent** of students say that they or another student at their school has been contacted by a police officer or another adult.

This practice raises concerns among both students and parents. **Fifty-seven percent** of students have some concern about data being shared with law enforcement. A **majority of parents** also have concerns, with Black parents expressing more concerns than their white counterparts.

Parents' concern about sharing data with law enforcement varies by race/ethnicity ...

All parents	58%
Black parents*	65%
Hispanic parents	60%
White parents	55%

% who report they are concerned about student data being shared with law enforcement

* The difference in levels of concern between Black parents and white parents is statistically significant. Hispanic parents also express more concern than white parents, though not at a statistically significant level.

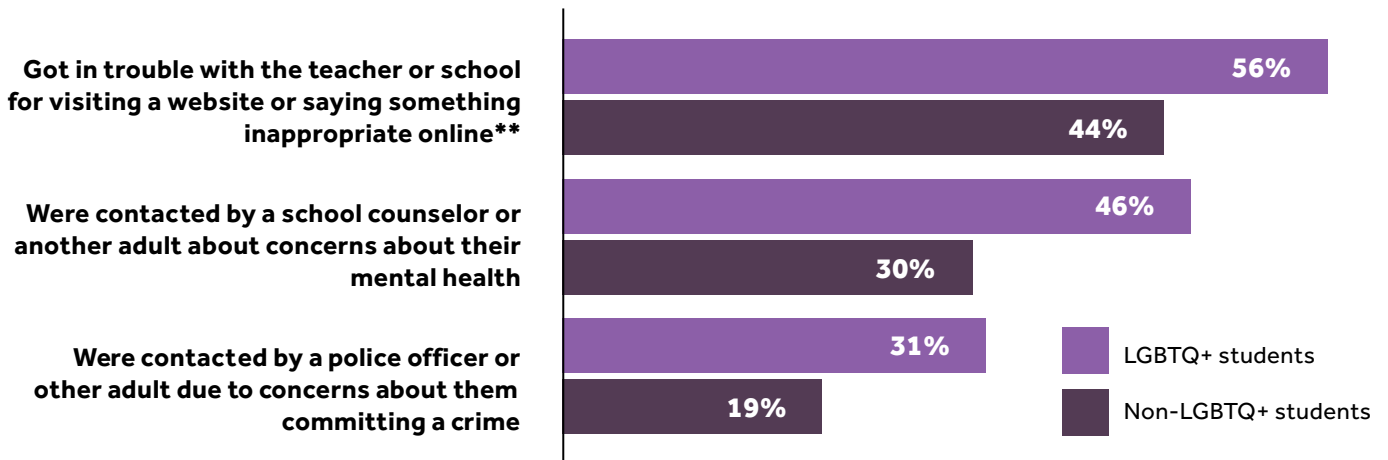# LGBTQ+ STUDENTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY TARGETED FOR ACTION

LGBTQ+ students are experiencing nonconsensual disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender identity (i.e., "outing") due to student activity monitoring. **Thirteen percent** of all students at schools doing student activity monitoring report that they or another student they know who is LGBTQ+ has been outed because of student activity monitoring, and that percentage rises to **29 percent** among LGBTQ+ students. Parents and teachers are concerned about this risk: **51 percent** of parents and **57 percent** of teachers agree that student online activity monitoring could have unintended consequences such as outing LGBTQ+ students.

In addition to nonconsensual disclosure, LGBTQ+ students are more likely to be targeted for action as a result of student activity monitoring.

> "[Outing LGBTQ+ students] could traumatize them. … It really has nothing to do with school. It's not a safety issue."
>
> — Parent of high school student

LGBTQ+ students (or another student they know)* have experienced more effects from student activity monitoring …

Got in trouble with the teacher or school for visiting a website or saying something inappropriate online**
- LGBTQ+ students: 56%
- Non-LGBTQ+ students: 44%

Were contacted by a school counselor or another adult about concerns about their mental health
- LGBTQ+ students: 46%
- Non-LGBTQ+ students: 30%

Were contacted by a police officer or other adult due to concerns about them committing a crime
- LGBTQ+ students: 31%
- Non-LGBTQ+ students: 19%

% of students at schools that use student activity monitoring who report these events have happened to them or another student

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* The question was phrased as "happened to you or another student at your school" to remove any concerns a respondent might have about reporting incidents that directly happened to them. This technique is important to use when asking about sensitive topics among audiences (e.g., high school students) who may be hesitant to report such behaviors about themselves.

** The difference between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students when responding to "got in trouble with the teacher or school for visiting a website or saying something inappropriate online" is directional and not statistically significant. LGTBQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ student responses to the other two questions differ by a statistically significant amount.

STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH COULD SUFFER

The primary stated purpose of student activity monitoring is to keep students safe, for instance by identifying whether students need mental health interventions. **Thirty-three percent** of students at schools using activity monitoring report that they or another student they know has been contacted by a school counselor, social worker, teacher, or other adult due to concerns about their mental health (such as harming themselves) because of this monitoring. That number rises to **54 percent** of teachers reporting that this contact has occurred with a student or students.

At the same time, student activity monitoring is having detrimental effects on students' free expression and could negatively affect their mental health in at least two ways: It could lead them to repress their emotions or to not access resources that could improve their overall mental health.
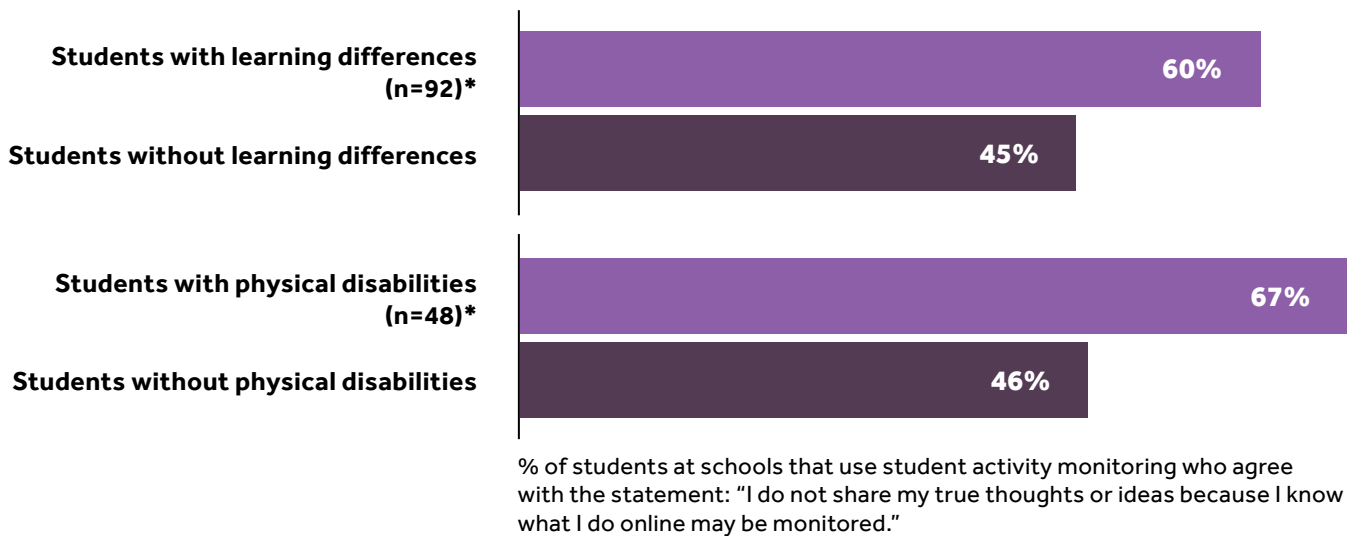
Students attending schools that use student activity monitoring report that they are not expressing themselves openly online or accessing important resources:

- Approximately **5 in 10** students agree with the statement: "I do not share my true thoughts or ideas because I know what I do online may be monitored."

- Approximately **8 in 10** students agree with the statement: "I am more careful about what I search online because I know what I do online may be monitored."

> " I think the focus should be more on encouraging people around [students in need of mental health support] to help these people get help rather than letting the school use software to spy on other people's devices. I don't think that using their devices is the most effective way to stop them from committing self-harm or suicide. "
>
> — High school student

Students with learning differences and physical disabilities report experiencing a greater chilling effect from student activity monitoring ...

Students with learning differences (n=92)*	60%
Students without learning differences	45%
Students with physical disabilities (n=48)*	67%
Students without physical disabilities	46%

% of students at schools that use student activity monitoring who agree with the statement: "I do not share my true thoughts or ideas because I know what I do online may be monitored."

These concerns are shared by parents and teachers. **Seventy-one percent** of parents and **66 percent** of teachers strongly or somewhat agree that students are less likely to be as open and expressive in sharing their personal thoughts and ideas online if their school uses student activity monitoring. Additionally, **66 percent** of teachers are concerned that students are less likely to access resources or visit websites that might provide help to them (e.g., how to come out to your family, how to access mental health supports), which could undermine mental health goals.

STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES, BLACK STUDENTS, AND HISPANIC STUDENTS ARE AT GREATER RISK OF HARM

CDT's previous research showed that students who rely on school-issued devices are subject to monitoring at higher rates than their peers.[9] Previous parent data illustrated that approximately **6 in 10** Black students, **6 in 10** Hispanic students, **7 in 10** rural students, and **7 in 10** students from low-income families rely on a computer or tablet issued by their school — and are consequently more likely than those who use personal devices (who also tend to be more affluent and white) to be subjected to the harms discussed throughout this report.[10]

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* While these findings show that students with disabilities are statistically significantly more likely than their peers to report experiencing a chilling effect on their behaviors, the sample sizes of students with disabilities are small, as noted in the chart.

Existing disparities in school discipline for historically marginalized groups of students parallel the disparate use of student activity monitoring to flag students for disciplinary violations, which is concerning for teachers and parents.[11] **Sixty-two percent** of parents and **68 percent** of teachers agree that student activity monitoring could have unintended consequences for students, such as more frequent discipline for students who rely on school-provided devices.

Unfortunately, these risks are not hypothetical.

Students who report that they or another student at their school has gotten into trouble as a result of student activity monitoring fall disproportionately along racial/ethnic lines ...

All students	46%
Hispanic students*	55%
Black students	48%
White students	41%

% of students at schools that use student activity monitoring who report that this happened to them or another student at their school

With a broader view of student experiences, teachers tell an even more expansive story of discipline. **Seventy-eight percent** of teachers report that student activity monitoring in their school has flagged a student or students for violations of disciplinary policy of any type (**63 percent** for violating academic disciplinary policies and **60 percent** for violating nonacademic disciplinary policies). **Fifty-nine percent** of teachers report that a student has actually been disciplined as a result of activity monitoring.

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* The difference between Hispanic students and white students who report that they or someone they know has gotten into trouble as a result of student activity monitoring is statistically significant. The difference between Black students and white students is not statistically significant but directionally raises concerns that a similar trend may be occurring.

Conclusion

Education leaders should look beyond the promises of monitoring students online to accurately assess whether that monitoring is being used in ways that benefit students — or is hurting students in the name of keeping them safe. This research uncovered important harms, from excessive discipline, to the outing of LGBTQ+ students, to exacerbating interactions with law enforcement, that are currently being imposed upon students and could ultimately undermine their safety and well-being. As a result, education leaders would benefit from an inclusive definition of student safety and well-being that not only seeks to address the devastating impacts of student self-harm and acts of school violence but also mitigates the disproportionate negative impacts of overbroad policing and surveillance.[12] They should pursue alternatives that do not require monitoring students online. Doing so will assist schools in protecting students while creating an educational environment in which students are not only kept safe but also learn, grow, and thrive.

Methodology

This year's surveys comprise a fourth wave of tracking among parents and teachers and a second wave among students. The surveys measure and track changes in perceptions, experiences, training, engagement, and concerns about student data privacy and student activity monitoring. Surveys were conducted in May/July 2020, February 2021, June/July 2021, and May/June 2022.

Online surveys of nationally representative samples of 1,606 6th- to 12th-grade parents and 1,008 6th- to 10th-grade teachers, as well as two surveys of 9th- to 12th-grade students (with n-sizes of 400 and 460) were fielded May/June 2022. For tracking purposes, 2020 and 2021 data has been filtered, weighted, and reported to be comparable to the 2022 data. In these surveys, student activity monitoring was defined as "technology that is used to track student activity online, such as date/time of logins to the system, the contents of students' screens, or the contents of student emails and/or student internet search queries/terms. 'Student activity monitoring' may also enable real-time visibility into what students are looking at on their computers and can occur within a learning management system or through a separate software program."

Endnotes

1   Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, United States Surgeon General (2021) [perma.cc/3MLB-QS97].

2   DeVan Hankerson et al., Online and Observed: Student Privacy Implications of School-Issued Devices and Student Activity Monitoring Software, Center for Democracy & Technology (Sept. 2021) [perma.cc/BA8K-5YUE].

3   Sens. Elizabeth Warren & Edward J. Markey, Warren, Markey Investigation Finds That EdTech Student Surveillance Platforms Need Urgent Federal Action to Protect Students, United States Senate (Mar. 2022) [perma.cc/2DA2-A2X7].

4   Ibid.

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