



TEACHING FOR TOMORROW



Screen Wise

What Teachers Say
About Making Classroom
Technology Work



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SESAME WORKSHOP

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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Introduction

A generation ago, the question was whether schools had enough devices. Today, it's whether schools are using them well. As states and districts weigh limits on instructional screen time, teachers play a central role in making sure that time counts.

New research from the Walton Family Foundation and Gallup, in partnership with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, captures teachers' views on the challenges learning devices pose in K-12 education today. It explores how teachers assess the benefits and drawbacks, and whether use should be expanded or scaled back. The survey, based on responses from 2,101 U.S. K-12 teachers, also covers teachers' oversight of student device use, the policies they believe would improve classroom technology, the guidance they need to use digital tools effectively, and the role they want in selecting new tools.

Teachers neither reject learning devices nor fully embrace them. More than half say parts of today's curriculum can't be properly taught without them, yet most believe students should spend less time on them during the school day.

Rather than calling for broad restrictions, teachers prioritize better governance: stronger oversight of student device use, clearer standards for evaluating digital tools, more transparency in technology decisions and a bigger role for teachers in making those decisions.

The sections that follow detail how teachers weigh the perceived benefits and drawbacks of learning devices, what guidance and preparation they still want, and what changes — starting with stronger oversight of device use — are most likely to improve outcomes for students and teachers.

Key Findings

- 1 **Teachers see value in devices, but few are enthusiastic.** Fifty-nine percent agree digital tools help students learn effectively, and many see particular value for students needing accessibility supports. But only 10% strongly agree that devices help most students learn, and 61% think they should spend less time on them. About half (52%) say devices do as much good as harm, and among the rest, more see net harm (29%) than net benefit (18%).
- 2 **Stronger oversight of device activity is linked to more positive views of technology.** While most teachers can monitor students' screens or lock them remotely, fewer than half (42%) say they have a lot of oversight of students' device activity. Those who do are more likely to say devices help students learn, favor their use and see them as less distracting.
- 3 **Teachers give tepid support to daily limits on screen time.** Just a third strongly support setting maximum daily time limits on device use at school. Most believe such limits would improve student engagement and behavior, but many also expect them to hurt rather than help students' digital readiness and teachers' own workload.
- 4 **Technology creates bigger challenges in middle and high school than in elementary school.** Devices are described as a major or moderate distraction by 18% of elementary school teachers, compared with 42% of middle school and 50% of high school teachers. High school teachers are both the least positive about devices and the least likely to report having strong oversight of students' activity on them.
- 5 **Teachers question how rigorously technology choices are reviewed and planned.** Fewer than four in 10 teachers (37%) say digital tools are usually adequately reviewed before adoption, and just a third (33%) say a new tool's learning goal is usually clear.
- 6 **Teachers want a larger role in choosing digital tools.** Nearly all (95%) support standardizing teacher input on new digital tools, and 92% support clear quality standards, yet only 29% say they've ever been asked to weigh in on a new classroom tool. Those who have are more likely to say their tools help students learn and are a good fit.

Detailed Findings

Screens Are Now Standard Equipment in Classrooms

Digital learning devices are nearly universal in today’s K-12 classrooms: 96% of teachers report that their students use them and 80% say students are assigned their own device. Laptops and Chromebooks dominate, well ahead of tablets, which are more common in elementary grades.

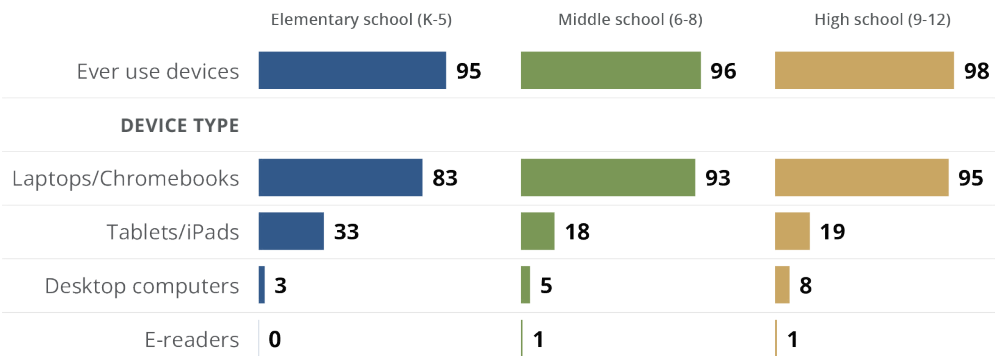
FIGURE 1

Device Use by Grade Level

Do the students you teach ever use laptops, tablets, desktop computers, e-readers or other learning devices in your class(es)?

Which types of learning devices do any of your students ever use in your class(es)?
Select all that apply.

% Selected



Note: Results for device type are among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es).

In a typical week, students most commonly use devices in at least some class periods for independent work (96%) and engaging with main lesson content (87%), followed by support during teacher-led instruction (80%) and collaborating with peers (77%).

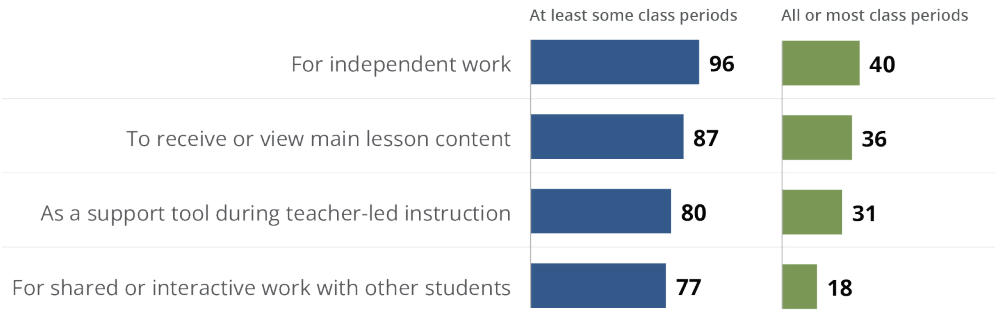
Use is less intensive than it is widespread, however: 40% of teachers report that students use devices for independent work in most or all class periods, and 36% say the same for main lesson content. Rates are lower for support tools (31%) and shared or interactive work (18%).

FIGURE 2

Frequency of Use for Various Types of Classwork

In a typical week, how often do students use learning devices ...

% Selected



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es). “At least some class periods” reflects those saying less than half of class periods or more. Response options include: every class period, most class periods, about half of class periods, less than half of class periods, no class periods.

Elementary school teachers report less frequent device use across every measured activity. For example, 25% say devices are used in all or most class periods for main lessons, versus 45% of middle school teachers and 44% of high school teachers.

Highlighting the importance of screens to instruction, 54% of teachers say parts of the required curriculum cannot be taught properly without devices.



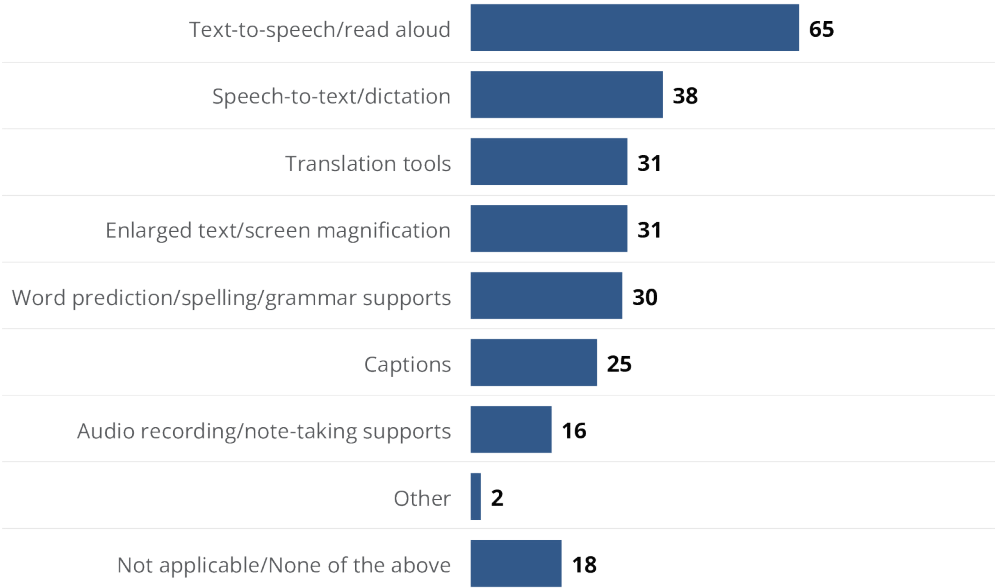
Devices are also clearly supporting accessibility in the classroom. Text readers are the most common support, with 65% of teachers reporting that at least some of their students use these. This is followed by speech-to-text or dictation tools (38%), translation tools (31%), magnified text (31%), and word prediction and spelling and grammar supports (30%).

FIGURE 3

Types of Accessibility Supports Students Use

Which accessibility supports, if any, do any of your students use on learning devices in your class(es)? Select all that apply.

% Selected



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es).

Teachers Like What Devices Do, Within Limits

Fifty-nine percent of teachers agree that the digital tools or apps they use with students help them learn more effectively, but only 10% strongly agree; another 40% are neutral or disagree.

Similarly, 65% agree that the digital tools used with their students are a good fit for them, with 13% strongly agreeing.

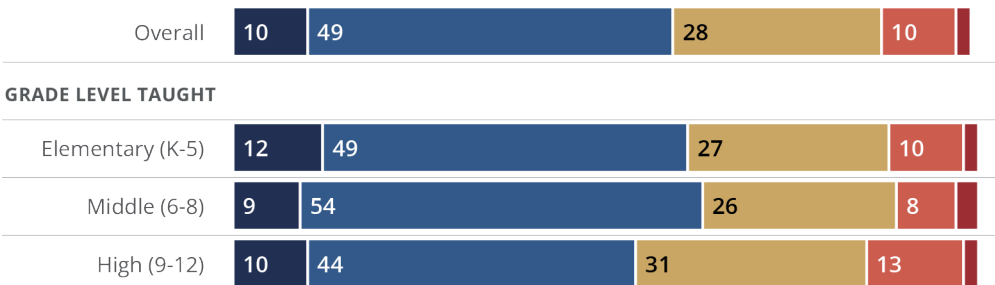
FIGURE 4

Perception of Device Use Helping Students Learn More Effectively

Overall, the digital tool(s)/app(s) used with my students help students learn more effectively.

% Selected

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es). Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Agreement that digital tools help students learn effectively is higher among elementary school (61%) and middle school (63%) teachers than high school teachers (54%).

Agreement is also highest among teachers with the fewest students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Nearly three-quarters of teachers in these wealthier districts (73%) agree the tools they use are a good fit for their students, compared with about six in 10 teachers in schools with higher poverty — a gap that may reflect differences in the tools schools can afford and how well they’re implemented.

Even though many teachers believe technology helps students learn, most want it scaled back. Sixty-one percent of teachers say students should use devices less often, 6% say more often and 33% say about the same amount. Majorities at each grade level favor less time: 55% of elementary school teachers, 67% of middle school teachers and 65% of high school teachers.

Two-thirds of teachers would support making device-based classes paper-based instead: 29% strongly support this and 38% somewhat support it. The other 34% oppose bringing back paper-based materials.



Teachers' overall views of learning devices reflect these reservations. Only 18% say the devices do more good than harm, while 52% say they do equal amounts of good and harm, and 29% say they do more harm than good. High school teachers are the most negative (34% more harm than good), compared with middle school (28%) and elementary school (27%) teachers.

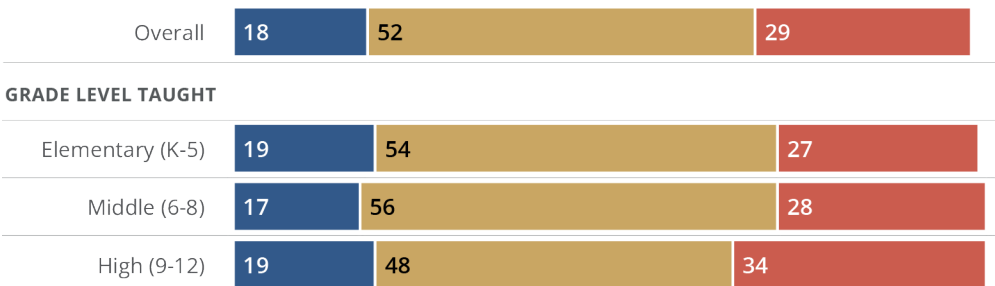
FIGURE 5

Relative Benefit vs. Harm of Learning Devices

In your opinion, do student learning devices do ...

% Selected

More good than harm Equal amounts of harm and good More harm than good



Note: Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Teachers Value Devices for Accessibility

Teachers widely value devices as a tool for differentiation — tailoring instruction to students’ varying needs — even as they are less convinced devices improve learning overall. Majorities say devices are very or somewhat important for English learners (77%), students with an IEP or 504 plan (76%), students needing enrichment or extension (72%), and those needing extra academic support or intervention (71%).

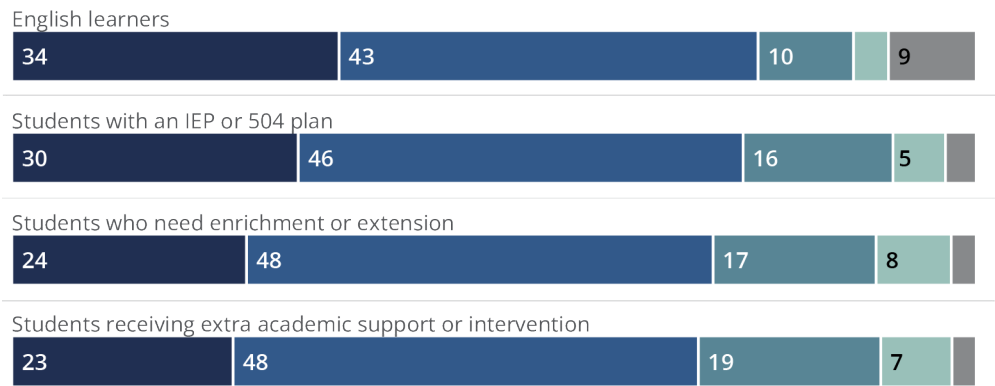
FIGURE 6

Importance of Learning Devices for Students With Various Needs

How important are student learning devices for meeting the learning needs of each of the following groups?

% Selected

Very important Somewhat important Not too important Not important at all
Not applicable/I do not teach this group



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es). Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Screen Distractions Outpace Some Teachers' Ability to Monitor

Overall, 34% of teachers say learning devices are a major or moderate distraction during instruction. But this view rises from 18% of elementary school teachers to 42% of middle school teachers and 50% of high school teachers.

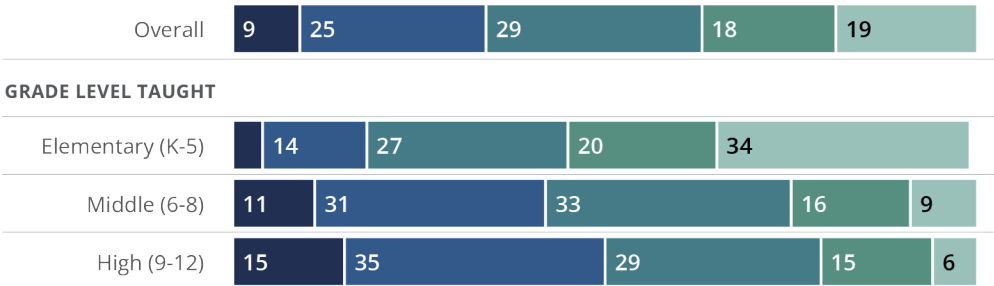
FIGURE 7

Extent to Which Learning Devices Are a Distraction During Instruction

How much of a learning distraction, if at all, are student learning devices during your instruction?

% Selected

- A major distraction
- A moderate distraction
- A minor distraction
- Not much of a distraction
- Not a distraction at all



Note: Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.



Teachers’ reports of the amount of oversight they have over students’ classroom use of learning devices move in the opposite direction of distraction, with higher rates of a lot of oversight among elementary school (51%) and middle school (44%) teachers than among high school teachers (28%).

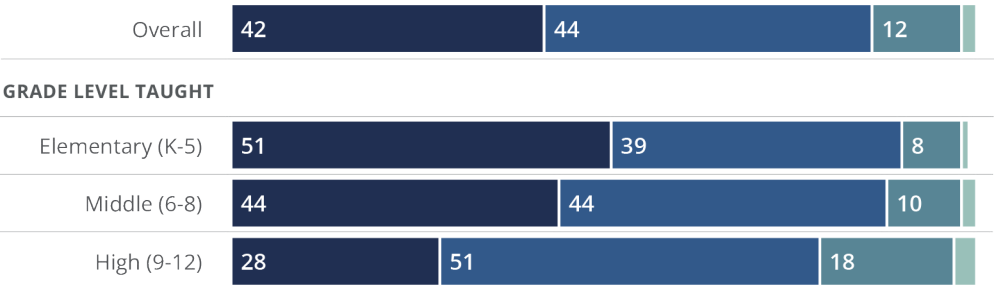
FIGURE 8

Teacher Oversight of Learning Devices During Instruction

Overall, how much oversight do you feel you have over what students are doing on learning devices during instruction?

% Selected

■ A lot of oversight ■ Some oversight ■ Not much oversight ■ No oversight at all



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es). Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Middle school marks a sharp upturn in reports of students finding workarounds on devices during class, jumping from 17% in elementary school to 59% in middle school, before rising to 67% in high school. Notably, middle school teachers report the strongest remote-monitoring capabilities of any grade level (83% can view screens, 78% can lock them), yet they report less overall oversight than elementary school teachers (44% vs. 51%). Thus, it appears monitoring tools themselves may be less effective once students become more technically independent.

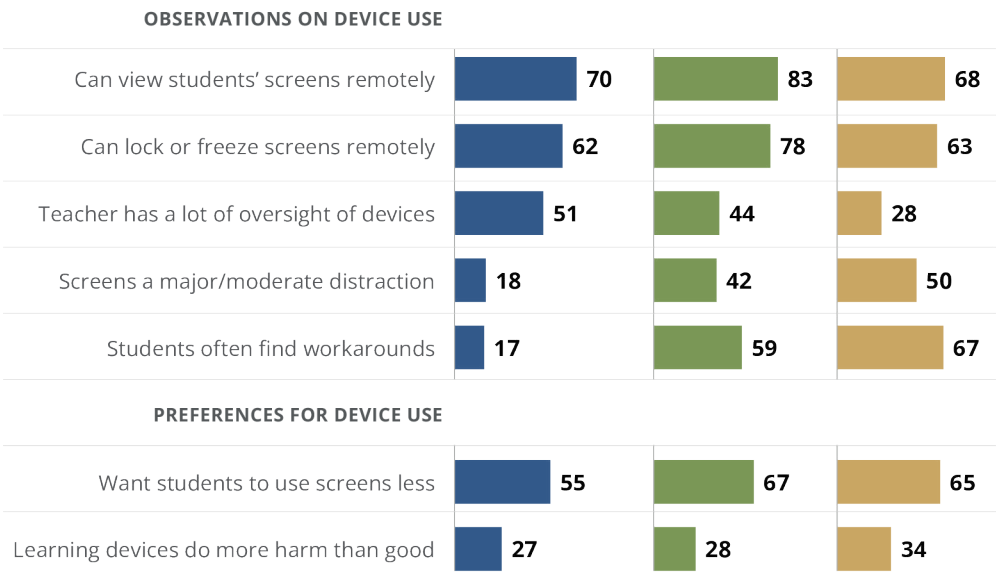
Despite these differences in day-to-day classroom management, teachers' overall verdict on devices is fairly consistent across grade levels: 27% to 34% across elementary, middle and high school say devices do more harm than good, while majorities would like to see students use learning devices less.

FIGURE 9

Summary of Teacher Oversight and Perceptions of Devices, by Grade Level

% Selected

Elementary school Middle school High school



Note: Results for remote monitoring capability, teacher oversight and student workarounds are among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es). All other results are among all teachers.

Greater Oversight Leads to More Positive Views of Devices

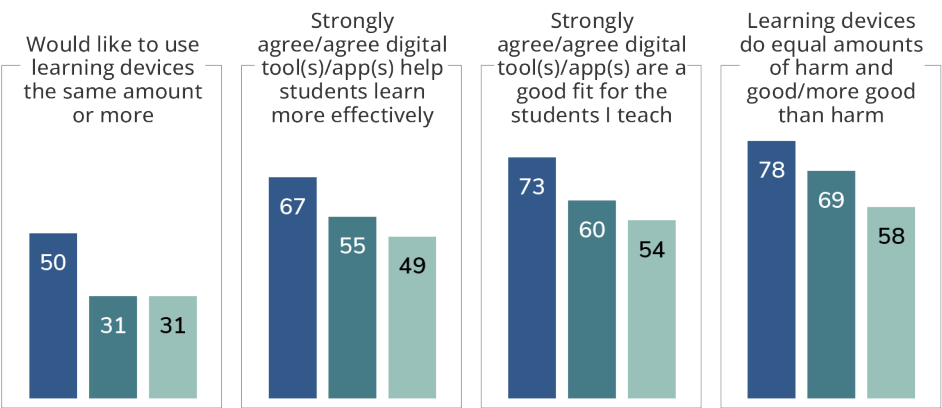
Oversight is a strong dividing line between device advocates and skeptics. The more oversight teachers say they have over students' device use, the more positively they rate devices. That includes saying devices help students learn, fit students' needs and do more good than harm.

FIGURE 10

Positive Evaluations of Learning Devices by Teacher Oversight

% Selected

■ A lot of oversight ■ Some oversight ■ No/Not much oversight



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es).

Teachers with substantial control over students' device use are far less likely to consider learning devices distracting (20%) than those with some oversight (42%) or not much or no oversight (52%).



FIGURE 11

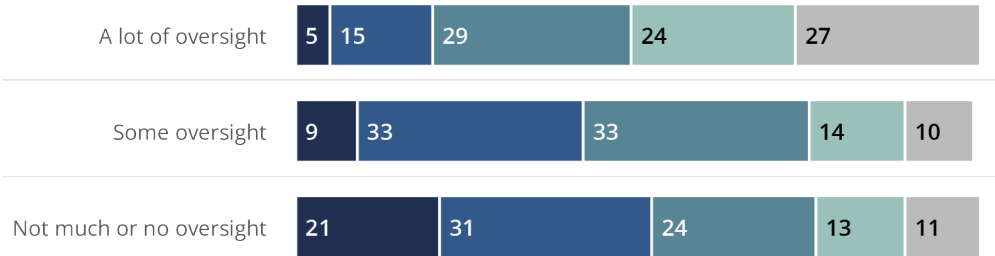
Distraction by Amount of Teacher Oversight

How much of a learning distraction, if at all, are student learning devices during your instruction?

Based on level of oversight teacher has over students' learning devices

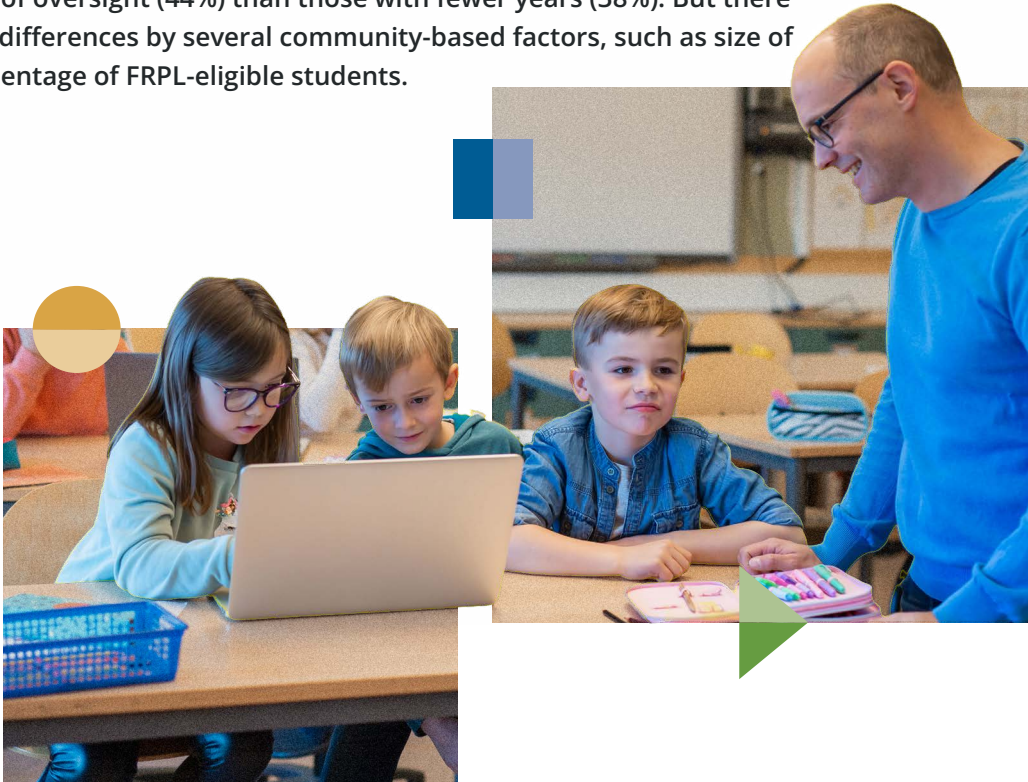
% Selected

A major distraction A moderate distraction A minor distraction
Not much of a distraction Not a distraction at all



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es). Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Time in the classroom may play a role in how much oversight a teacher has: Teachers with 10 or more years of teaching experience are somewhat more likely to report having a lot of oversight (44%) than those with fewer years (38%). But there are no meaningful differences by several community-based factors, such as size of community or percentage of FRPL-eligible students.



Teachers Want Guardrails for Devices More Than Time Limits

Teachers are broadly open to measures that would limit or improve screen use, with overall support for six tested proposals ranging from 73% to 91%. Only two proposals draw strong support from a majority of teachers, however: investing more in non-digital materials (58%) and strengthening device monitoring (54%). By contrast, 34% strongly support setting a maximum amount of school-day device use, a policy that elementary school (40%) and middle school (35%) teachers support more than high school teachers (25%).

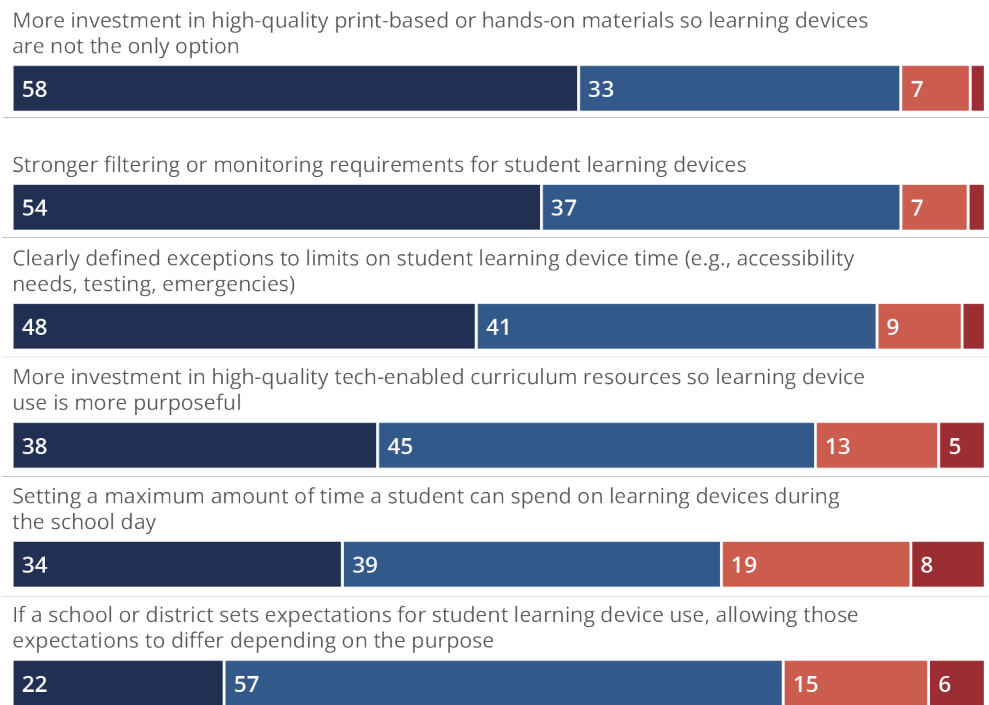
FIGURE 12

Teacher Support for Policies to Manage Students’ Use of Devices

To what extent would you support or oppose each of the following approaches to managing student learning device use during the school day?

% Selected

■ Strongly support ■ Somewhat support ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Strongly oppose

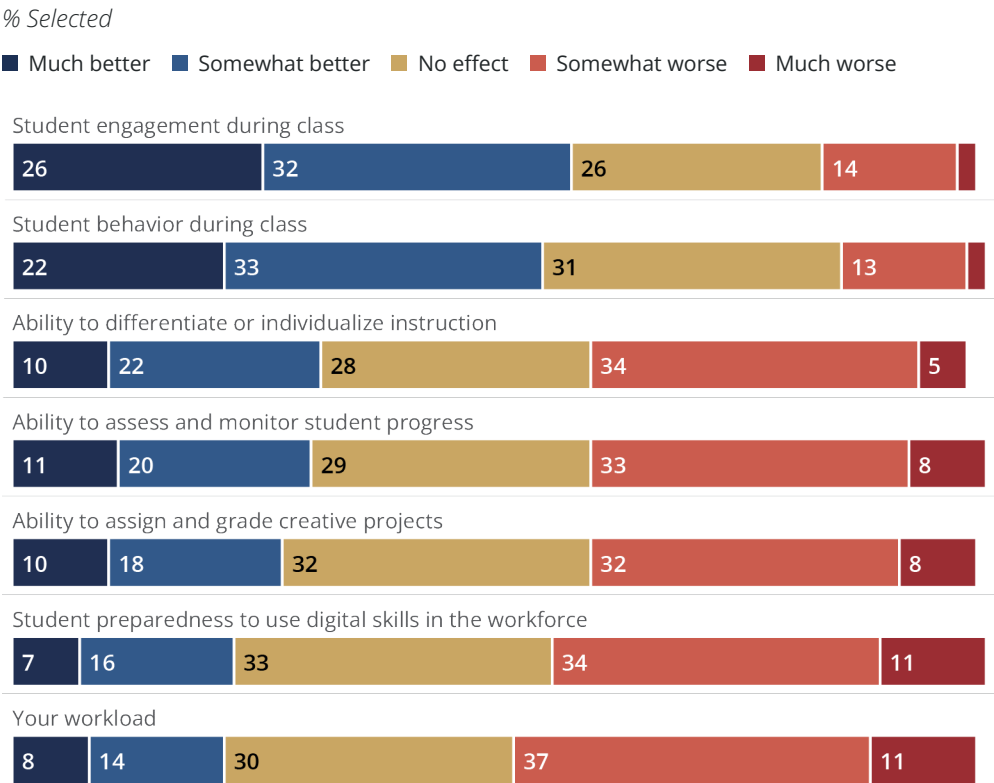


Note: Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

For now, school or district device time limits are rare: Only 7% of teachers report that their school or district has one, and teachers see pros and cons. Most expect time limits would improve student engagement (58% say it would be somewhat or much better) and student behavior during class (55% somewhat or much better). But more teachers believe time limits would worsen rather than improve students’ digital skills readiness (45% vs. 23%) and teachers’ own workload (48% vs. 22%).

FIGURE 13
Effect of Time Restrictions on School Outcomes

If your school restricted the amount of time students can use learning devices during the school day, what effect do you think that would have on ...



Note: Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Coordinating limits across classes is also seen as a practical challenge: 51% say it would be difficult, while 33% say it would be easy. But perspectives differ sharply by grade level.

Most high school (71%) and middle school (64%) teachers say time limits on devices would be difficult to coordinate, while a slim majority of elementary school teachers (51%) say it would be easy.

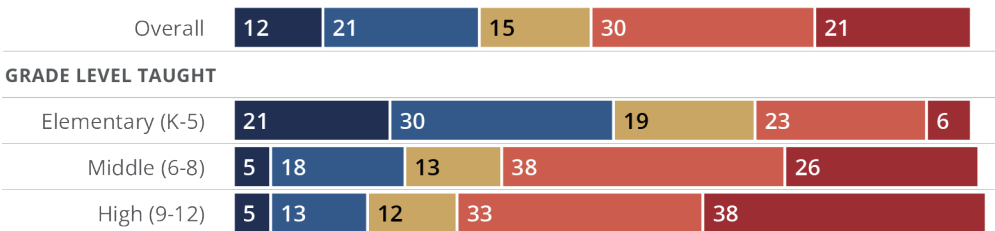
FIGURE 14

Ease of Implementing Daily Screen Time Limits

If a daily maximum for the amount of time a student can spend on a device each day at your school was implemented, how easy or difficult would it be to coordinate to ensure students do not reach the maximum across all classes?

% Selected

Very easy Somewhat easy Neither easy nor difficult Somewhat difficult Very difficult



Note: Among teachers whose school does not have a learning device time limit policy. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Teachers see device oversight as a shared responsibility, but they place the most weight on students (63% assign them a lot of responsibility) and parents (59%), ahead of school leaders (49%), district leaders (48%), teachers themselves (46%) and technology providers (44%).

The balance shifts by grade level, however. The share assigning a lot of responsibility to teachers themselves declines from 58% in elementary school to 44% in middle school and 31% in high school. Conversely, the share assigning students a lot of responsibility rises from 56% in elementary school to 67% in middle school and 69% in high school.

Half of Teachers Receptive to More Guidance on Screen Time Issues

Teachers are about evenly divided over whether they want more support using learning devices: 47% would welcome more guidance and 53% would not, with the split similar across grade levels and subject areas. However, teachers with the largest share of students eligible for FRPL (76% to 100%) are slightly more likely than those with fewer eligible students to want more guidance on learning-device best practices (54% vs. 45%).

Among teachers who want more guidance on using devices in the classroom, the preferred sources are their own school principal or administrator (42%) and district leaders (32%). Far fewer point to ed tech or curriculum vendors (8%) or state-level administrators (8%).

Teachers who want more guidance most often want clear, classroom-ready examples of best-practice device use (55%). Half want clear expectations about the purpose of integrating these devices, such as instruction, assessment or enrichment, and 42% want shared expectations across classrooms within their school.

Teachers' preferences for technology guidance vary sharply by grade level, with elementary school teachers (43%) much more likely to want it differentiated by age or grade than middle school (24%) or high school (19%) teachers. Conversely, middle and high school teachers (52% each) are more likely than elementary school teachers (29%) to want guidance to reflect shared expectations across classrooms.



Skepticism That New Tools Receive Sufficient Vetting or Teacher Input

Teachers see major shortcomings in how new technology is adopted in their schools. Only 37% of teachers say classroom tools are adequately reviewed all or most of the time, and just 33% say a new tool’s learning goal or instructional purpose is clear all or most of the time.

FIGURE 15

Adequacy of Tool Review and Clarity of Purpose

% Selected

Always Most of the time Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

How often do you think digital tools/apps used with students in your school have been adequately reviewed before being used with students?



When you are asked to use a new digital tool/app with students, how often is it clear what learning goal or instructional purpose it is meant to support?



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es). Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Teachers’ confidence that the digital tools they’ve been given have been properly vetted and resourced differs little by grade level or subject taught, but does vary by schools’ economic status, as indicated by the percentage of students eligible for FRPL. Teachers in the highest FRPL schools (the most economically disadvantaged) are almost twice as likely as those in the lowest FRPL schools (the least disadvantaged) to say tools are rarely or never adequately reviewed (23% vs. 13%).

Insufficient review of technology may also reflect teachers’ lack of involvement in the process of vetting or adopting it. Just 29% of teachers say they have been asked to weigh in on a new digital tool. This rate is slightly higher among teachers with 10 or more years in the field (32%) than those working nine or fewer years (24%). Teacher input is also slightly more common in middle school (33%) and high school (31%) than at the elementary school level (25%).

Teachers Want a Seat at the Tech Table

Most teachers favor each of three possible changes to how schools adopt new digital tools: 95% support standardizing teacher input (including 58% strongly), 92% support clear quality standards before adoption, and 92% support giving families more transparency about which tools are used and why.

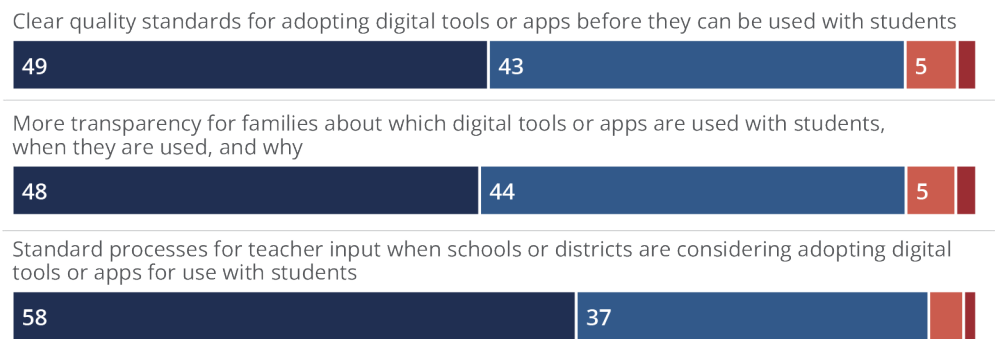
FIGURE 16

Support for Various Technology Development Proposals

To what extent would you support or oppose each of the following approaches related to digital tools or apps used with students?

% Selected

■ Strongly support ■ Somewhat support ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Strongly oppose



Note: Values below 5% not shown. Totals may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Good Tech Decisions Align With More Engaged Teachers

How devices are managed has significant consequences for teachers themselves, not just students. **Teachers who view devices positively, who have had input on new tools and who understand their purposes are far more likely to be engaged at work and to say they know what’s expected of them.** For this analysis, teachers are classified as engaged using Gallup’s validated framework based on four workplace evaluations: having clear expectations, the right materials, opportunities to do their best work and feeling their opinions count.

Teachers More Engaged When Devices Support Students

Teachers are more likely to be engaged in their job when they strongly agree that devices help students learn effectively and fit their students’ needs. Specifically, majorities who strongly agree that devices are effective and suited to their students are engaged at work, but engagement drops to just over a third among teachers who merely agree with these sentiments, and to about one-quarter among those who are neutral or disagree.

FIGURE 17

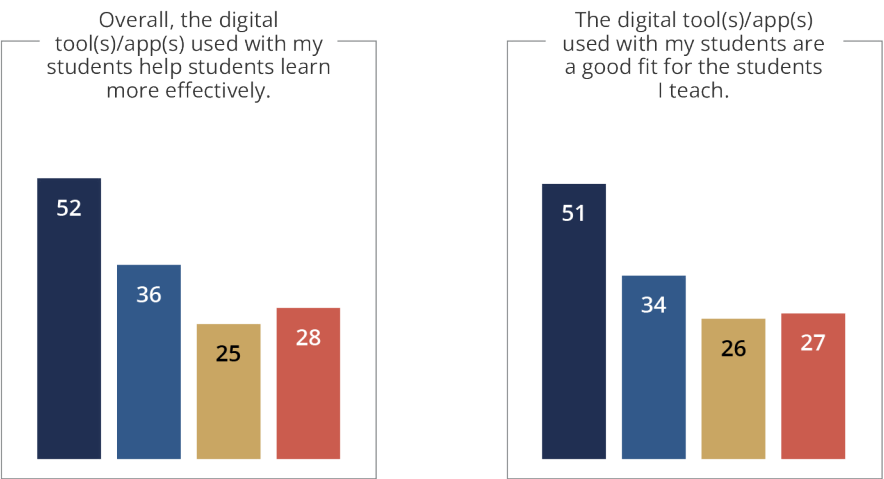
Relationship Between Positive Views of Learning Devices and Teacher Engagement

Link between teacher satisfaction with learning devices and engagement

% Engaged

Teachers who ...

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree/Strongly disagree



Note: Among the 96% of teachers whose students have used learning devices in their class(es).

Teachers With Tech Input Also More Engaged

Teachers are also more likely to be engaged at work when the purpose of new learning devices is clear. Engagement rises from 18% among teachers who say the goals of new technology are rarely or never clear to 31% among those who say they are sometimes clear and 46% among those who say they are clear all or most of the time.

While this relationship could partly reflect differences in how well technology applications are designed, it may also reflect how well a school communicates with and involves its teachers in technology decisions. The data suggest that schools that do this well will have more engaged teachers.

Additionally, teachers who have been asked for input on digital tools view digital learning devices more positively. Whereas 55% of teachers who have not been asked for input think digital tools help students learn more effectively, 70% of teachers who have been asked for input think this. Also, 60% of teachers without input say the digital tools available to them are a good fit for their students, compared with 76% of teachers who have had input.



Conclusion

Digital tools are now a routine part of instruction, and most teachers say some curriculum content depends on them. Still, few see devices as an unqualified benefit: Most perceive their impact as mixed at best, and most want students to spend less time using them during the school day.

These mixed views are closely tied to how devices are managed. Teachers with more oversight of student device use are more positive about devices and less likely to see them as distracting. Those consulted on new tools and who understand why a tool was adopted feel the same way. Together, the findings suggest that stronger teacher control and input may improve technology use as much as changes to the tools themselves.

Evaluations also vary by grade level. Elementary school teachers report fewer problems with distraction and workarounds, while high school teachers face both more often, have less oversight and see schoolwide screen-time limits as harder to implement. Policies are likely to work best when they account for these differences rather than apply a single standard across K-12.

Teachers favor making technology more purposeful and manageable over simply cutting device use. They support limits, but favor teacher input, stronger monitoring, clearer standards and more high-quality non-digital materials even more strongly. They also see tradeoffs in screen-time limits: better engagement and behavior but heavier teacher workloads and fewer chances for students to build their digital skills.

For school leaders, districts and ed tech developers, the opportunity is evident. Teachers embrace technology most readily when its purpose is clear and tools have been carefully reviewed, yet most have never been consulted. Developers can help with clear instructional goals, evidence of effectiveness and transparent communication for stakeholders. Districts can help by building teacher input and quality review into how tools get adopted, and by routing guidance through the school and district leaders that teachers already trust.

As schools reassess technology's role, the question is not only how much time students spend on screens, but how devices are selected, used and managed. Teachers' responses suggest those factors may matter as much as screen time itself.

Survey Methods

Results are based on a web survey conducted May 6-29, 2026, with a sample of 2,101 U.S. teachers working in public K-12 schools. Teachers were recruited from the RAND American Teacher Panel, a nationally representative, probability-based panel of U.S. public school teachers. More information about the RAND American Teacher Panel is available [here](#).

The final sample was weighted to match the school- and teacher-level demographics of K-12 public school teachers in the U.S., including school level, student poverty, student race and Hispanic ethnicity, school size, school urbanicity, teacher gender, teacher race and Hispanic ethnicity, and teachers' years of experience. Targets for these characteristics were retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics. Teacher-level characteristics were based on the 2020-21 National Teacher and Principal Survey, while school-level characteristics were based on the 2023-24 Common Core of Data.

For the total sample of 2,101 U.S. teachers, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Device-specific items were asked only of teachers whose students use learning devices.

About the Teachers Surveyed

The U.S. public K-12 teachers surveyed for this study represent a range of backgrounds and classroom experiences.

Reflecting the grade span within each school type, 37% of surveyed teachers work in elementary schools, 28% in middle schools and 35% in high schools. Roughly four in 10 teach in suburban districts (39%), while 31% teach in towns or rural districts and 30% in urban districts. Many teachers surveyed work in midsize schools — those with 500 to 999 students (39%). About a third work in smaller schools, and 28% work in larger schools.

Twenty percent of teachers work in districts where no more than a quarter of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, while 23% work in districts where three-quarters or more qualify.

The majority of teachers have a master's degree or higher (72%) and have taught for at least 10 years (78%). Most teachers also say they are fluent only in English (86%). Among the 14% fluent in another language, 5% say English is not their first language.

Fluency in a language other than English differs little by grade level but varies more by community: Teachers in urban districts (19%) are about twice as likely as those in rural areas or towns (9%) to speak another language. Also, ESL teachers are much more likely than non-ESL teachers to be multilingual (39% vs. 11%), though majorities of both groups speak only English.

In terms of their emotional experiences, 40% of teachers, consistent with Gallup findings since late 2024, say they always or very often feel burned out at work, with the rate higher among teachers working less than 10 years in the profession (45%). Yet about two-thirds of teachers are satisfied with their place of employment and 91%, the highest reading in the trend since 2024, say they plan to continue teaching in K-12 next year.

GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

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