CoSN
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2025
BLASCHKE REPORT

SCREENS IN BALANCE:
EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Cooper Sved
Consortium for School Networking
Blaschke Fellowship – Summer 2025
Screens in Balance: Education, Technology, and Community Conversations

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nea National Education Association

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Executive Summary

The ubiquity of screens in American K–12 schools has become pressing and controversial issues in public education. This report examines the different ways screens appear in classrooms and homes. It also examines how educators, families, and policymakers can work together to navigate their inevitable impact on children.

Our report aims to clarify the term "screen time" as it relates to children in K-12 education. In public debates, the term is often used without distinction, making complex and thoughtful conversations between relevant parties difficult. Schools encounter screens in three primary forms: **smart phones and social media, educational technology (EdTech), and screen-based entertainment.** Each carries different risks and opportunities for children both in and out of the classroom setting.

Smart Phones and Social Media

Smart phones and social media applications (like Instagram and TikTok) used by K-12 students are at the center of a feverous national conversation. States and districts across the country have moved quickly to restrict their use via state and local legislation, citing distraction, safety, and mental health as primary catalysts. As of Fall 2025, almost two-thirds of U.S. states and territories have enacted wide-sweeping legislation related to smart phone use in K-12 schools (EdWeek, 2025). While schools cannot control the pervasiveness of smart phones or the financial incentives of their app's designers, they are responsible for managing use within the classrooms and maintaining clear communication with families about what restrictions are in place.

Educational Technology (EdTech)

Unlike social media, EdTech is developed exclusively for instructional purposes. When used with intention and balance, it can support differentiation, accessibility, enrichment, and workforce preparation in the K-12 classroom. EdTech is not a replacement for instruction, however; it works best as a supplement to high-quality teaching (Masiello et al., 2023). Its success depends on the training educators receive and the degree to which its use aligns with local pedagogical structures (Niederhauser & Howard, 2018). Without sustained support, technology risks overwhelming teachers rather than empowering them.

Screen-Based Entertainment

A child's relationship with screens begins long before entering the school system. Television, video games, and other screen-based entertainment media dominate the early lives of American children . This shapes long-term technology habits and expectations while also contributing to "parental screen guilt" (Wolfer et al., 2024), a phenomenon describing the negative feelings from parents when they feel that they have an overreliance on screen media as a parenting tool. These feelings can influence how families interpret educational screen use and may help explain why district decisions about technology can be contentious.

Educators as Public Figures

Educators, both in instructional and leadership roles, stand at the intersection of debates over educational policies and their implementation. Though they do not always have a hand in the policies they are subject to, they are responsible for carrying them out and explaining them to their classroom communities. Their ability to communicate consistently and thoughtfully is essential for maintaining community trust. That community trust can also be built through high-quality teaching and pedagogical structures, which should result in positive academic outcomes. As the conversation over screens and EdTech continues to evolve, teachers and site leaders must use their technological resources with efficacy while simultaneously relaying said efficacy to families.

Recommendations for Educators

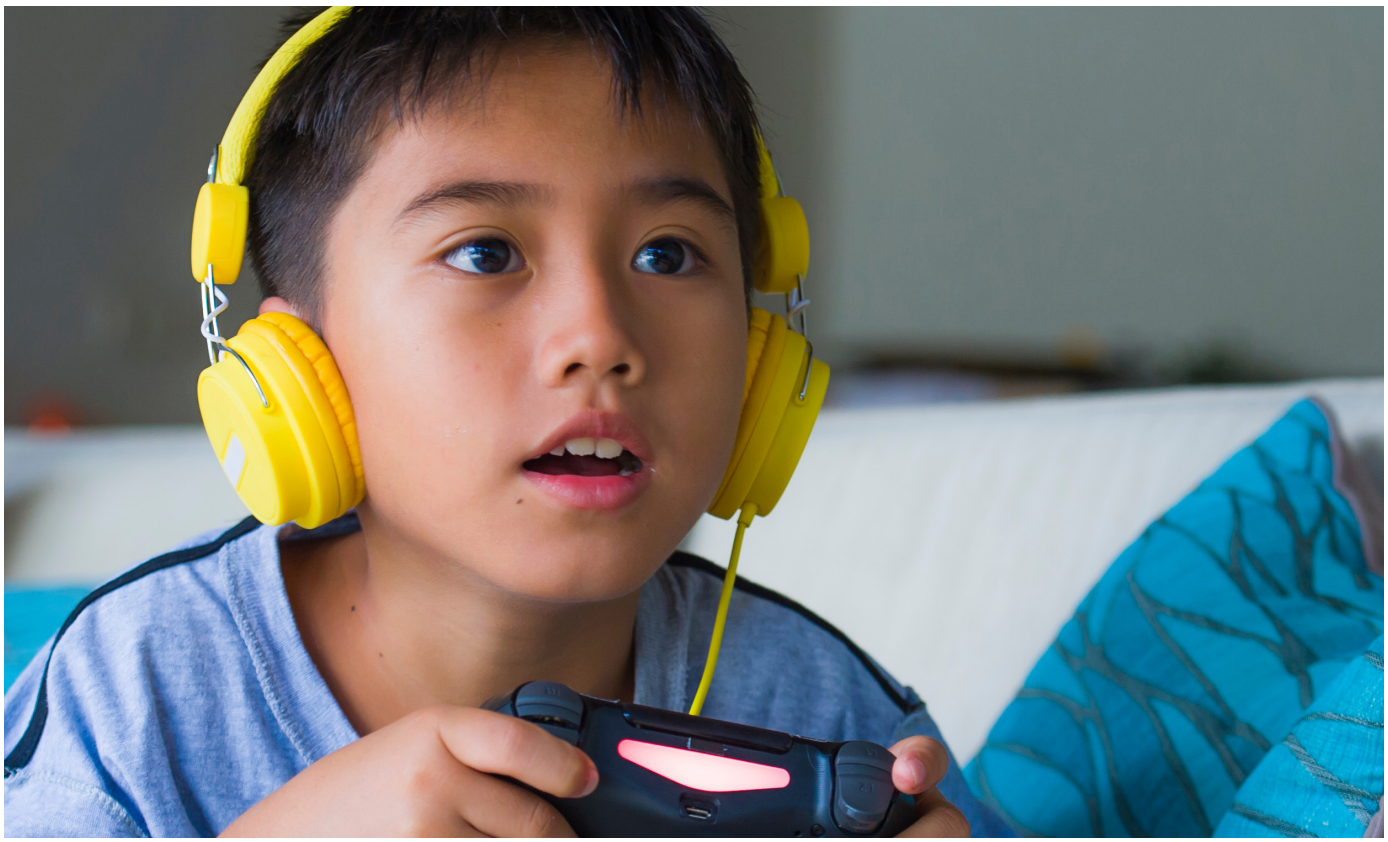
• Provide both new and experienced teachers with ongoing, context-specific professional development for using EdTech effectively.

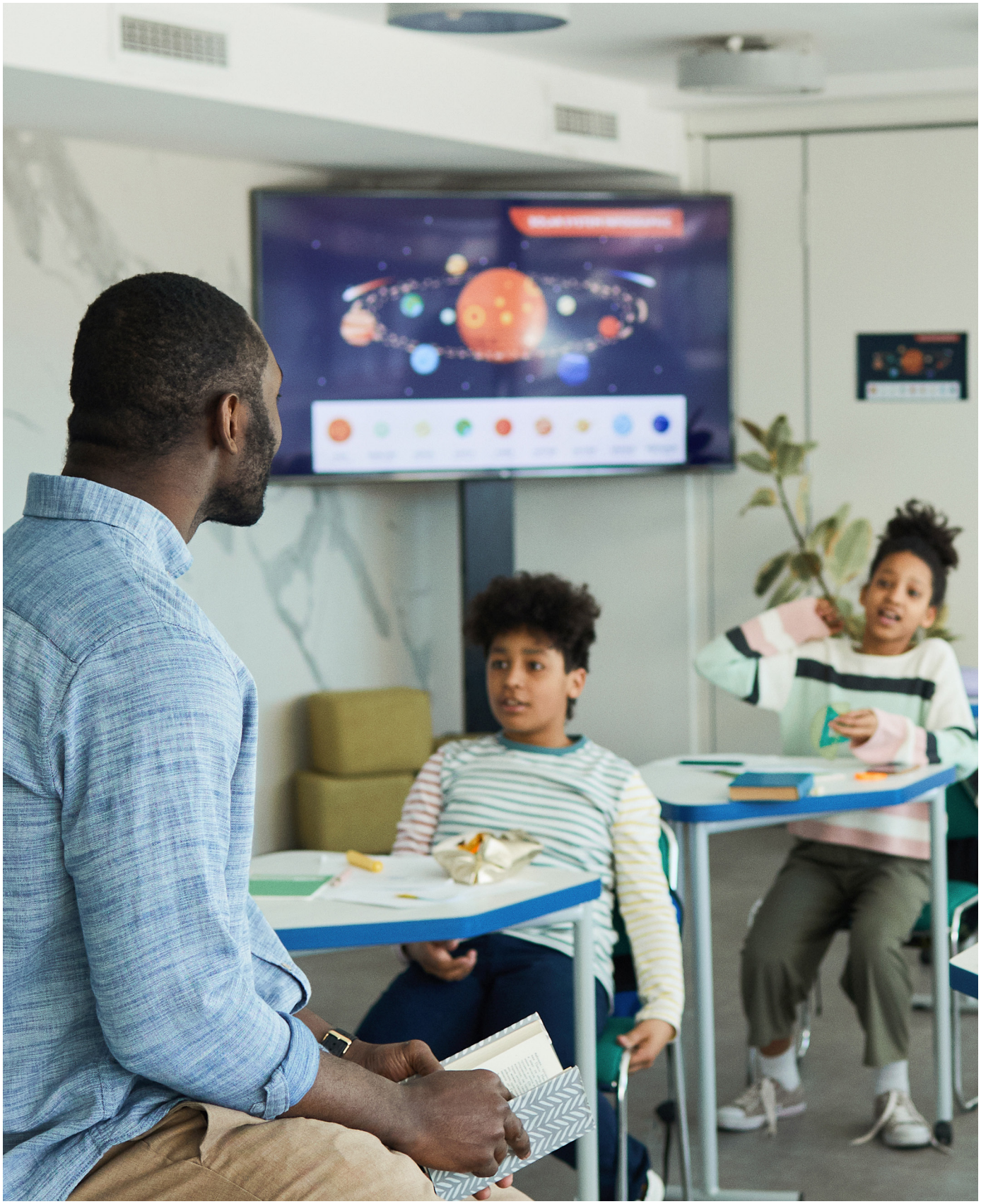
• Teach and model digital citizenship, showing students how to balance the academic and social dimensions of screen use.

• Ensure school and district leaders articulate a clear vision for how screens fit into instruction, aligning decisions with both local needs and community expectations.

Conclusion

Screens are now a permanent feature of K–12 schooling. The central challenge is not whether they belong in classrooms, but how they can be integrated in ways that strengthen learning, promote equity, and preserve public trust. By distinguishing among different manifestations of screen use and addressing their unique impacts, schools can move toward more constructive, community-centered conversations about technology.





Glossary

504 Plan: An individualized plan designed to ensure an appropriate and responsive education for students with disabilities that participate in programs receiving federal financial assistance. Developed in accordance with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Section 504 covers students who are determined to:

• Have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or
• Have a record of such an impairment; or
• Be regarded as having such an impairment.

Choice Board: A visual menu of options for students to choose from in academic or non-academic settings. Designed to facilitate student choice and ownership over their education.

Differentiation: An instructional technique that includes various ways to teach content and assess learning. It is used to meet student needs and differences in readiness, interests, and learning styles.

Economically Developed Country: A country with high amounts of industrial activity and citizens with relatively high incomes.

Educator: A person who teaches people. Encompasses classroom teachers, school leaders, and anyone in direct, authoritative contact with students in an academic setting.

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs): Any program designed to train and certify new educators. These are often, but not always, housed within colleges and universities.

Educational Technology (EdTech): Technological resources designed to support educators in teaching their students. May refer to hardware (e.g. laptops; tablet computers) or software (e.g. online math programs; editing software).

Enrichment Program: Programs and experiences that supplement classroom instruction either during or after school hours. Enrichment activities extend student thinking beyond their established grade-level concepts.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): An individualized, legally-binding program of action designed to serve the unique needs of students with disabilities. This plan requires accommodation and understanding by all staff members.

K–12: Referring to the range of years students spend within a traditional public school system (kindergarten through twelfth-grade).

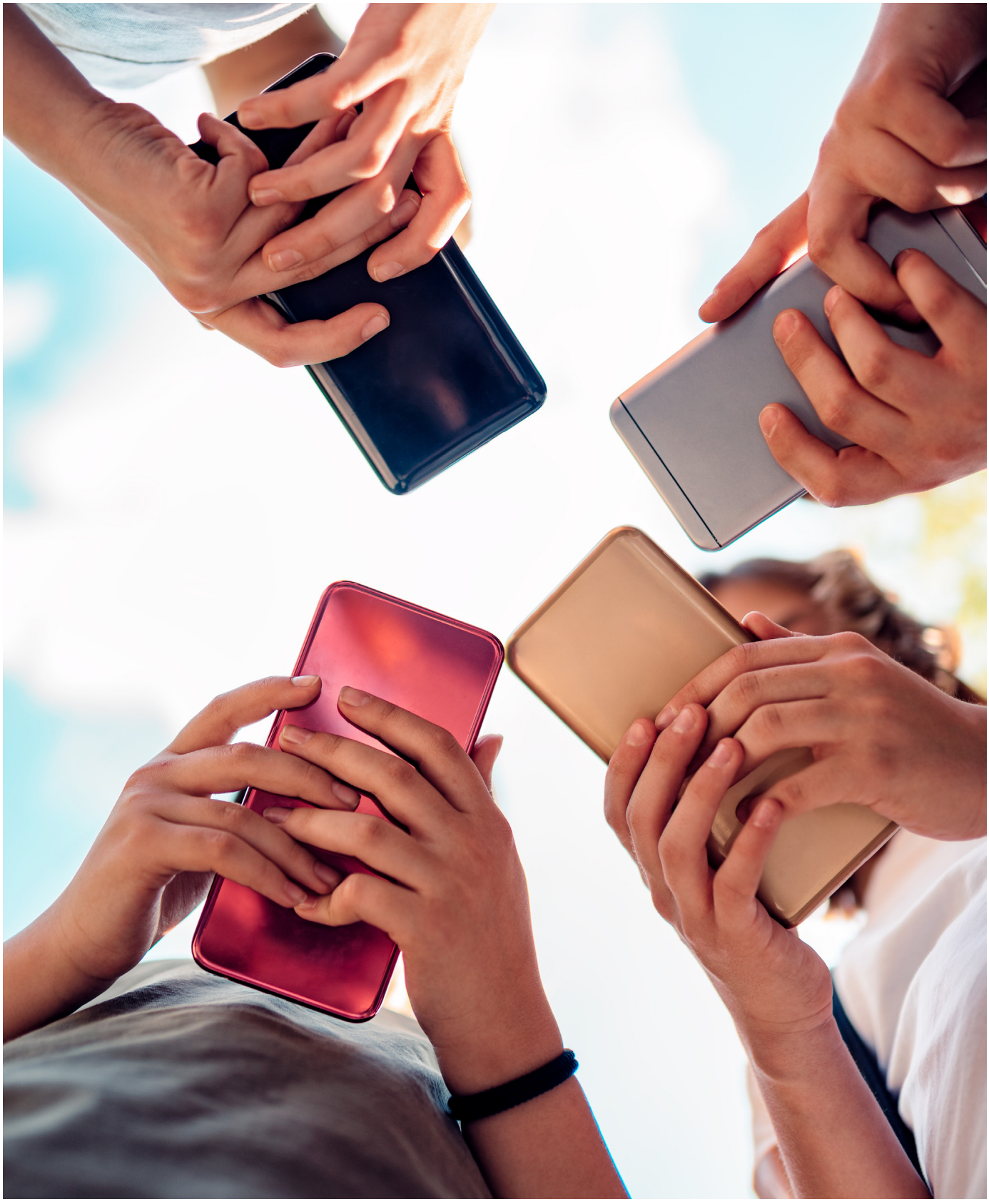
No Child Left Behind (NCLB): U.S. federal law aimed at improving public primary and secondary schools, and thus student performance, via increased accountability for schools, school districts, and states. The act was passed by Congress with bipartisan support in December 2001 and signed into law by Pres. George W. Bush in January 2002. States were not legally mandated to follow NCLB, but non-compliance would result in the loss of federal funds for education programs.

One to One (1:1) Model: A model for the dissemination of student EdTech hardware. Under this model, all students are given and responsible for their own device (laptop, tablet, etc.) that will be used for classroom activities. Most K–12 schools in the United States operate on a one-to-one model at all grade levels.

Parental Screen Guilt: The phenomenon of parents feeling guilty or frustrated at their use/overreliance on screen-based activities as a form of childcare.

Screen: A surface that can display electronic images (e.g. televisions; computer monitors).

Special Education: A system or program within school systems designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities or learning differences.



Report Developers

About CoSN (Consortium for School Networking)
CoSN is a world-class professional association for K-12 EdTech leaders with the mission to provide professional development resources for EdTech leaders, their teams, and districts, allowing them to cultivate engaging learning environments. CoSN's represents over 14 million students and continues to grow as an influential voice in K-12 education. Learn more about CoSN here.

The Blaschke Fellowship Fund
The Blaschke Fund was created by CoSN to support emerging leaders in education technology policy and advocacy. This memorial fund honors the late-industry giant Charles Blaschke, who conducted pioneering research and analysis on the ever-changing U.S. education landscape for over 50 years. Through the fellowship, graduate students have the opportunity to develop research along with CoSN in topics related to digital equity, protecting privacy of education data, enabling accessibility or other key topics. Learn more about the Blaschke Fellowship here.

Cooper Sved
The Blaschke Fellow for 2025 is Cooper Sved. Currently, Cooper serves as a proud Sixth Grade teacher in the Washington, D.C. area. He is finishing his Master's in Education Policy at George Washington University and has served as an intern for the U.S. House of Representatives and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). He also holds a master's in teaching from the University of Richmond and a bachelor's in theatre from Virginia Commonwealth University. He dedicates his career to the memories of Mary Emily Kitterman, his grandmother, and Adam Turck, his dear friend.

In addition to preparing this report, Cooper developed the Screen Time Toolkit to help educators facilitate thoughtful conversations about EdTech with their school communities.

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Methodology

This report is the product of a summer-long exploration of screen use in public education via academic journals, contemporary news articles, and semi-structured interviews with various professionals working in EdTech and K-12 spaces (including, but not limited to, school principals, district-level EdTech leaders, teacher's union representatives, and CoSN staff).

Cooper Sved, CoSN's 2025 Blaschke Fellow, began by creating an annotated bibliography that covered the following topics: Screentime and Child Development; School Leadership; Parent Perspectives on EdTech; Social Media; and Digital Citizen Education.

The questions asked during the semi-structured interviews were dependent on the subject's professional background. Each interview aimed to gather the subject's perspectives on screen use in schools, conversations about screens in their professional communities, and ideas for resources that may help schools communicate with families about EdTech.

The methods used to develop this report were also used in the development of CoSN's Screen Time Toolkit.

Acknowledgements

The report's developer would like to thank the following people and organizations who, in one way or another, helped make this report a reality:

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically reshaped the landscape of American education technology (EdTech). School districts were, with little warning, forced to quickly develop an infrastructure for all-digital learning (Heise, 2023). If they didn't already have one, students at all grade levels were given a personal learning device to help facilitate this monumental shift in K–12 learning. Upon emerging from the pandemic, districts found themselves with a range of new educational hardware and software. Though screens had been present in most K–12 schools before the pandemic, they had assumed a ubiquity that no principal or superintendent could have predicted. What were educators going to do now that most, if not all, of their classrooms had one-to-one devices?

While school districts were navigating their new circumstances, a new generation of children were presented with unparalleled access to burgeoning, rapidly-evolving, and unregulated new technologies. This, in conjunction with a media ecosystem dependent on rapid and repetitive engagement and the growing prevalence of artificial intelligence (See: 2024 Blaschke Report on AI and Accessibility) has created a new kind of digital nativism. Children in the United States, more than ever, are immersed (and functionally dependent) on their screens (McArthur et al., 2021).

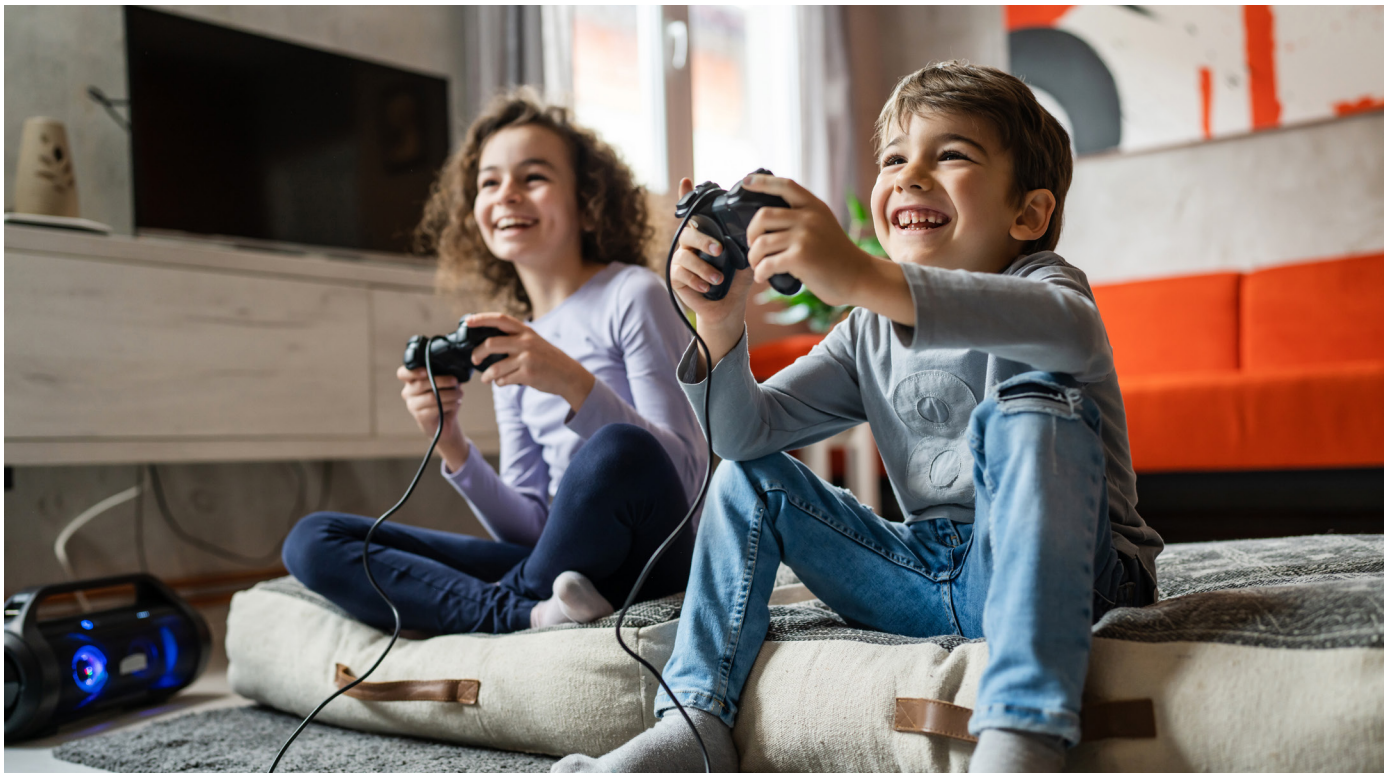
In such a disjointed and untested ecosystem, K–12 schools are presented with a unique opportunity. They, more than any other American institution, have the chance to harness the power of this new digital landscape to prepare the workforce, promote student individuality, and uplift marginalized populations. To accomplish this lofty goal, American schools must proceed with thought, intention, and care. The long-term impacts of screen time on modern students depend on the steps we take at this very moment.

What Do We Mean By “Screen?”

In this report, we (i.e. CoSN) attempt to frame the current conversation on screens in schools. To start, what do we mean by the word “screen?” We are bombarded by digital displays both in and out of the classroom. Smart watches, fast food restaurant menus, slide decks, and e-ink reading devices all count as examples of everyday screen use. For the purpose of discussing K–12 education, it will be important to narrow our scope.

In the K–12 classroom, we use “screen” to refer to an **electronic panel used to display continuous and self-contained digital information.** We use self-contained to exclude instances where screens are used to supplement intentionally designed, high-quality in-person instruction. For example, slide decks, if used alongside an in-person experience, are not included within the scope of this report.

The “screen” may, however, refer to a smart phone or smart watch that may serve as a repeated distraction to student learning. “Screen” in our context will refer to digital tablets, laptops, smart phones, and whole-class projections that do not supplement in-person instruction (e.g. watching a video). In a students’ home, a screen may also include a desktop computer, handheld gaming console (e.g. Nintendo Switch), or a television. In all cases, screen use can refer to either active OR passive participation by the user.



"The term 'screen time,' if used without specificity, may conflate multiple kinds of screen use that are distinct and equally worthy of our care and attention."

Clarifying the Conversation

There is a pervasive national (and international) conversation on children and "screen time". "Screen time," though, is an umbrella term. Though screens are ubiquitous in 2025, they vary significantly in purpose and functionality. The term "screen time," if used without specificity, may conflate multiple kinds of screen use that are distinct and equally worthy of our care and attention. To help clarify our work, we have identified three relevant manifestations of "screen time" that require separate conversations and, indeed, separate solutions. We do understand, though, that these manifestations do share a connective tissue. When one mentions "screen time," they may be referring to: smart phones and social media; educational technology (Ed-Tech); or screen-based entertainment.

For a more in-depth overview of why we must "Clarify the Conversation," see **Appendix One: What Does Screen Time Mean, Anyway?**

An infographic detailing the three manifestations of "screen time" for educators and families can be found in CoSN's Screen Time Toolkit.

Smart Phones and Social Media

Smart phone use has dominated the national and political conversation about screens in classrooms. Specifically, smart phones are discussed as tools for social media consumption by adolescents and teenagers. An estimated 53% of children aged 8-12 (Toscano & Schmitt, 2024) and 95% of teens aged 13-17 (Pew Research Center, 2025) in the United States have access to a smart phone. There has been growing concern in recent years that these devices are, in fact, contributing to poor social behavior, mental health, and academic performance in K–12 students. In 2024 and 2025, in response to this national concern, the majority of U.S. states passed some form of legislation related to smart phone use and restrictions in schools.

For a more in-depth overview of smart phone use and legislation, see **Appendix 2: Smart phones, Schools, and Solutions.**

Educational Technology (EdTech)

Coinciding with concerns over smart phones in schools are worries over the ubiquity of screens and screen-based activities in the K–12 classroom. Despite these concerns, EdTech resources have the power to radically enhance teacher practices and, in turn, positively affect student outcomes (Johnson et al., 2016). Thoughtful and intentional academic screen time, when paired with high-quality instruction from a professional educator, can be transformational (see: RAT model; SAMR model). It is also important to note that EdTech companies and social media companies operate within different markets and financial incentives for their products. Because they are funded via ad revenue, social media companies are most lucrative when users spend long amounts of time on their platform. Conversely, EdTech companies are most lucrative when they are able to foster consistent student academic growth and, in turn, stay contracted with school districts.

For a more in-depth overview of EdTech, see **Appendix 3: Performance Without Paper.**

Screen-Based Entertainment

Before children are given access to a personal smart phone, they have already been inundated with screens as tools for entertainment and leisure. These screens can come in many forms, like desktop computers, video game consoles (like Nintendo Switch, which has its own built-in screen), televisions, and, most commonly, tablets. By 2021, 80% of households with children have some form of tablet computer while 64% of households overall have a tablet computer (Mejía, 2023). U.S. parents have not only shown a willingness to offer these kinds of devices to their children, in many cases, they see screen media as

a form of babysitting (Chong et al.,2023). Children' s screen use goes well beyond smart phones, it often begins before they even get to kindergarten. A recent study has even shown a correlation between leisurely screen use (social media, video games, etc.) and strong SAT scores (Hales & Hampton, 2025). This study questions the assumption that digital entertainment, generally, lacks educational value.

For a more in-depth overview of Screen-Based Children's Entertainment, see **Appendix 4: A Digital Childhood.**

Supplement, Not Replacement

Screen-based EdTech resources are not, and should never aim to be, a replacement for high-quality in-person instruction from a trained educator. K–12 schools are not sites of autonomous production. Concrete academic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, etc.) certainly should serve as primary goals for teachers and students. They are not, however, taught in a silo. K–12 education is designed for the development of a student's academic AND socio-emotional skillsets. Trained educators, in turn, are facilitators of critical INTERPERSONAL experiences. In academic settings, students are challenged by both content and environment; K-12 students must simultaneously navigate personal and social responsibilities. Furthermore, students do not arrive at school on the same socio-emotional footing. Schools are not just sites for new social experiences, but spaces for modeling thoughtful behavior and meeting those who experience the world differently. This emphasis on empathy, cooperation, and relationship-building, while not explicitly assessed, is a vital part of building a new generation of citizens and workers. Screens and artificial intelligence are simply unequipped to facilitate these kinds of experiences on their own.

Screen use in the classroom is not a polar issue, however. An all-or-nothing approach to this conversation denies teachers and students access to meaningful and practical digital experiences that, indeed, bolster the classroom learning experience. Not only have EdTech resources been thoroughly woven into school district and teacher preparation infrastructures, but they are vital for differentiation, access, and nuts-and-bolts workforce development (this will be expanded upon in a later section, Screens in Schools). The key to resource implementation, though, is educator development. Teachers and administrators cannot instinctively know how to incorporate new technologies effectively. We cannot expect them to guess best practices and hope for the best. Since EdTech will (and should) continue to supplement in-person instruction, it will be necessary to continue developing educators into effective designers of a multi-modal classroom experience.

For more on teacher development, see **Appendix 7: EdTech Professional Development.**

Educators can use CoSN's Teacher Reflection and Administrative EdTech Audit documents, parts of the Screen Time Toolkit, to help clarify their use of available classroom technologies.

Screens in Schools

One-to-one computing in K–12 classrooms serves as just one example of the prominence of screen use in the lives of children in the United States. Social media, video game platforms, YouTube content, and tablet applications define media consumption by children currently attending K–12 schools.

School districts offer a range of resources to teachers that rely on screens. In many cases, the use of screens is a mandatory part of the district's educational infrastructure. Teachers are not generally able to use any resource they please. Instead, they will defer to the guidance and approved resources that have been cultivated by that district's technology and curriculum offices. Those resources, in turn, are filtered through multiple levels of district and site leadership before being used by a teacher of record. This heavily vetted selection process ensures that the district's classrooms are, in some way, aligned via

coordinated resources. The process looks different in each district, and can still fall victim to technological fads, but it provides critical guardrails that inform the pedagogical strategies that teachers will employ.

Screen-dependent EdTech resources serve a multitude of classroom functions. Students and teachers, in many ways, depend on one-to-one devices to successfully access and complete their work. In the rest of this section, we will outline just a few ways that EdTech resources might be employed in K–12 classrooms. We offer this section not to break ground, but to remind readers of the critical role that EdTech plays in the everyday classroom. Communicating these use cases clearly and thoughtfully is one major way to temper parent concerns over screen use.

Note: Some of these points serve as an expansion to those expressed in Appendix 3: Performance Without Paper.

Educators may use the editable presentations available in CoSN's Screen Time Toolkit to help facilitate conversations about the use of EdTech in their school.

Differentiation

Differentiation is a foundational pedagogical skill taught in teacher preparation programs. Educators are primed with internal AND external expectations to meet the needs of all learners in their classroom, regardless of their academic need. Differentiated activities provide pathways for each learner to access grade-level content that aligns with their unique learning styles, classroom habits, and skillsets. Teachers may differentiate their activities in a variety of ways, like providing leveled options for games or project options of differing complexities.

One-to-one computing, critically, offers teachers opportunities for easy and quick differentiation in the classroom. Many digital EdTech resources (like phonics programs, digital choice boards, etc.) allow students access to grade-level content that is aligned with their needs and skills either through menu options or automatic content generation based on formative assessment. Programs featuring content generation via formative assessment are especially prominent in elementary school. Foundational literacy and math instruction in early grades is taught directly and enhanced by independent work targeting specific skills. These kinds of programs also afford teachers more classroom time for small-group instruction. Without one-to-one computing, elementary educators would have to spend more of their planning time generating thoughtful and differentiated independent activities,

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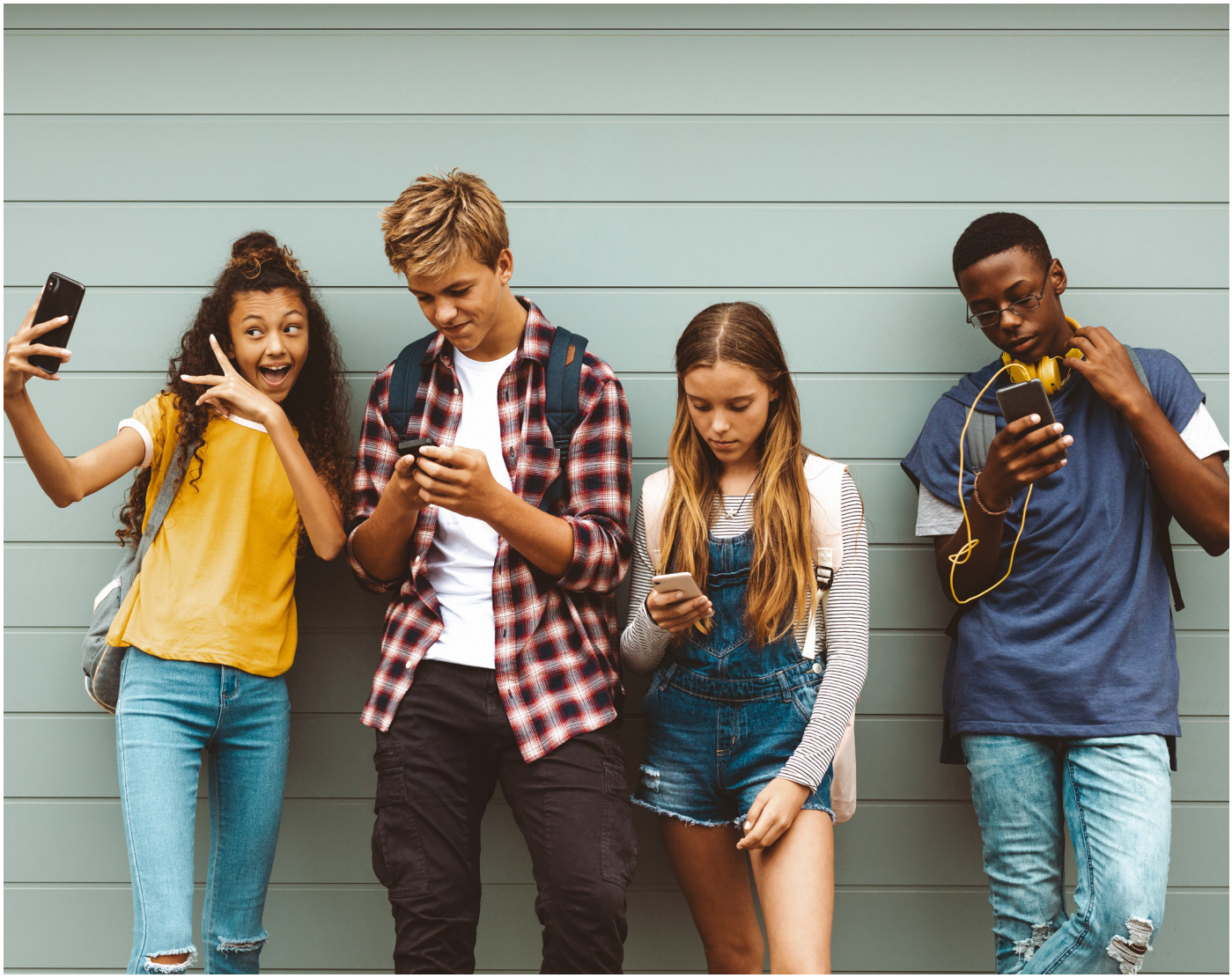


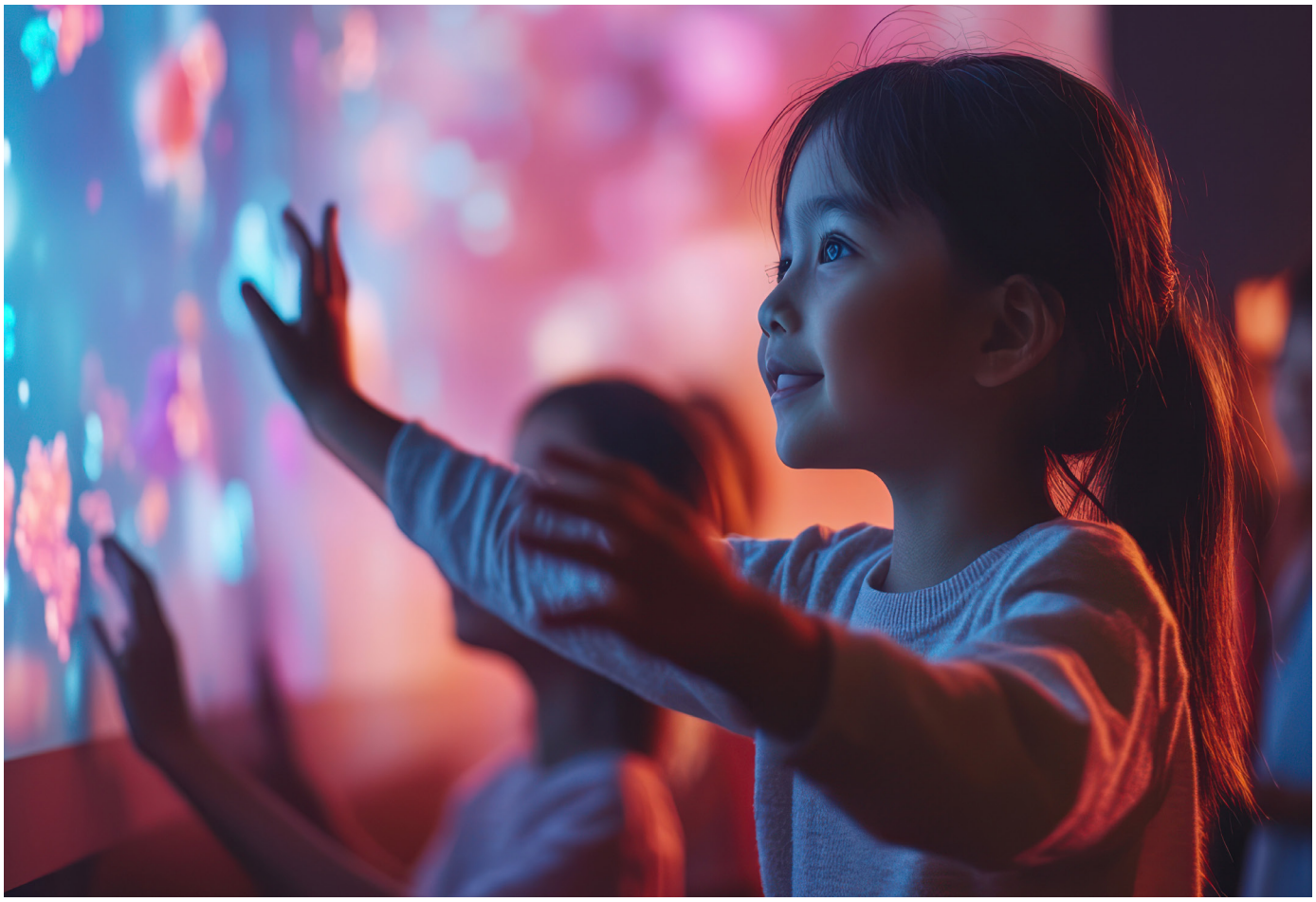
adding to their generally dense work schedules. Furthermore, the one-to-one structure allows students greater opportunity to explore content related to their own personal interests without the need for teacher cultivation or intrusion.

Special Education

Many devices, INCLUDING personal smart phones, offer academic pathways to students in special education programs. Special education, in this case, refers to individualized education programs (IEPs), 504 accommodations, and enrichment programs. In addition to differentiation, screens offer accessibility and extension opportunities.

Over the past ten years or so, EdTech resources have been employed effectively when teaching special education students across the K–12 spectrum (Carreon et al., 2025). Most often, these programs will use applications on one-to-one devices. They may be used to teach content skills (like spelling and graph-making) or to teach other skills as outlined by the student's unique education program (like fine motor skills or effective communication). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that artificial intelligence (AI) can be a crucial piece of special education pedagogy (Hopcan et al., 2022) (Also see CoSN's 2024 Blaschke Report on AI and Accessibility). It is important to note that the USE of personal devices for these kinds of digital resources is not universally approved within the smart phone restrictions offered by state legislatures in the U.S.. Some legislation allows for exceptions to smart phone restrictions for students with IEP and 504 plans, but not all make that distinction.

> "We offer this section not to break ground, but to remind readers of the critical role that EdTech plays in the everyday classroom. Communicating these use cases clearly and thoughtfully is one major way to temper parent concerns over screen use."



Workforce Development

Despite some nationwide tensions over the curricular expectations of schools and districts, most Americans agree that K–12 education is, at least partially, supposed to cultivate a new generation of high-quality workers. It is necessary that students, especially in secondary grade levels, are exposed to skills that are practical (and necessary) for the job market. The skills necessary for entry into said market, though, have changed drastically over the last decade (World Economic Forum, 2025), and K–12 schools have a duty to keep with those expectations.

Educational technologies, in addition to providing new pedagogical strategies, allow students to explore content using skills that may be necessary for their future careers. Many school districts allow for coding programs, even to elementary-aged students. Opportunities for digital marketing projects, building virtual presentations, and online collaboration via websites like Google Drive are all valuable, and necessary, to those looking for immediate

post-graduate careers OR a college education. With the onset of artificial intelligence programs, K–12 schools are needed more than ever to provide thoughtful guardrails and guidance to students learning to use burgeoning technologies for both academic and personal reasons. Public education is not able to stop the development of new tech products, but they have the ability, and perhaps a duty, to teach students to use said products with balance and intention.

The Public Conversation

The 2025 Blaschke Report (and CoSN's Screen Time Toolkit) have been developed in direct response to an ever-growing national debate over the presence of screens and technology in K–12 classrooms. Though many schools had already shifted to a one-to-one model, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated investments in devices and programs to ease the heavy burden on educators navigating a new but necessary digital teaching infrastructure. As the United States emerged from this chaotic and uncertain period, its educational infrastructure maintained its reliance on EdTech tools and resources. In reaction to the continued employment of technology in classrooms, the collective trauma of COVID-era education, and continued literary and online discourse, a national conversation about screen use emerged between schools, families, and educators. In this section, we explore different pieces of this national conversation, the actors within it, and how it directly affects what happens in the classroom.

Smart Phone Restrictions

According to EdWeek's Cellphone Laws and Policies Tracker, the majority of US states (and Washington, DC) are entering the 2025-2026 school year with legislation targeting the use of smart phones in K–12 classrooms. This legislation may come in the form of statewide bans, mandates for district-level policy development, recommendations, or incentive structures. Most states passed their legislation in late 2024 or early 2025 in anticipation of the upcoming school year.

These restrictions serve as an example of states exercising their constitutional right to exclusively govern their education systems (education mandates at the federal level are not legal, only incentive programs like No Child Left Behind that offer federal funds). Though statewide smart phone legislation has received significant bipartisan support from constituents, it has garnered some criticism from educators and families. Critical perspectives include concerns over parent/student communication, funding, access for

students with IEPs and 504 plans, and organizational accountability.

For a more in-depth overview of smart phone use and legislation, see **Appendix 2: Smart Phones, Schools, and Solutions.**

Parent Perspectives

Public Public education, as a public institution, is dependent on the needs and expectations of the community they serve. Relative to other economically developed countries (EDCs), families in the United States have an outsized role in the development and implementation of education policy. Rather than relying on a federal department of education, U.S. public schools are controlled locally by school boards, district-level leadership and state-level leadership. School boards, in particular, heavily democratize reform efforts. Under these circumstances, new district and state policies for public schooling can often arise from constituent priorities and incentives. By contrast, other EDCs (e.g. United Kingdom) generate reform efforts and guidance from the top-down. While still subject to public scrutiny, these institutions are more removed from the kind of active community involvement that helps shape education policy in the United States.

In response to pandemic learning and poor standardized test scores, American parents have shown an increased disdain for screens, especially in school settings. State legislatures created their policies for smart phone restrictions to attend to these growing concerns. Parent perspectives on screen use, however, are far from definitive or consistent. Despite concerns over EdTech's prominence in public schools, they also tend to recognize its potential educational value. Furthermore, American parents experience parental screen guilt (PSG) as a correlate to their child's personal screen use at home (Wolfers et al., 2024). A parent's concern over EdTech in school may stem from personal guilt over screen use in the home.

For a more in-depth overview of parent perspectives on screen use, see **Appendix Five: Parent Perspectives.**

Educators as Public Figures

As noted in the previous section, public education in the United States is especially vulnerable to the expectations of local communities. Educators (meaning classroom teachers, administrators, and other student-facing school employees) serve as public representatives of the system they work within. Despite often having little control over curricula and approved resources, educators at school sites serve as a first point of contact for parents and community members. As a result, they are often expected to speak to or justify policy decisions that they, in some cases, have taken no part in creating. As organizational representatives, teachers and leadership teams must convincingly communicate mandates and expectations created at the district or state level. This is an unseen, unspoken extra expectation on the plates of school employees.

As public figures with community-level influence, educators have to directly respond to parent concerns over screen use and educational technology. The implementation of digital resources in the classroom, as a result, must remain thoughtful and balanced. Educators must be intentional with their EdTech implementation if they wish to honestly communicate with families classroom-level and site-level practices.

The expectations for clear, consistent, thoughtful communication about EdTech and screens led CoSN to develop the Screen Time Toolkit. This series of documents helps educators foster nuanced conversations about the use of screens in schools with members of their community.

Recommendations for Educators

A rapidly evolving technological ecosystem requires K–12 schools and school systems to remain flexible, attentive, and creative. Local policies must remain centered on pedagogical efficacy while maintaining a keen eye towards public perception and understanding. Screen use in public education only remains publicly salient if district- or school-level messaging is authoritative, focused on collaboration, and authentic to day-to-day classroom practice. These recommendations highlight just a few ways that education systems may build and maintain public trust around the use of digital EdTech tools.

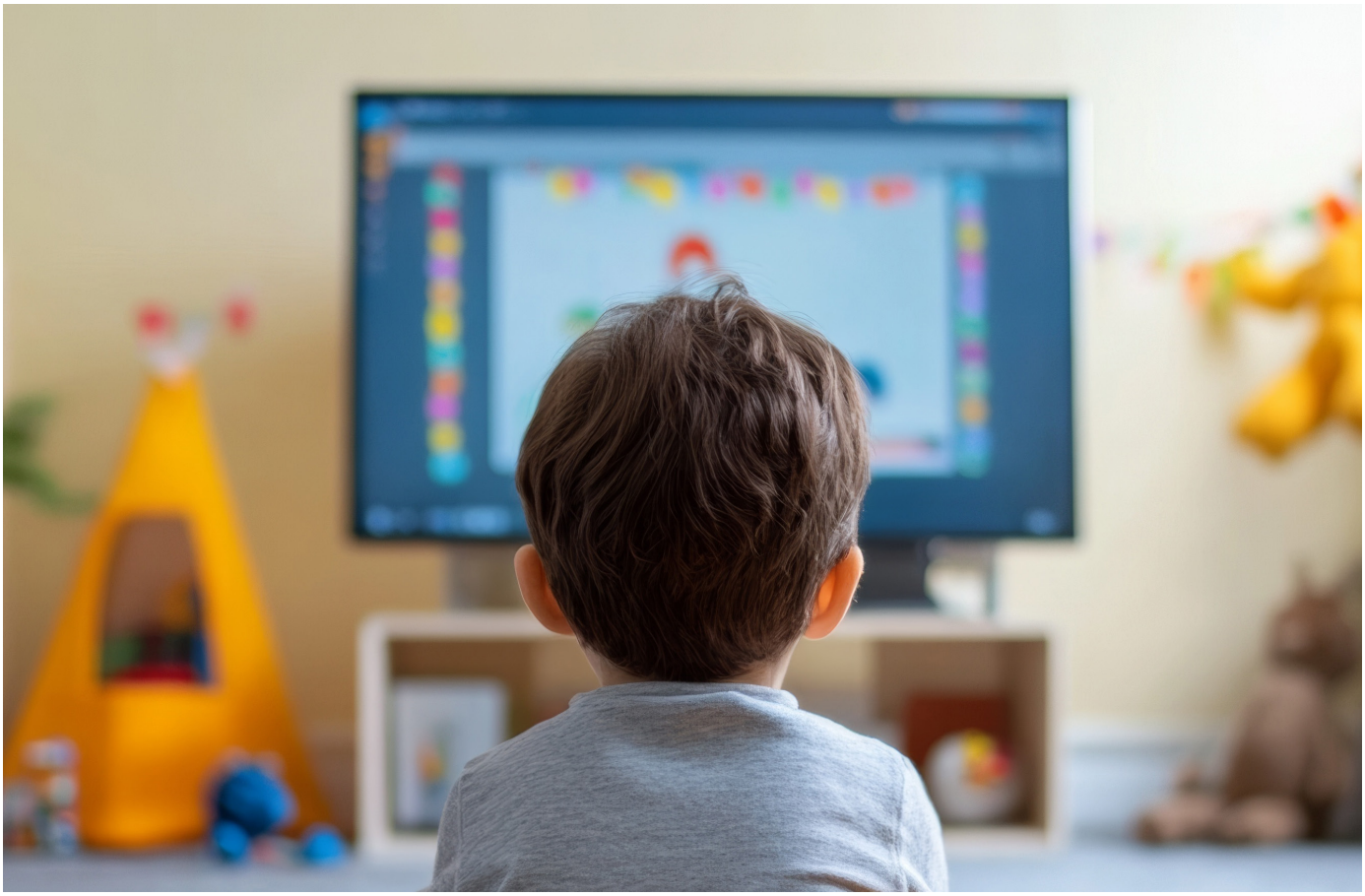
Teacher Development

Teacher development, in this case, refers both to the development of new educators and to the continued development of the K–12 work force. Both novice and veteran teachers require thoughtful professional development for EdTech products. Not only do they need to understand the resource itself, but how to use said resource within the context of their school. Because public education operates at a local level in the United States, each school site must build and maintain a unique pedagogical structure. Understanding how EdTech resources operate within that local structure is necessary before they can be used in the classroom. School leaders and site-based EdTech leaders must make their guidance on specific resources clear and intentional. Not only does this provide classroom teachers with a contextual understanding of the resource, but it provides all parties a coherent framework and expectations for use that may be used in communication with families.

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) must also work to prepare novice educators to thoughtfully and intentionally weave EdTech into their pedagogical structures. Digital tools exist in all U.S. school systems. Most districts operate on a 1:1 device model. Creative and thoughtful use of these resources, in conjunction with high-quality teaching, is a vital piece of any modern classroom infrastructure. Despite not knowing where EPP students will end up teaching, responsive programs will ensure that educational technologies are included within modeled structures of high-quality teaching and learning.

Modeling Digital Literacy and Citizenship

Research has demonstrated that a child's ability to effectively balance their use of screens in day-to-day life may depend on their exposure to thoughtful use by adults. Teachers and family members can affect a child's relationship with screens by simultaneously setting consistent boundaries for use and demonstrating thoughtful use themselves. In



the classroom, teachers should use their EdTech resources without overreliance, only employing them when it makes pedagogical sense or in conjunction with other strategies. Parents can affect their children' s relationship to screens by balancing their own lives alongside consistent boundary-setting.

Schools and districts may serve as friendly and authoritative figures in the screen time conversation. Building a school-to-home connection is critical for providing actionable guidance on screen use to families that is aligned with district-level messaging and expectations, Furthermore, teachers are best equipped to provide classroom-level context and child-specific guidance.

Administrative Coherence and Clarity

Those in leadership, both at the school and district level, should provide clear, actionable, and context-specific guidance on the use of EdTech resources in the classroom. Not only should EdTech resources be thoughtfully filtered by leadership teams to best fit the needs of their academic community, but they should have a clear understanding of how each will

operate alongside other resources and expectations.

For example, if your district purchases and offers an optional digital phonics program for K-2 students, the leadership team may ask the following questions:

• How might it fit into your established structures for teaching and learning?

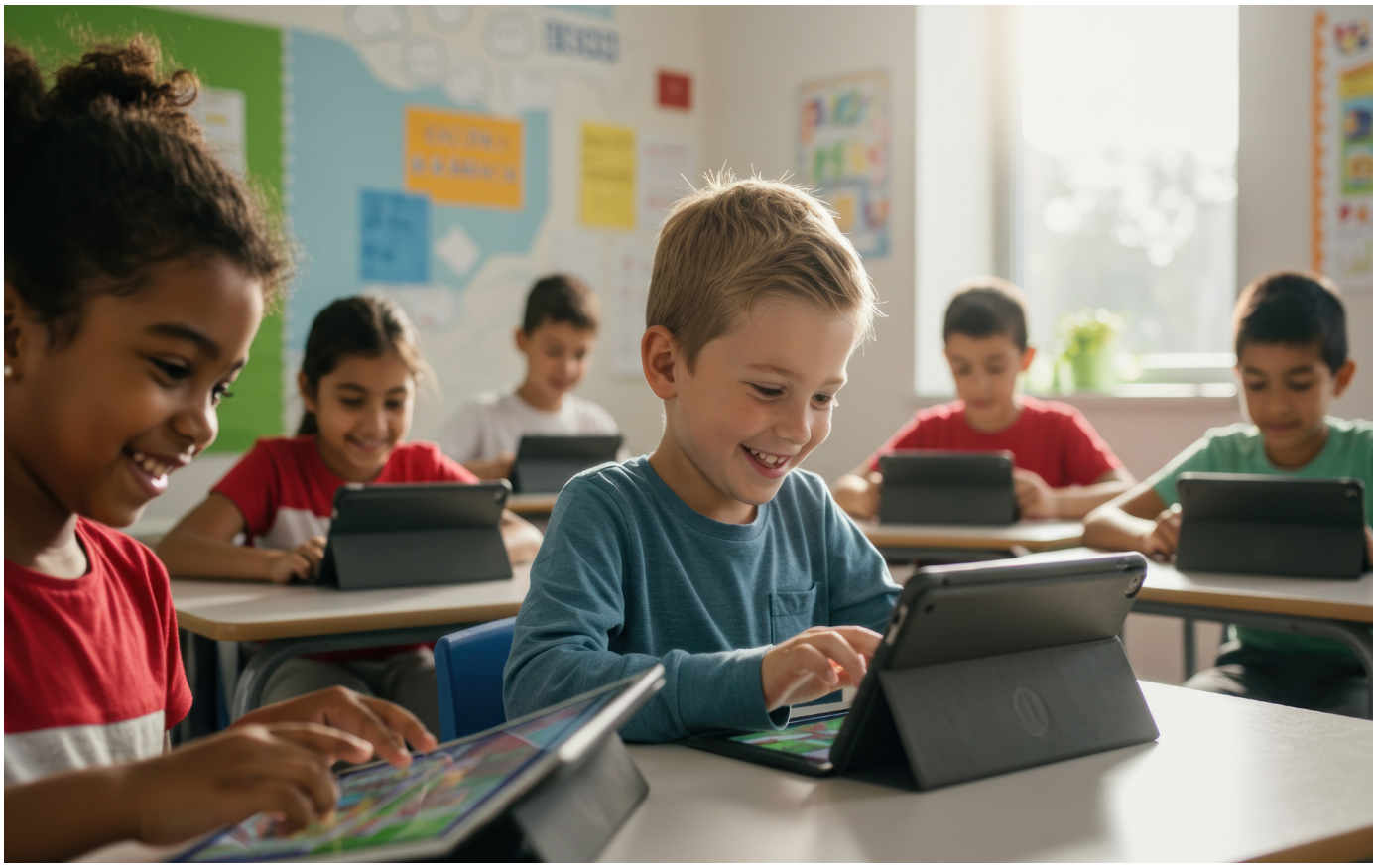
• Would this resource be reiterative?

• Might this resource be a stronger alternative to a program that is already being used?

• How long might it take for teachers to learn and implement this new resource with efficacy?

Once a site leadership team contextualizes their EdTech resources and communicates those expectations to staff, all are able to speak about said resources with families. Not only is it important for districts to find quality resources for their sites, it is critical that school-based leaders curate those resources to best fit the pedagogical needs of their student AND teacher populations.

> "Local policies must remain centered on pedagogical efficacy while maintaining a keen eye towards public perception and understanding."



"Controversy can be a starting point for a nuanced, thoughtful, solutions-oriented conversation between schools and communities."

Conclusion

Conversations about screen use in K–12 schools connect directly to the wider story of technological development in the U.S. and around the globe. Recent smart phone legislation, in particular, is part of a larger story of technological development in the United States and around the world. School districts, in reflecting contemporary society, find themselves either in harmony or contention with burgeoning and ubiquitous technologies. Often, they find themselves feeling both at the same time. It is important for public schools to prepare students for an advanced, often unpredictable technological future. At the same time, they must recognize that education work in the United States is directly dependent on the voting public. **Technological advancement within the classroom must be simultaneously responsive and innovative in order to fulfill public education's numerous (often paradoxical) responsibilities.**

Despite their general lack of authority over district-level decisions, site-based K–12 educators indirectly assume the responsibility for disseminating policies and initiatives that may not always land well with their communities. In addition to their pedagogical work, educators play a public role that they may not always be ready for. Teacher training, for novice AND veteran teachers, rarely includes guidance on thoughtful and authoritative communication.

The use of any technology in the classroom can (and does) easily become a source of controversy. This has especially been the case since COVID-19 brought with it a cobbled infrastructure of all-digital education. The solution to these controversies may not lie in swift, comprehensive legislation (like we've seen throughout the United States this past year). Instead, controversy can be a starting point for a nuanced, thoughtful, solutions-oriented conversation between schools and communities.

The importance of a nuanced conversation about technology use extends beyond improving K–12 education. It is driven by a recognition that public education serves as both a reflection and a driver of our collective relationship with new technologies.

The 2025 Blaschke Report was developed alongside CoSN's Screen Time Toolkit and a series of posts slated for release on the CoSN Blog throughout the fall/winter of 2025. Many of these posts are highly relevant to the topics discussed in this report and can be found in the appendices below.

Appendix One: What Does Screen Time Mean, Anyway?

K-12 educators are currently operating within a feverous cultural conversation over technological ubiquity and screen time. This cultural conversation is expansive and can be overwhelming. When someone refers to "screen time," they may be speaking of television, social media, smart phone addictions, or, importantly, technology use during classroom instruction. Though these topics share a connective tissue, they should not be conflated. Parents/caregivers and policymakers, in their concern over both screen time and public education writ large, may not instinctively understand the importance of separating their terms and specifying our home-to-school discourse. In the coming academic year, strong differentiation in K-12 messaging may curb some of the conflicts between schools and their communities.

Educators at the classroom, school, and district level, should work to help the community differentiate between the varying definitions of "screen time" that manifest in their classrooms. These manifestations may be separated into three categories: smart phones/social media, educational technologies (EdTech), and screens for at-home leisure. Though distinct, these categories are all highly relevant to those working in twenty-first century public education. Understanding how these categories impact children/students will help educators navigate conversations around screen use in the coming academic years.

Smart Phones/Social Media

Smart phones and social media may be the most pertinent focus of our national conversation on screen use. All around the country, schools, states, and districts are enacting smart phone bans designed to increase student attention spans and foster meaningful academic engagement. As of September 2025, almost two-thirds of US states (and Washington, DC) have enacted new legislation banning, restricting, or disincentivizing smart phone use in the classroom (EdWeek, 2025). In a rare example of national unity, bans have, for the most part, been well received by lawmakers, constituents, and educators, despite some unpopularity with students and parents.

Outside of education, parents and caregivers have shown increased concern over the ways that cell phones affect childrens' socio-emotional and cognitive development. Time will tell if school bans are able to curb some of the long-term threats that cell phones pose to young people (see also: Navigating Student Cell Phone Use in K-12 Schools; Whose Call: A Student-Driven Approach to School Cell Phone Policies).

EdTech

The The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for schools and districts to ramp up their use of EdTech. Schools that had strategically fully not gone one-to-one (i.e. each student has their own device) were suddenly forced to purchase and use a slate of new hardware and software. Now, in 2025, most schools in the U.S. operate on a one-to-one model (see: CoSN's 2025 State of EdTech Leadership).

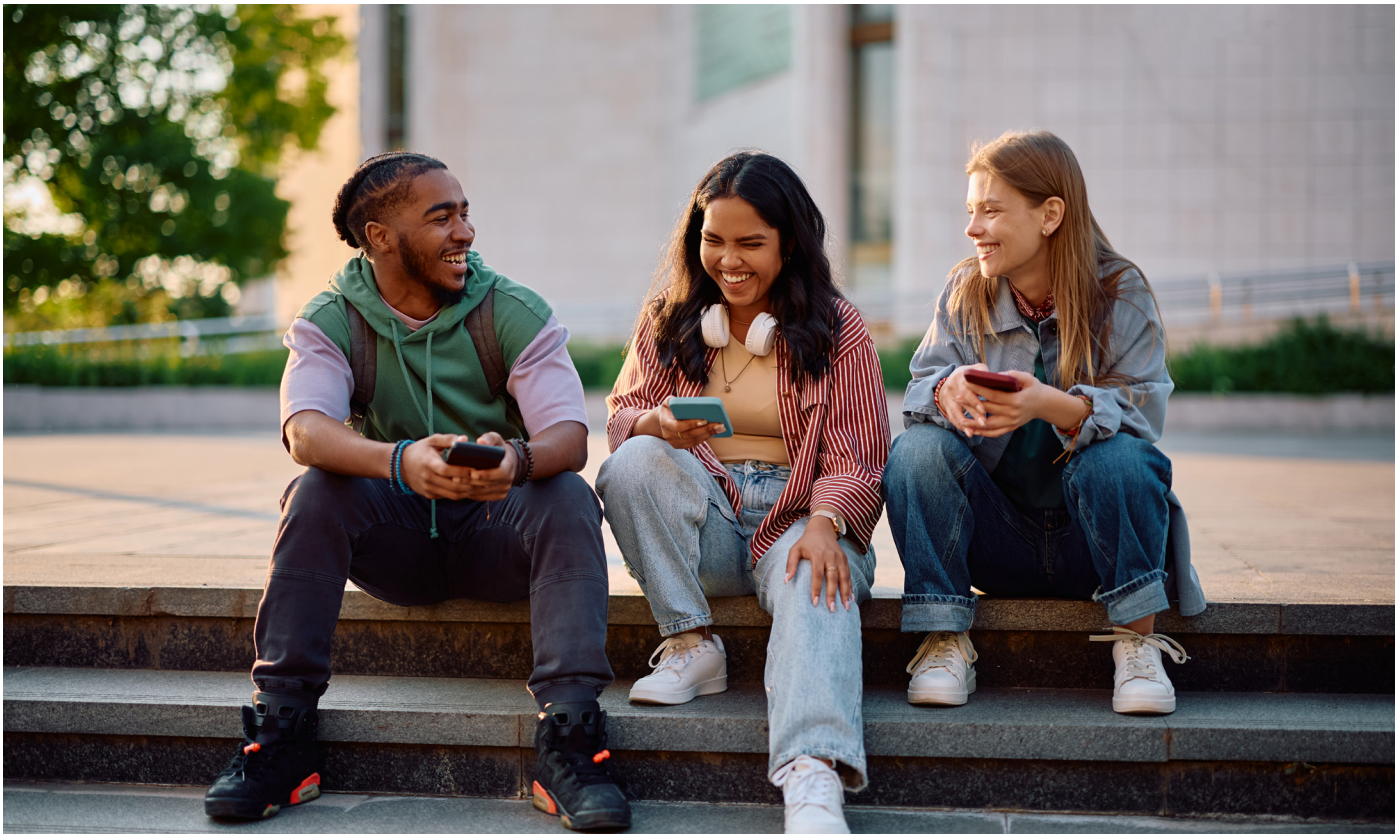
This model, if used thoughtfully, has the potential to supplement and enhance in-person learning in exciting and pragmatic ways. Teachers may use EdTech devices and programs to differentiate their instruction, teach important technological skill sets, and increase the engagement of differently-abled learners. Too much time on these devices, though, may hinder a student's growth (Kirkorian, 2024), so it is vital that teachers understand how to WEAVE EdTech into their classrooms, not rely on it in lieu of other strong pedagogical practices. It is important to communicate the instructional value of these strategies to families and community members.

Screens for At-Home Entertainment

Though educators have limited influence on a family's use of technologies on a day-to-day basis, they still have an opportunity to sway attitudes towards screen use in the home. Like smart phone use, excessive and unrestricted time on screens may affect a young child's socio-emotional and cognitive development. Despite this, modern parents and caretakers still often use screens as babysitting tools. Video game systems (like the Nintendo Switch), tablet computers, and televisions have the opportunity to affect a child long before they get their first smart phone. Like educators, it is vital that parents and caretakers remain thoughtful and targeted as they introduce digital media to their children. These early experiences may shape a child's relationship to educational technologies once they reach grade school.

Next Steps

The Consortium for School Networking is committed to fostering a pragmatic conversation on screen use in K-12 education. Educators and families alike may benefit from this more nuanced discussion of screens and technologies for children.



Appendix Two: Cell phones, Schools, and Solutions

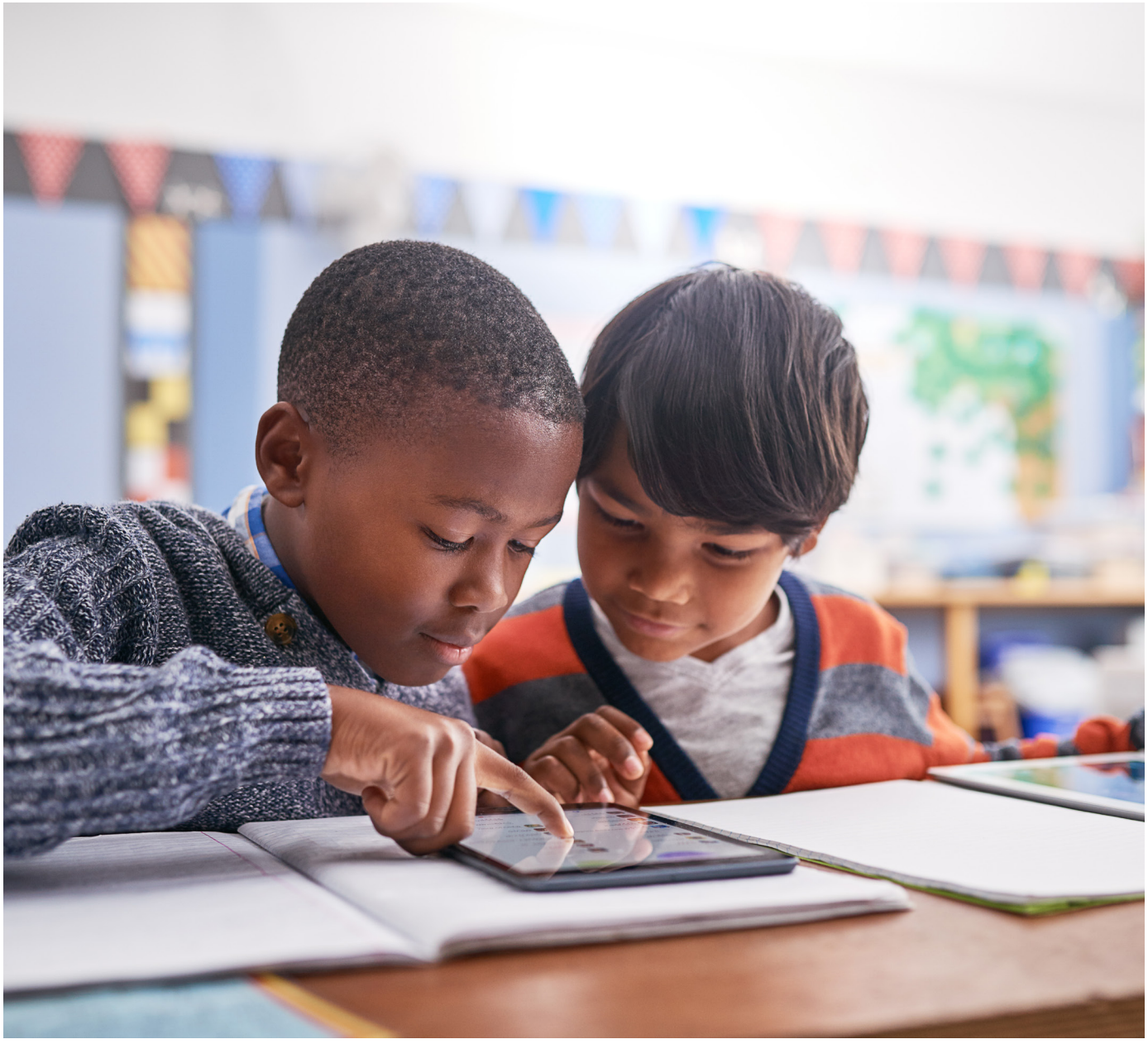
Over the past year, cell phone use has been a dominant force in the conversation on technology's role in American classrooms. Many educators, advocates, and parents have expressed concern over generation alpha's adherence to personal devices. The development of attention spans, critical thinking, and socio-emotional skills are in untested waters as students have been allowed unparalleled, largely unfettered access to burgeoning technologies. Educators, in turn, have been tasked with navigating these waters without much of a precedent. Government legislation on technology in the classroom was inevitable.

Public education in the United States is controlled at the state and local level. Over the past year, school districts and legislatures have begun exercising their power in response to the recent national fervor over cell phones in schools. According to *Education Week,* as of September 2025, almost two-thirds of states (and the District of Columbia) have passed some form of legislation on cell phone use in classrooms. This legislation may offer blanket statewide restrictions, require localities to produce their own policies, or offer incentives and recommendations to districts. Many, but not all, of these policies include exemptions for students needing personal devices as part of their IEP, 504 plan, or medical plan.

Though some state legislatures passed cell phone bills in 2024, the majority passed theirs in the latter half of the 24-25 school year. The 25-26 school year, in turn, will be a critical test year for the efficacy of this kind of legislation. There is a critical opportunity here to discover how these bills, which vary significantly in size and scope, operate in different academic contexts. Do blanket restrictions do the trick in some cases? Do districts need external funding to make legislation effective? Is it effective to incentivize leaders to develop their own policies without a true mandate? Only time will tell.

We must, though, make sure that any analysis of cell phone legislation in the coming year takes multiple forms of data into consideration. It may take some time for this work to have any effect, positive or negative, on student academic achievement. A qualitative account of both educator and student experience may help us understand how this legislation will operate beyond its pilot year. Longitudinal analyses will be necessary.

Finally, we cannot view cell phone legislation as a silver bullet solution to solve technological intrusion into academic (and non-academic) life. K-12 classrooms are uniquely suited to provide critical, large-scale messaging on how these devices can be used safely. Like EdTech in classroom settings, mass-market technologies should serve as helpful supplements, not replacements, for human experience. We cannot ignore the ubiquity of personal devices, but we can certainly prepare our students (and families) for thoughtful employment of personal devices through 12th grade and beyond.



Appendix Three:
Performance Without Paper

We've identified three primary manifestations of "screen time" in K-12 spaces (those being Cell Phones/Social Media, Educational Technology, and Entertainment). Educational technology, hereafter referred to as "EdTech," may be conflated with digital entertainment and/or cell phone use despite their differing purposes AND market incentives. EdTech, when used as a supplement to high-quality teaching, has the ability to generate significant student academic growth, foster meaningful engagement with standards, and create a pedagogical ecosystem that is designed for all learners. The conversation around EdTech in K-12 classrooms must remain separate from the ferocious national debate over cell phone restrictions.

CoSN's 2025 State of EdTech Leadership Report notes that most school districts are either operating on a one-to-one device model OR are actively working towards a one-to-one model. In other words, most districts (especially after the COVID-19 pandemic) supply each of their students, regardless of age, with an electronic device (iPad, laptop, etc.) for educational use. How these devices are used, however, varies significantly by age and subject. A site-level administrator or EdTech leader may filter the district's available products to better serve the needs of their community and/or faculty. Products may include phonics programs for elementary students, coding lessons for middle-schoolers, or artificial intelligence software for high-schoolers (See: 2024 Blaschke Report on AI and Accessibility). Many of these programs, even at the elementary level, are dynamic, allowing students to engage with content that is directly aligned with their skills and learning targets. A teacher's use of digital media is largely dependent on district context and administrative expectations (and, of course, their personal comfort with the technologies on offer).

One-to-one computing for general education is just one example of how EdTech manifests in a 2025 classroom. Some districts have adopted virtual reality headsets so that students may go on "virtual field trips" (Mohring & Brendel, 2021). These headsets afford districts that are remote and/or have fewer financial resources the opportunity to share a wide breadth of new experiences with their classes. Many district special education departments use tablets, computers, and other hardware for student communication and differentiation. Some high schools have purchased 3D printers, while others have created robotics labs. These examples provide a glimpse into not just the scope of EdTech, but how

it can be harnessed for the dual purposes of equity and workforce development.

The EdTech industry is vast, complex, and rife with opportunities IF teachers and administrators can use them effectively. None of the resources we have outlined here will be effective without proper teacher training AND an earnest commitment to technologies when they are pedagogically appropriate. We are calling for a balance, not a replacement. We also recognize a need for clear, thoughtful communication with families on the applications of EdTech in the classroom. Buy-in at every organizational level is critical. We do not want families to conflate cell phones with the intentional, thoughtful employment of EdTech for academic and personal growth.

Appendix Four:
A Digital Childhood

Introduction

Children in the United States are growing up in a media ecosystem that is drastically different than that of most adults. This generation of kids have been afforded widespread, consistent, largely unregulated access to the internet via personal devices. Much of the national conversation over children's media has revolved around cell phone use in K-12 schools. Children gain access to screen media long before receiving their first cell phone, however. Educators, parents, and K-12 leaders must recognize that these digital childhoods can have effects on teaching practice, student behavior, and the school-to-home relationship. It is also necessary to remember, however, that the kind of media that children consume is often more important than the format in which it is presented.

Ubiquity of Screens Amongst Young Children

Young children in the United States (ages 0-8), despite their age, are often given access to screen-based devices for both education and entertainment purposes. These devices may come in the form of televisions, video game systems (like Nintendo Switch), or even laptop and desktop computers. The most common form of screen for children, however, is the tablet computer. These devices have permeated both educational and non-educational spaces. According to Common Sense Media (2025), by age four, 58% of children have a tablet computer. These tablets can be used for a variety of functions, but are commonly used to play games or watch videos. Despite their age, children can also use these computers to access social media sites (specifically, YouTube) (Auxier et al., 2020). Parents can have a tendency to rely on these devices as conflict resolution tools despite recognizing the potential dangers of overreliance (Chong et al., 2023).

The Screen Time Continuum

On its own, screen time as a form of entertainment does not present any explicit harm, especially if it is used with balance and intention. Harm may present itself, though, if the activities are not developmentally appropriate or if they are designed in response to the developer's monetary incentives. Often, digital entertainment for children will present the

user with a bevy of targeted advertisements. This structure gives developers a reason to keep users repeatedly engaged for long periods of time (Larche et al., 2016). The medium is not necessarily the problem, it's the way that the medium is used by developers. In response, families should be thoughtful about the kinds of activities that they engage with on their screens. For instance, a digital logic puzzle (e.g. a virtual escape room), while still a video game, is far more challenging (and ad-free) than mobile games like Candy Crush. In the same vein, talking to a loved one over FaceTime does not present the same dangers as scrolling social media because it requires deep and consistent socio-emotional engagement from the user while also negating the use of content generation algorithms designed to hook users.

School-to-Home Connection/Finding a Balance

Parents may have concerns over their child's use of EdTech in their public school partially because they have concerns over use in the home. Rather than explicitly pushing back on that rhetoric, it would benefit K-12 educators to meet families where they are and attempt to build a strong home-to-school connection. Families want to trust that teachers use screens thoughtfully, intentionally, and with balance. Consistent engagement with families over the use of EdTech, combined with practical and specific guidance on how technology may be used in the home, may simultaneously appease parent concerns while also building long-term trust in K-12 institutions.

Conclusion

Though educators are not directly responsible for how screens are used in their students' homes, they are responsible for navigating how those home behaviors manifest in classroom settings. Though screens and personal devices are wonderful tools for entertainment, families should remain thoughtful about the kinds of entertainment they make available to children (especially at young ages). Parents and guardians can affect change not just by making clear and consistent home policies surrounding technology use, but by modeling thoughtful use themselves. Much like EdTech, digital entertainment can be exciting, relaxing, and intriguing when used as a supplement to a life rich with a variety of experiences.

Appendix Five:
Parent Perspectives

Beneath our society's collective adoption of new technologies lies a paradox. While, yes, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and the ubiquity of smart phones indicate a general acceptance of (and even enthusiasm for) technology's intrusion into everyday life, there are macro-level fears that are equally prevalent. Why do we need AI? Is it healthy to be connected to the internet 24/7? Are screens destroying our attention spans? How will new technologies affect my children?

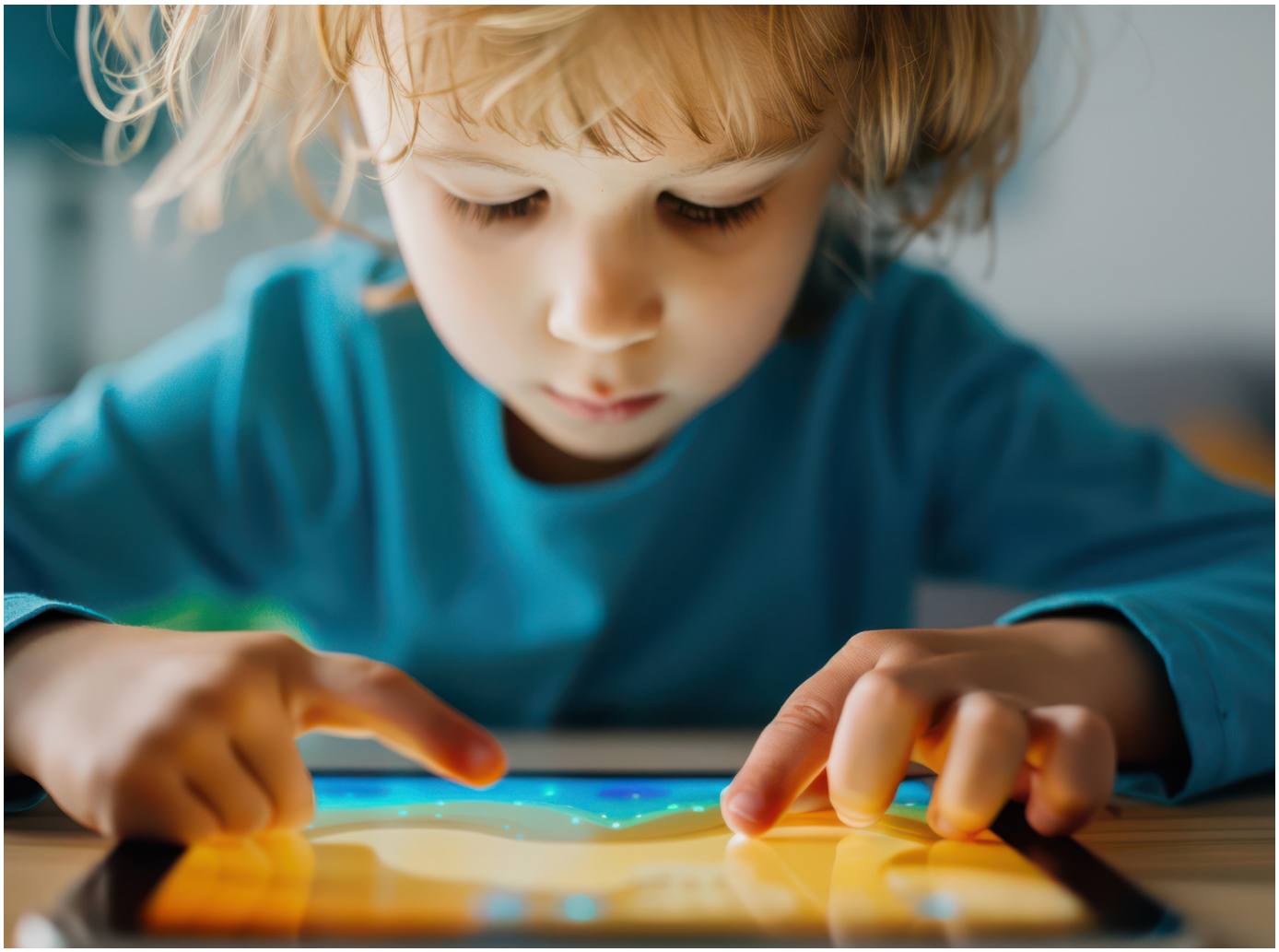
Public schools have become an arena for the debate over technological proliferation. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts have adopted innumerable devices and programs designed to support student academic growth. The key word here is support, not replace. Educational technologies (EdTech) are not, and shouldn't be, designed as a replacement for high-quality teaching. There is nuance to how teachers weave their technological supports throughout their classroom activities. This nuance, though, is difficult to communicate to families who may be concerned over the aforementioned technological proliferation.

Chong et al. (2023), in their meta-synthesis of perceptions of screentime, note that parents view screens (TVs, iPads, etc.) as babysitting tools and inevitable parts of life in the twenty-first century. At the same time, they recognize the harms associated with excessive screen time. This perspective is expanded upon in Wolfers et al.'s (2024) study on parental screen guilt. They found that guilt over parental decision-making is related to a child's time spent in front of a screen. Parents become dissatisfied with their parenting decisions when said decisions conflict with their previously-established moral code. Allowing children to spend their free time in front of screens, it seems, often contradicts broadly adopted philosophies on child care.

Chong et al. (2023), notably, also found that parents recognize screens as sites for educational opportunities. This seems to run counter to the larger conversation we are having about screen use (specifically, smart phones) in schools. Use of educational technology in the classroom is becoming increasingly unpopular DESPITE a parental recognition that EdTech can be a powerful tool for learning. This may fuel a rise in educational programs designed to be used outside of the boundaries of a traditional school

district. Widely available EdTech may be of great concern to K-12 leaders because products used at home, outside of the purview of a teacher, will likely not align with district-level technology initiatives and programs. This presents a danger to public schools attempting to establish coherence in a largely incoherent educational marketplace. Large-scale academic initiatives (like the Science of Reading) are threatened, too, because educators cannot guarantee that a child's educational screen time at home aligns meaningfully with the ideas and strategies they are learning in the classroom.

Parent perceptions of screen use post-COVID are paradoxical. Beliefs in the pragmatism and efficacy of new technologies during childhood are accompanied by feelings of guilt and fear over their known (and unknown) long-term ramifications. In the coming academic year, K-12 leaders in public schools must recognize this paradox as they communicate with concerned and anxious families. These institutions are uniquely positioned to ease the public into our new era of work and education.



Appendix Six: Preparation and Societal Progress

Introduction

K-12 schools are designed for social AND professional induction. They aim to teach concrete skills that can be used in the workforce while simultaneously fostering socio-emotional growth. The concrete skills that students need to learn, however, have become progressively more difficult to narrow down. The rise of generative artificial intelligence, the ubiquity of screens, and the wide range of new digital workplace skills have altered the curricular expectations for educational organizations. Furthermore, a rapidly-changing technological landscape may call into question some assumptions we make about traditional subjects and curricula. What do we need to teach, and how should we teach it?

Flexibility/Preparation for the Unknown

We have moved beyond the once-prolific category of "twenty-first century skills." Not only do modern children understand how to use computers, their childhoods have been defined by an unprecedented access to digital spaces. There was no need to acclimatize; their ability to use technology came as naturally as their ability to walk. Meanwhile, over the past five years, tech applications in the workplace have evolved (World Economic Forum, 2025). Though it has been said plenty of times before, it bears repeating: the rise in automation/artificial intelligence will transform work in ways that are, as of now, unseen and unpredictable. Students knowing how to use computers is not enough preparation for this great unknown. Workforce development in 2025 will require K-12 students to learn skills that may never be used in a professional setting.

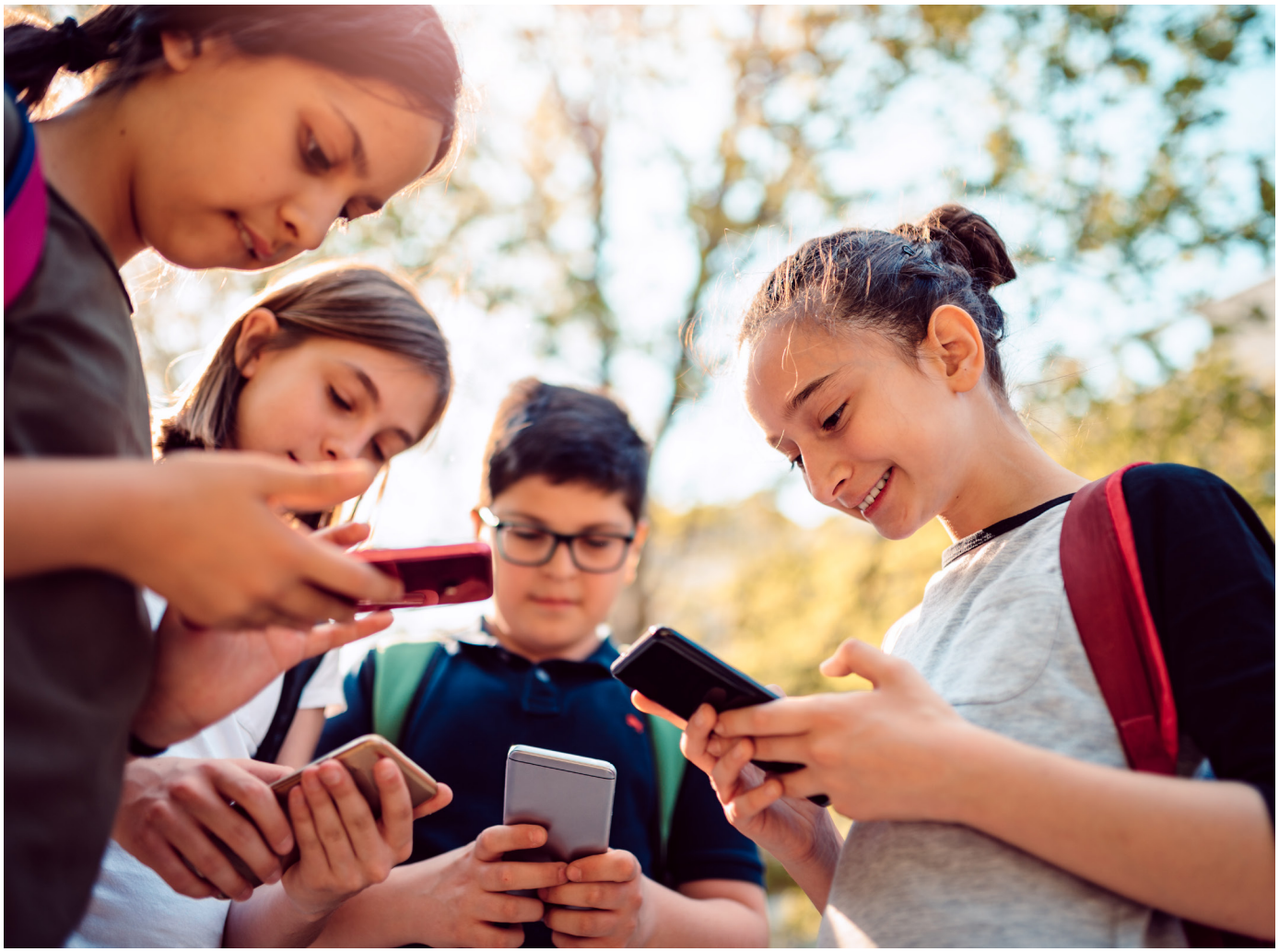
The Role of K-12 Schools

We may need to view technological pedagogies like we view K-12 writing courses. Most people do not write five paragraph essays for a living. The five paragraph essay, though, is not anachronistic. We use it NOT as a way to build a marketable skill, we use it to help foster critical thinking and argumentative reasoning. It is an avenue for an amorphous, but important, skill for students to learn. Educational technologies can be viewed in the same way. If we use these technologies to help students remain flexible and knowledgeable about

tech use more broadly, they will be better prepared for the inevitable adoption of new digital workforce skills in the future. We are not teaching the skill itself, we are teaching the flexibility.

Conclusion

The idea of "workforce development" is both critically important and fundamentally impossible. We do not know what students will need because K-12 institutions cannot possibly keep pace with the expectations of the workforce. It is their responsibility, however, to remain attentive to technological trends and create circumstances that allow students to easily adopt what may come. Furthermore, schools can (and SHOULD) try to impart a core message of balance and digital literacy so that students have a greater understanding of the technologies they use both in and out of the workplace.



Appendix Seven: EdTech Professional Development

Introduction

The successful implementation of educational technology (EdTech) tools in classrooms is dependent on educators having a nuanced understanding of the resource they will use, its pedagogical benefits, and how it can be woven into an already-established structure for teaching and learning. A school or district must ensure that any new technological initiative has an induction plan that is thoughtful, responsive, and comprehensive. If schools do not attend to the beginning stages of their EdTech initiatives, they run the risk of losing teacher trust, community confidence, and, worst of all, academic credibility.

Development of EdTech Skills

A school's professional development infrastructure must account for a wide variance in technological comfort within the workforce. Mirroring the differentiation practices that define modern K-12 education, professional development facilitators have to create meaningful learning opportunities for all teachers, regardless of their technological skill level. This era of teaching is particularly interesting because many new teachers grew up as digital natives (i.e. those who used computers and the internet from very early ages). This can create disparities in the skillsets of the teachers in the workforce. Regardless, the teachers in a school building are usually expected to use their EdTech tools regardless of their personal relationship with technology. As new programs and devices are introduced, and as new, innovative tools enter the marketplace, it is vital that EdTech professional development opportunities remain highly responsive to the needs of the educators who are expected to incorporate it into their classrooms.

Teacher Perceptions of Professional Development

Educators, regardless of their interest in advancing their practice, may not respond well to new professional development mandates. Professional development sessions may seem intrusive and unnecessary if they are laborious, complicated, or lack a direct connection to day-to-day teaching. Veteran educators, especially, recognize the cyclical nature of K-12 initiatives, and feel less of an incentive for aligning with mandated structures, strategies,

and resources. Not only do EdTech professional development facilitators have to account for a range of skills, they have to remain mindful of how educators may view these kinds of opportunities writ large.

Conclusion

With the continued proliferation of digital resources in K-12 classrooms (and the looming presence of artificial intelligence in the educational marketplace), it is important that teachers have comprehensive and meaningful training. This training must include an explanation of the resource itself AND how it can be applied to a local pedagogical context. At the same time, those creating and directing professional development opportunities must remain thoughtful about how they are introducing the resource, what the teacher's response may be, and how to respond to some inevitable frustration or lethargy from the staff. Despite the challenges, professional development is vital in an era where thoughtful use of EdTech is an expected part of an educator's structure for teaching and learning.

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