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U.S. STATE OF EDTECH 2026

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Contents

Introduction

Results from this year's report were compiled from 607 survey responses. With the help of our partners CDW Education, LightSpeed Systems, AASA, Sogolytics, and MCH, the 45-question survey was emailed to education technology leaders in U.S. school systems and data was collected Jan. 14 through March 1, 2026. Findings for each item in the report exclude participants who did not answer a specific question. Percentages in graphs may not total 100 due to rounding. For details about the demographic breakdown of survey respondents, see "About the Survey" on page 43.

The 2026 State of EdTech report provides insights into the state of K-12 education through the lens of education technology leaders—professionals who play a critical role ensuring technology is safe, reliable, and effective in supporting student learning, teaching, and district operations. Today's education technology leaders are responsible not only for maintaining infrastructure, but also for supporting instructional practice, protecting student data, enabling innovation, and engaging families and communities around responsible technology use. Education technology leaders need to navigate a landscape that is ever-changing. In 2026 there is nearly ubiquitous 1:1 implementation at all grade levels and districts face community concerns about screen time.

This year's report examines both emerging and long-standing issues, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, connectivity, staffing, procurement, and device management. Together, these findings help education technology leaders benchmark progress, inform district decision-making, and support policymakers and system leaders seeking to strengthen learning environments through the thoughtful use of technology.

This report serves to inform CoSN's ongoing work. By identifying where districts are succeeding and where additional support is needed, CoSN continues to develop resources, professional learning, and leadership programs to help districts nationwide use education technology intentionally, responsibly, and effectively. For more information about CoSN resources, see page 38.

Key Findings

Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity continues to rank as the No. 1 priority for education technology leaders, reflecting the essential role secure digital systems play in modern education. Most districts are actively investing in monitoring, detection, identity protection, and firewall technologies to safeguard networks, data, and learning continuity.

However, nearly two-thirds (65%) identify insufficient cybersecurity staffing and the lack of a dedicated budget as the top barriers to addressing cybersecurity challenges—highlighting the potential for a gap between responsibility and readiness. With increasing cyber insurance costs putting additional strain on budgets and new forms of AI-enabled cyberattacks increasing risks, districts must navigate how to best align funding decisions to keep up with ongoing pressures in the cybersecurity landscape.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Districts are making significant progress in establishing guidance for the responsible use of AI. More than three-quarters of districts (79%) report having AI guidelines in place, compared to 57% in 2025, reflecting growing clarity around AI's role in education. The majority of education technology leaders welcome guidance and recommendations from state education agencies (SEAs) on these AI policies. Nevertheless, the vast majority report they do not want their SEA to issue AI mandates, underscoring the value of local decision-making.

In just one year, education technology leaders have become strikingly more optimistic about AI's potential, nearly doubling their confidence in areas like productivity and personalized learning and showing especially sharp gains in student tutoring and workforce readiness. Productivity gains are seen as the area of greatest impact: a vast percentage (96%) of education technology leaders view AI as having the potential to positively affect education. More than half of districts have AI initiatives that focus on productivity, such as productivity suites for administrators and teachers as well as training in the use of those tools. Fewer districts (41%) have initiatives for instructional platforms to support teaching and learning. More districts (64%) are using AI in operations—a notable jump from the prior year's 37%.

Procurement

Responses to procurement questions indicate that many districts have established baseline purchasing practices, particularly around product safety. A majority of districts (56%) require vendors to provide information on the safety of their products. Fewer require information on the other key education technology quality indicators—such as evidence-based design, inclusivity, usability, and interoperability—pointing to an opportunity to further strengthen and standardize procurement practices.

Regulations for accessibility impact all local education systems, though only 11% of districts regard accessibility as a key priority. As the framework of the Five EdTech Quality Indicators becomes more widely known, and expectations for meeting accessibility requirements are more broadly understood, districts are well-positioned to refine adoption criteria in ways that support high-quality education technology implementation.

Teaching and Learning

Districts continue to demonstrate strong foundational capacity to support education technology. The majority of districts (66%) report adequate staffing for core technical functions such as network administration, application installation, and maintenance as access to digital learning has expanded, with 1:1 implementation at an all-time high.

At the same time, most districts (58%) report they are understaffed when it comes to supporting the technology used for teaching and learning. Strengthening instructional support presents a clear opportunity to maximize the value of education technology investments and reinforce confidence among educators and communities.

Community interest and engagement around instructional technology is high. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of districts report that their communities express moderate to high levels of concern about the technology used for teaching and learning. This finding underscores the importance of clear communication, thoughtful implementation, and ongoing professional support to ensure technology continues to advance teaching and learning goals.

Artificial Intelligence

According to a recent study, 85% of teachers and 86% of students are using AI,[1] and districts are establishing guidelines for that use. Over the past three years, more districts have defined their approach to AI. Only 19% have not done so, compared to 40% in 2024. Increasingly districts are defining their AI strategy based on the use case—nearly half (49%) this year, up from 31% in 2024. Since 2025, there have been no changes in the percentage of districts embracing AI (30%) or banning it (1%).

Districts' AI Usage by Year

Approach	2026	2025	2024
Depends on the use case	49%	41%	31%
Embrace it	30%	30%	22%
Not yet defined	19%	27%	40%
Ban it	1%	1%	3%
Not sure	1%	1%	3%

The percentage of districts without AI guidelines declined in recent years, going from 43% in 2025 to 21% this year. More than half (56%) of districts now have a policy for the acceptable use of generative (Gen) AI, a significant increase from 38% the prior year. There is a marked increase in AI policy adoption from 2025 across the board. Policies regarding academic integrity increased from 32% to 46%; creation of a new policy specific to AI doubled from 19% to 38%; and policies related to data privacy/personal identifiable information (PII) nearly doubled from 18% to 34%. Instructional material/technology adoption policies had the smallest uptick, rising from 12% to 19%. As AI is increasingly embedded into district software, it is hoped that the percentage of districts creating guidelines for this type of AI use will increase as well.

[1] https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/CDT-2025-Hand-in-Hand-Polling-111225-accessible.pdf

Guidelines for AI Use

Updating Existing Policy	2026	2025
Acceptable use policy	56%	38%
Academic integrity	46%	32%
New policy specific to AI	38%	19%
Data privacy and PII	34%	18%
No guidelines for Gen AI	21%	43%
Instructional material/technology adoption	19%	12%
Other	5%	6%

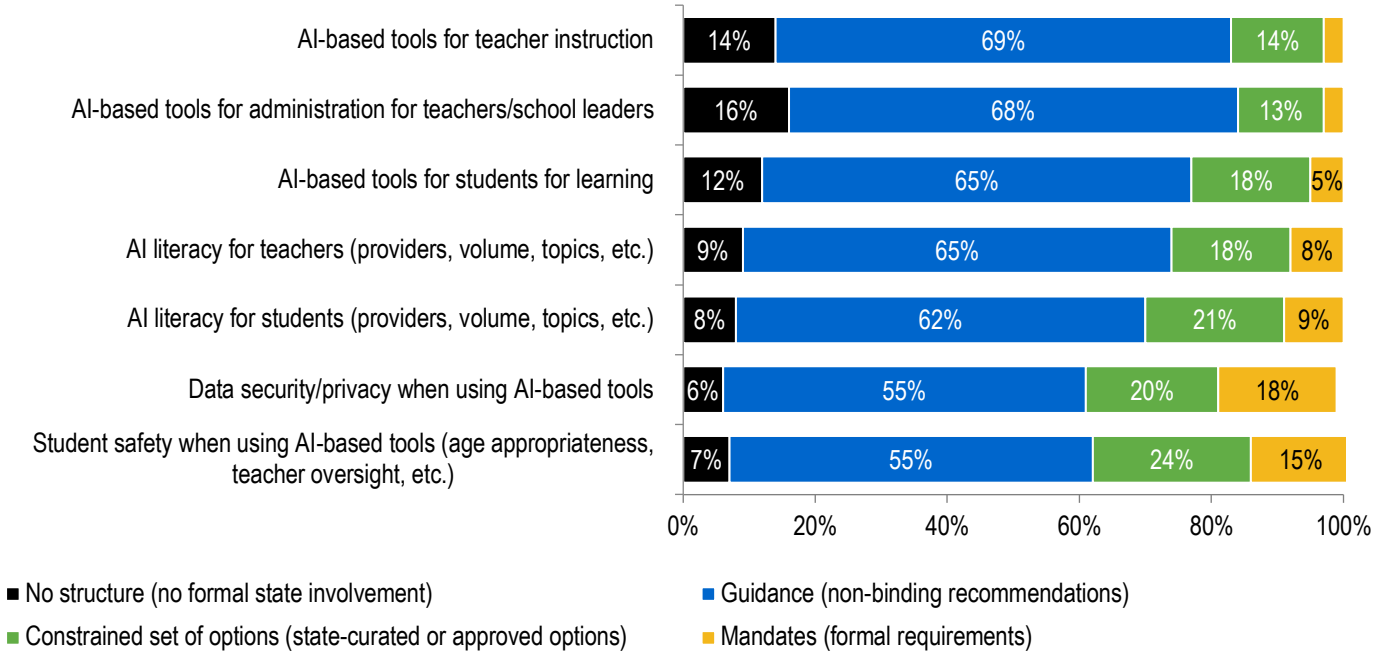
When asked for their perspectives on the role SEAs should play in various areas of AI, respondents want guidance across all areas. However, desire for formal mandates was low. Student safety and data privacy had the highest response rates for mandates, at 18% and 15% respectively. AI-based tools for teacher instruction, at 69%, and AI-based administrative tools for teachers/school leaders, at 68%, were the top areas where non-binding guidance is desired. AI-based tools for students for learning and AI literacy for teachers followed, each with 65%. Sixty-two percent (62%) of respondents expressed a need for guidance on AI literacy for students.

The other two areas—data security/privacy when using AI-based tools and student safety when using AI-based tools—were each identified by 55% of respondents. Those two areas had the highest percentage seeking a greater SEA role in decision-making. Nearly a quarter (24%) want the state to curate approved AI options, with an additional 15% welcoming formal requirements for AI that protect student safety. At similar rates, 20% wanted an approved list and 18% wanted formal requirements for AI areas related to data security/privacy. AI tools used by adults have the highest percentage of respondents indicating no state involvement is needed, with administrative tools for teachers/school leaders at 16% and tools for teacher instruction at 14%.

Overall, education technology leaders' desire for formal requirements from their state education agency was low. One reason for the lack of interest in state mandates is the fear that implementation will be ordered without the state providing the necessary financial support (i.e., unfunded mandates). One respondent explained that mandates from "state agencies would not be helpful," because:

> *"...unfunded mandates contribute to the problem rather than the solution...unfunded mandates make it increasingly difficult to fund education."*

State Education Agency Involvement in AI-Related Areas



Overall, results indicate year-over-year increases of district initiatives to support AI use. Only 12% of respondents reported their districts do not have or do not plan to implement any AI initiatives this school year. Of the 88% that have initiatives, the most common is training instructional staff on the use of instruction-focused Gen AI tools (70%). This is followed by productivity suite platforms, at 54% for administrative and support staff and at 53% for teachers and instructional staff. A majority (51%) have initiatives for training their

administrators and support staff on productivity platforms. More than a third (41%) are implementing instructional platforms for teaching and learning. Twenty-three percent (23%) have stand-alone Gen AI initiatives, down from 30% the prior year—the only initiative to show a decrease. More than a fifth (22%) of respondents have an initiative for enhancing cybersecurity measures to support Gen AI implementation, and 22% to research and develop custom solutions. Another 3% have initiatives not listed on the survey.

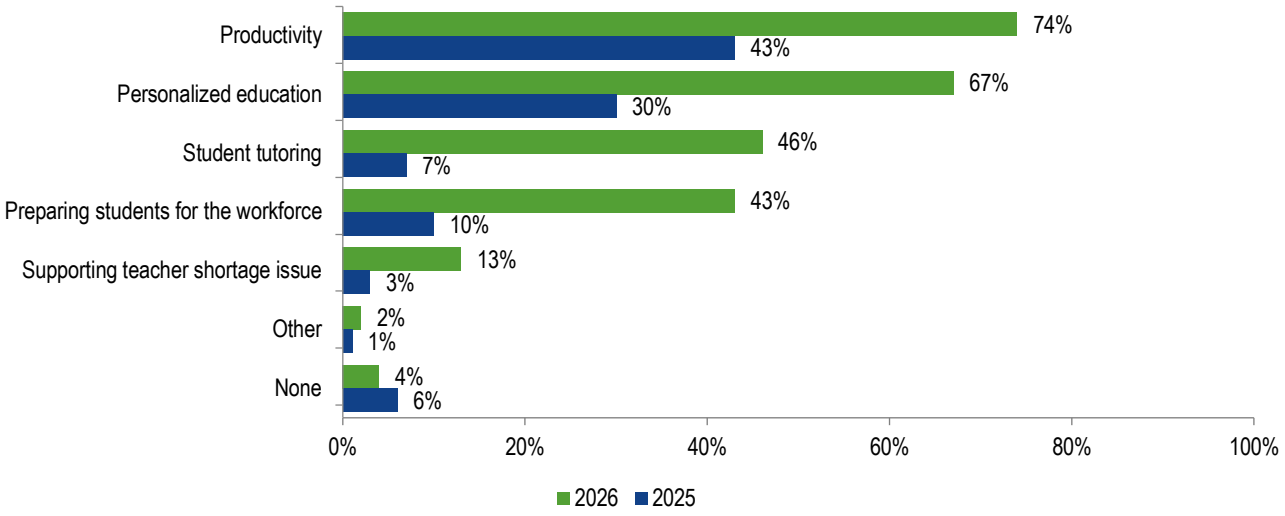
Current AI Initiatives

Initiative	2026	2025
▲ Train instructional staff on the use of instruction-focused Gen AI tools	70%	51%
▲ Productivity suite platforms for administrative/support staff (Ex: Gemini, Copilot)	54%	41%
▲ Productivity suite platforms for teachers/instructional staff (Ex: Gemini, Copilot)	53%	41%
▲ Train administrative/support staff on the use of productivity suite platform tools	51%	44%
▲ Instructional platforms for teaching and learning use	41%	37%
▲ Stand-alone general Gen AI for teachers/instructional staff	23%	30%
▲ Enhance cybersecurity measures to support Gen AI implementation	22%	19%
▲ Research and develop custom solutions (chatbots, 'GPTs', custom apps using Gen AI APIs, etc.)	22%	15%
▲ Prepare identity access management systems	7%	4%
▲ Prepare data storage environments (on-premises and/or cloud-based)	7%	4%
Other	3%	--
None	12%	20%

Overall, education technology leaders increasingly believe in AI's potential to positively impact education. Year-over-year results show significant gains across survey areas. At 74%, productivity is the area where education technology leaders see AI having the greatest potential, an increase from 43% the prior year. Strong support for productivity tools aligns with the survey results on AI initiatives, where the majority of districts have initiatives for AI productivity platforms and training for their use. Personalized education is also an area where AI is seen as having great potential, indicated by 67% of

respondents, more than double 2025's rate of 30%. Student tutoring and preparation showed even more dramatic increases. Belief in AI's positive impact on student tutoring rose to 46%, more than six times the prior year's rate of 7%. Belief that AI will prepare students for the workforce rose to 43%, more than four times the 2025 rate of 10%. Generally, education technology leaders do not see AI playing a significant role in addressing teacher shortages; only 13% indicated it would have an impact. However, that rate is a significant increase from just 3% the prior year.

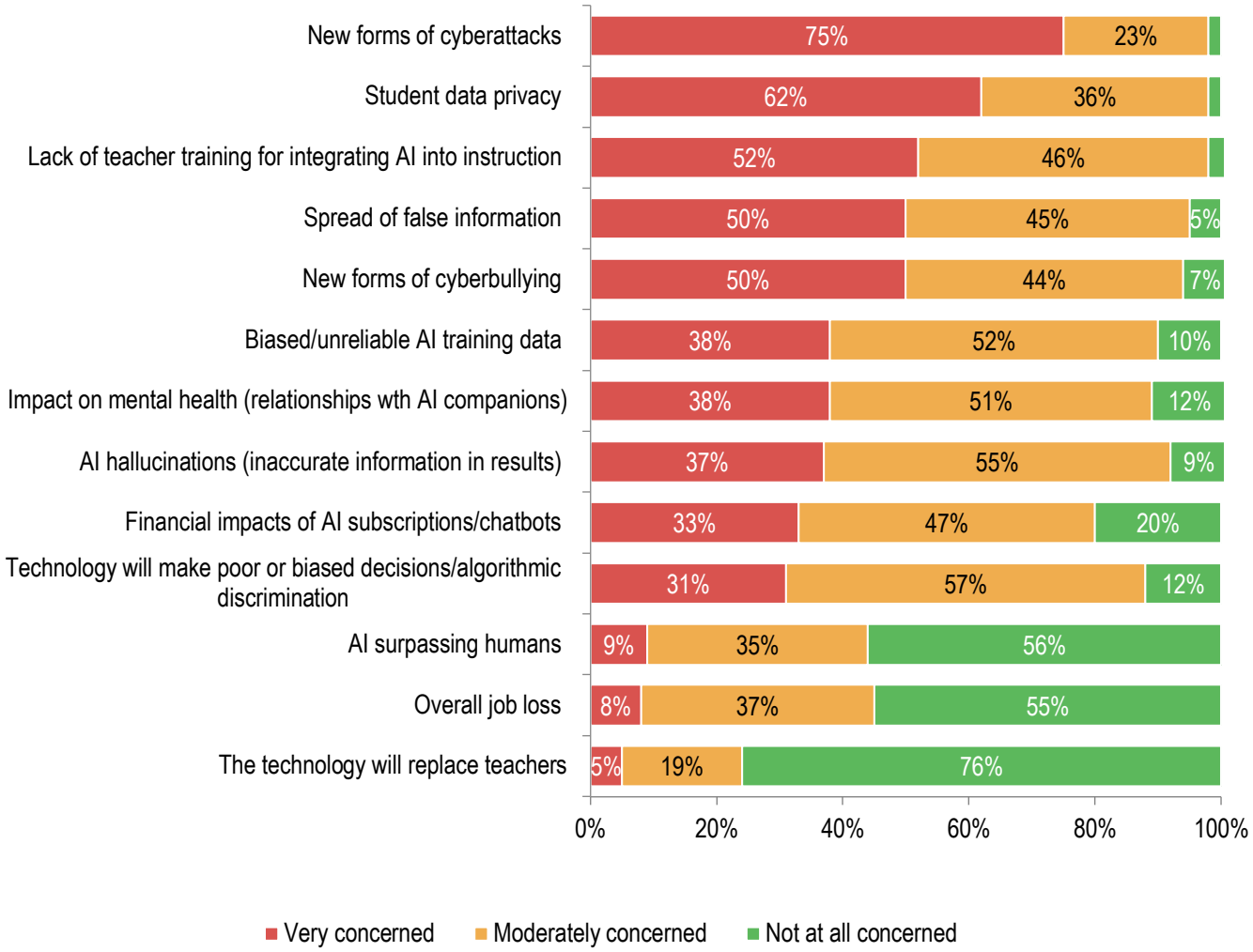
AI Potential for Positive Impact in Education by Year



The most frequently cited area of concern for education technology leaders is the potential for AI to enable new forms of cyberattacks, with 75% of respondents indicating they are very concerned. The majority of education technology leaders are also very concerned about AI's potential impact on student data privacy (62%), teachers' lack of training for integrating AI into instruction (52%), AI's role in the spread of false information (50%), and the creation of new forms of cyberbullying (50%). These concerns underscore the importance of clear policies, safeguards, and professional learning as AI use expands.

At the same time, education technology leaders express comparatively low levels of concern regarding broader workforce and instructional disruption. A large majority (76%) report no concern at all about AI replacing teachers, reinforcing the view that AI is understood as a supportive, complementary tool rather than a substitute for educators or their role in the classroom. Similarly, most respondents indicate no concern about AI surpassing humans (56%) or overall job loss (55%). The majority of education technology leaders indicated moderate concern about AI bias (57%), AI hallucinations (55%), unreliable AI training data (52%), and AI companions (51%). The financial impact of AI subscriptions is the area with the next largest percentage of "not at all concerned," at a distant 20%.

Degree of Concern Regarding the Use of AI in School Districts



While education technology leaders are mindful of the risks associated with AI, the data shows they increasingly recognize its practical value in operational applications. Only a third (36%) of districts are not using AI in operations, compared to nearly two-thirds (63%) the prior year. The 2026 survey expanded the 2025 question to include a broader list of AI components; tracking this expanded list will provide a clearer picture of changes over time.

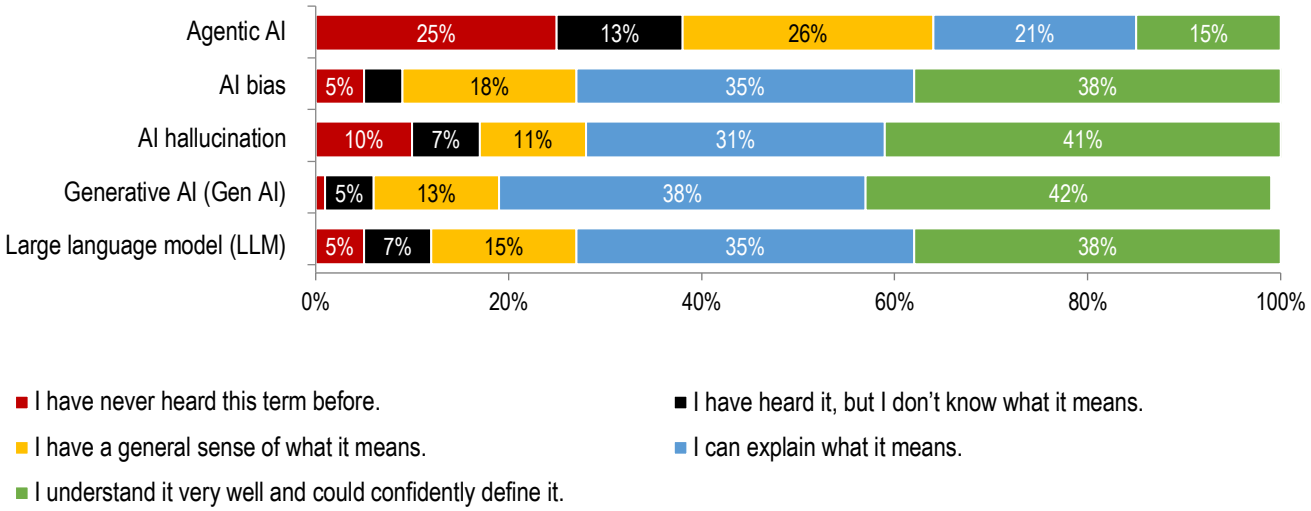
Operational use of AI is most common in security-related applications. AI is most frequently used for cameras, growing to 41% this year from 26% in 2025—a significant increase. The use of AI for environmental sensors (12%) and facial recognition software (9%) show essentially the same rates as the prior year. Among the components new to the list, student safety-monitoring AI tools are the most popular, used by more than a third (38%) of respondents. Less than a fifth of districts use AI tools for the other operations added to this year's list: intrusion detection (18%), license plate recognition (14%), appearance search (8%), behavior analysis (8%), heat mapping (6%), and occupancy management (3%).

AI in Operations

AI Component	2026	2025
Cameras	41%	26%
Student safety-monitoring tools	38%	--
Intrusion detection	18%	--
License plate recognition	14%	--
Environmental sensors	12%	11%
Facial recognition	9%	8%
Appearance search	8%	--
Behavior analysis	8%	--
Heat mapping	6%	--
Occupancy management	3%	--
Other	3%	2%
None	36%	63%

Overall, education technology leaders have a strong understanding of key AI-related terms. Eighty-two percent (80%) of respondents report that they are able to define or explain Gen AI. High levels of familiarity are also reported for other commonly used AI terms: large language models (LLMs) at 73%, AI bias at 73%, and AI hallucinations at 72%. The only term with a low degree of familiarity is agentic AI,* the most recent AI term to enter mainstream usage. A quarter (25%) of respondents have never heard the term and only 36% said they could define or explain it.

Degree of Familiarity with AI-Related Terms



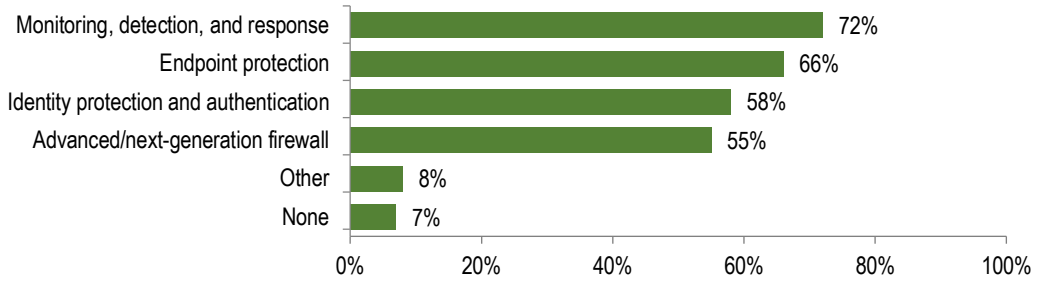
Cybersecurity

Unsurprisingly, the majority of districts are investing in a variety of tactics to keep their networks safe. Monitoring, detection, and response is the most common method employed, with 72% of respondents reporting investments in this area. Investments in endpoint protection are made by two-thirds (66%) of districts, with more than half investing in identity protection and authentication (58%) and advanced/next-generation firewall (55%). Another 8% are investing in tactics not listed on the survey. Of the other tactics that respondents cited,

*Agentic AI refers to artificial intelligence systems that can act independently to achieve goals without requiring constant human control. These systems can make decisions, perform actions, and adapt to situations based on their programming and the data they process, typically without human input. (*IEEE Transmitter, "What Is Agentic AI?"*)

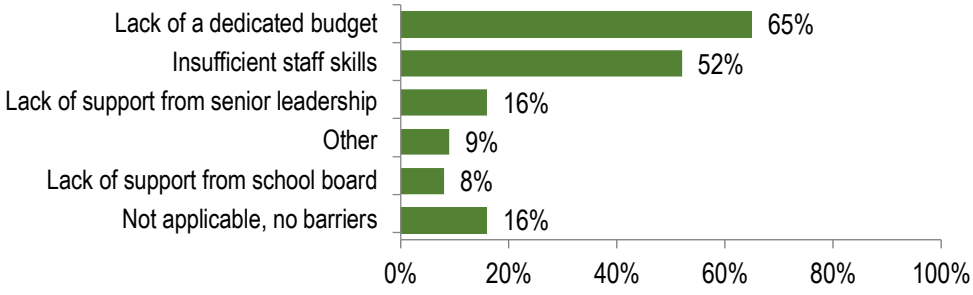
many are aimed at reducing the threats posed by email, such as advanced email filtering, staff awareness training, and simulated phishing tests. Only 7% of respondents report that their districts have not invested in any cybersecurity tactics this year.

Cybersecurity Investments



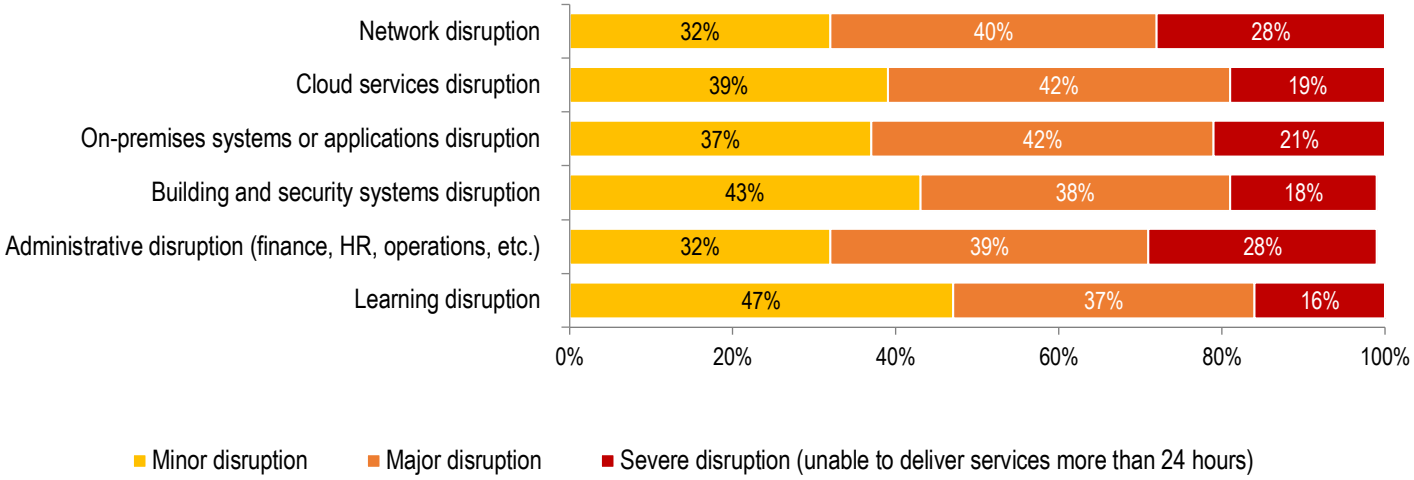
Education technology leaders identify resourcing and capacity as the primary factors shaping districts' ability to address cybersecurity effectively. The most commonly cited challenge is the lack of a dedicated budget, reported by 65% of respondents. In addition, just over half (52%) point to the need for expanded staff skills and expertise to keep pace with the evolving threat landscape—highlighting professional learning as a key area of focus. To a much lesser degree, respondents cited lack of support from senior leadership (16%), lack of support from school board (8%), and other factors not listed on the survey (8%). A fortunate 16% report their districts face no barriers.

Barriers to Addressing Cybersecurity



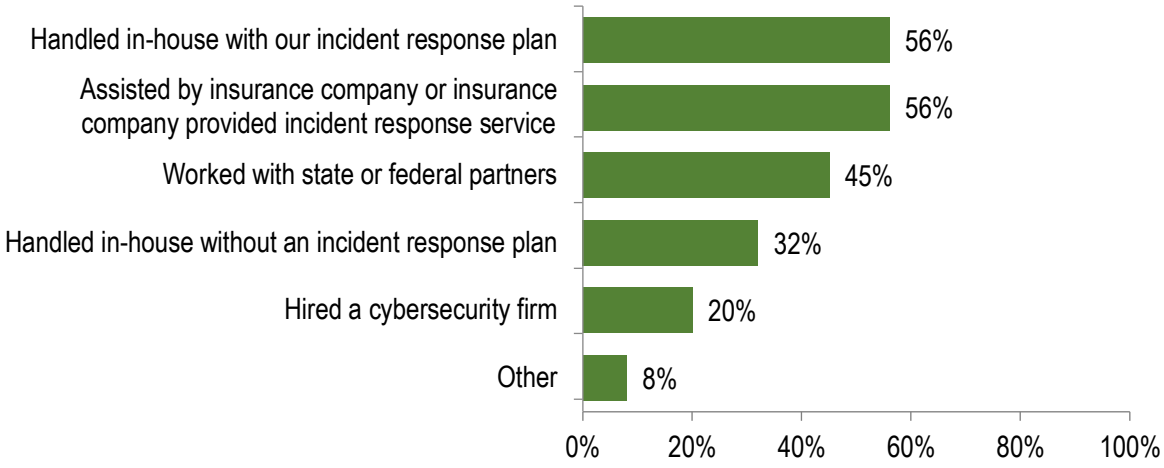
Cyberattacks can cause disruptions in various areas with varying degrees of impact. Of the districts that experienced an attack, a majority across all categories characterized the disruption as major or severe (unable to deliver services for more than 24 hours). Twenty-eight percent (28%) of districts that experienced a disruption to their networks or administrative operations classified them as severe. Of districts whose on-premises systems were affected, a fifth (21%) described the disruption as severe. Other severe disruptions were experienced related to cloud services disruptions (19%), building and security system disruptions (18%), and learning disruptions (16%).

Degree of Disruption Caused by Cyberattacks



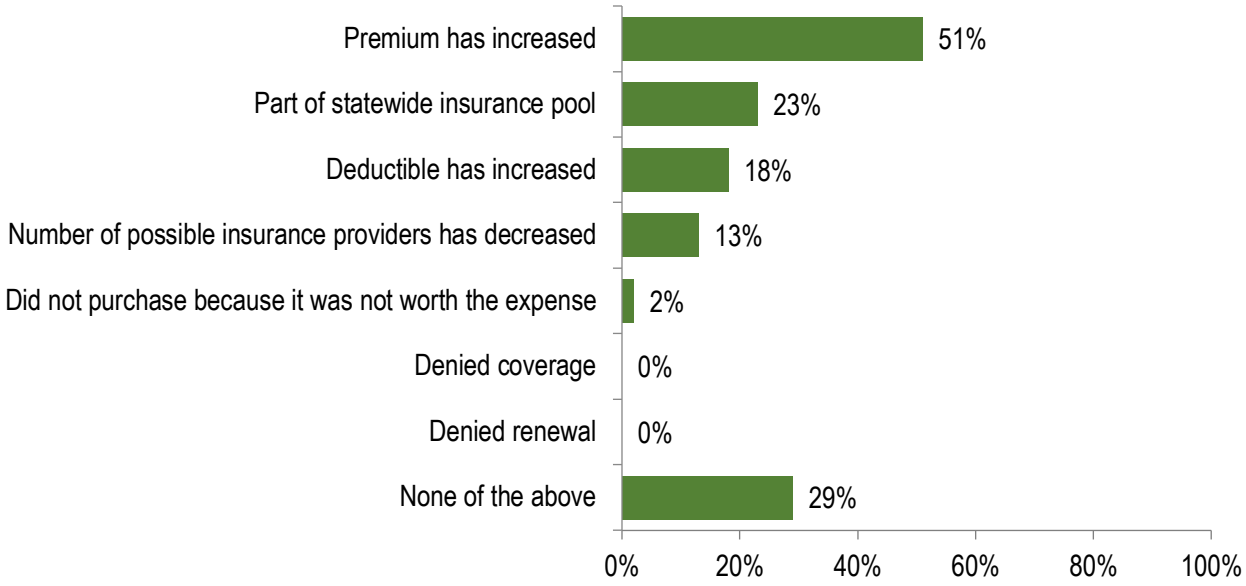
Of districts that experienced an attack, 56% addressed the disruption with their in-house incident response plan. Another third (32%) handled in-house, but without the benefit of an established incident response plan. Districts also make use of external partnerships when responding to incidents. The majority (56%) of districts were assisted by their insurance company in responding or used their insurance company's incident response service. Forty-five percent (45%) worked with their state or federal partners to resolve issues, 20% hired a cybersecurity firm, and 8% managed their response with an approach not listed on the survey.

Management of Disruptions Caused by a Cyberattack



Half (51%) of districts are paying more for their cyber insurance due to premium increases and 18% have had deductible increases. For 13% of responding districts, the number of possible insurance providers decreased, and 2% did not purchase cyber insurance because they felt it was not worth the expense. More than a fifth (23%) of respondents work in districts that are part of a statewide insurance pool. Districts denied coverage or coverage renewal account for less than 0.5% each. (*Note that responses are reported in whole numbers and response rates less than 0.5% are rounded down to zero.*) For 29% of respondents, none of the cyber insurance statements on the survey described their district, suggesting there were no changes in their cyber insurance.

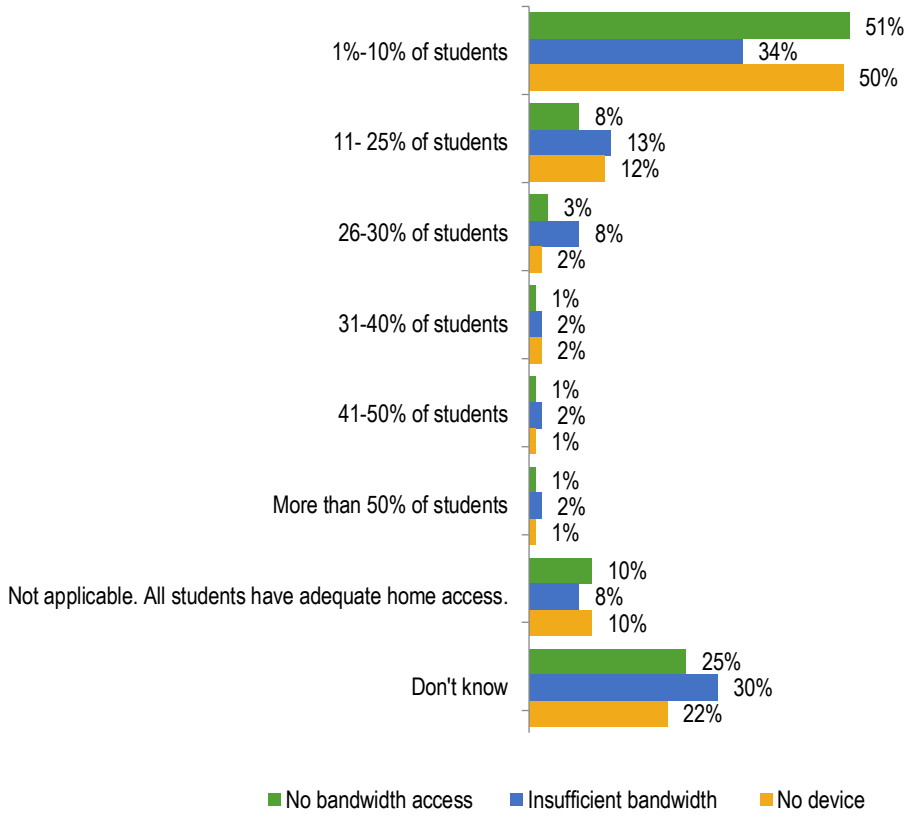
Cyber Insurance Policies



Digital Connectivity

A relatively low percentage of districts report that all their students have home connectivity: 10% home devices, 10% home broadband, and 8% home broadband that is insufficient for video conferencing. A more encouraging picture emerges when looking at district data on students without connectivity. Half of districts report that 10% or less of their students lack access to devices at home and 51% report that only one out of ten (or less) of their students lack access to broadband. For a third (34%) of districts, students with inadequate broadband make up 10% or less of the student population. However, these results do not fully reflect the reality of home access. A significant portion of respondents did not have the data needed to provide a response. Additionally, more than a fifth (22%) do not know whether their students have access to devices outside of school, 25% do not know if their students have broadband, and 30% do not know whether that broadband is sufficient.

Students Without Adequate Home Access



A trend line has emerged regarding district support of off-campus broadband: It is decreasing. While a majority (59%) of respondents report that their school system employs a strategy for increasing broadband access outside of school for their students, that rate has declined from 74% three years ago. The most common strategy at 47% is providing district-owned hot spots, down from 58% in 2023. The share of respondents with initiatives to promote awareness of broadband subsidy programs declined from 35% to 23%, while efforts focused on notifying users about provider-sponsored access programs fell from 25% to 21%.The federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) stopped accepting new applications in February 2024 and concluded in June 2024 after Congress did not provide additional funding which has clearly impacted the reduction in provider sponsored services. While the percentage of those districts providing

free/subsidized home internet access for low-income families (6%) has been roughly consistent since 2024, the rate is a reduction from the 15% of respondents providing that service in 2023. Wi-Fi on school buses is down to 6% from 13%. Those partnering with libraries for loaner hot spots fell to 6% from 8%. Less than a third of districts that provided free/subsidized district-sponsored wireless access in 2023 are doing so today, down to 3% from 10%. Percentages of those using other strategies not listed on the survey have decreased as well, from 4% in 2025 to 2% this year.

Off-Campus Strategies for Broadband Access

Strategy	2026	2025	2024	2023
Do not provide any off-campus services	41%	34%	31%	26%
Provide district-owned hot spots for students	47%	49%	49%	58%
Promote federal broadband benefit programs for low-income families	23%	30%	36%	35%
Promote provider-sponsored services	21%	22%	27%	25%
Provide free/subsidized home internet access for low-income families	6%	8%	7%	15%
Provide Wi-Fi on school buses	6%	9%	9%	13%
Partner with library providing loaner hot spots	6%	7%	8%	8%
Provide free/subsidized district-sponsored wireless access to the community	3%	4%	10%	10%
Other	2%	3%	4%	4%

Strategic Initiatives

Cybersecurity is the No. 1 priority for education technology leaders, as it has been since 2018. As "data consistently show that K-12 schools remain vulnerable to cybersecurity threats,"[2] it was expected that network security initiatives would remain top priorities for education technology leaders. Closely related to cybersecurity is data privacy and security, which came in as the second-highest priority. Gen AI initiatives ranked third. Cost-effective/smart budgeting and network initiatives round out the top five.

Top Technology Priorities

No.	Initiative
1	Cybersecurity
2	Data privacy and security
3	Gen AI
4	Cost-effective/smart budgeting
5	Network infrastructure

When asked to name their top three challenges to planning and implementing technology-enabled learning environments, education technology leaders consistently have listed budgets at the top. It has been the No. 1 challenge in 12 of the 13 years that this question has been asked. Its persistence as the top challenge reflects, in part, the budget constraints of districts in general. Properly maintaining a complex and constantly evolving technology ecosystem requires predictable and sustainable funding. Unanticipated budget expenses, such as increases in server costs, add to the financial pressure.

No. 2 on the list of challenges is the existence of silos in the district, which make it difficult to work together on technology planning. The lack of technology planning created by silos—with silos cited as one of the top three challenges in nine of 13 years of survey data—is a likely contributor to education technology budget issues. Lack of available relevant training and professional development is the third-ranked challenge, another frequent entry on the top challenges list. Like its No. 2 neighbor, it appears on the top three list in nine of last 13 years.

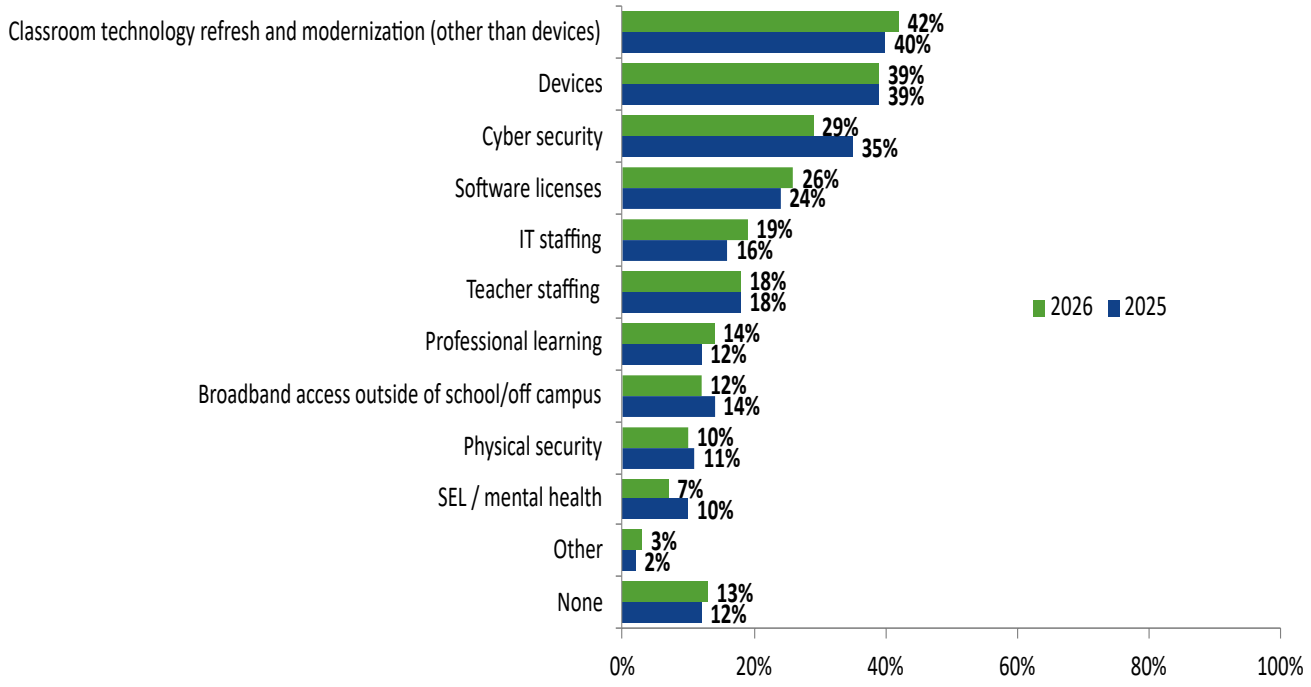
[2] https://www.ed.gov/teaching-and-administration/safe-learning-environments/school-safety-and-security/k-12-cybersecurity

Top Challenges to Technology Implementation

No.	Initiative
1	Budget constraints and lack of resources
2	Existence of silos in the district, which make it difficult to work together on technology planning
3	Relevant training and professional development unavailable

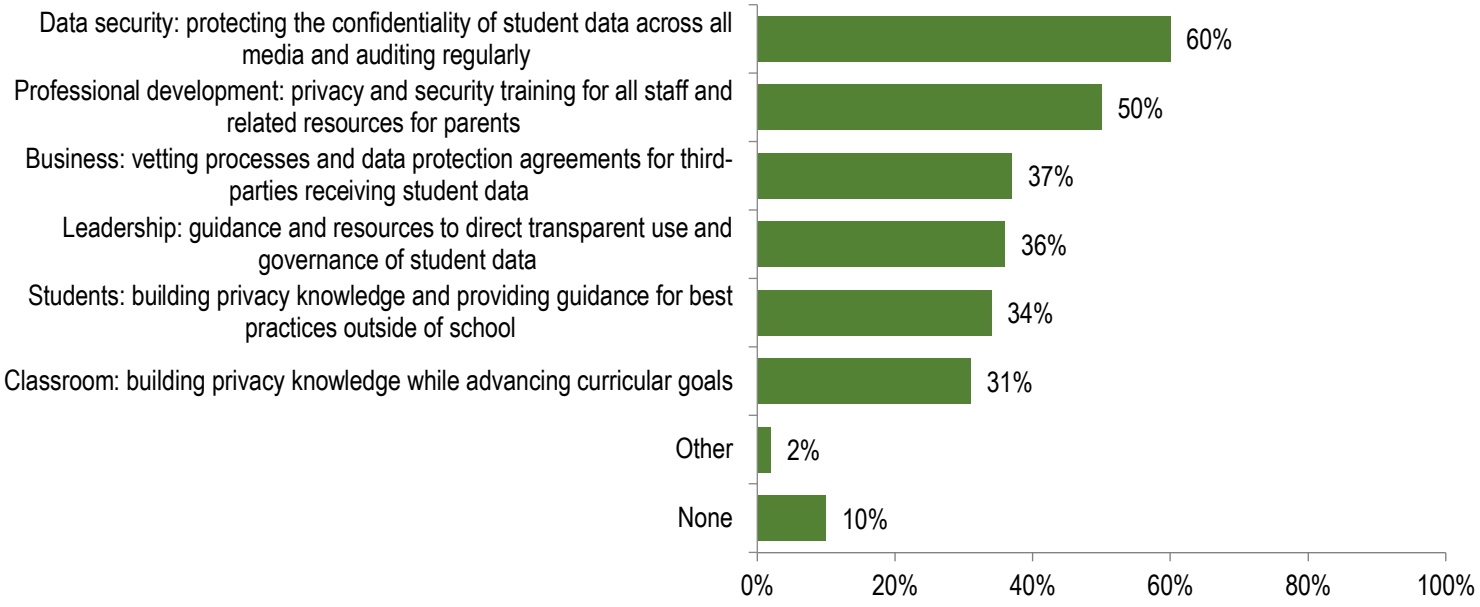
With the ending of emergency funding, education technology budgets are experiencing additional constraints. The various budget categories are being affected at essentially the same rates year over year. The refresh and modernization of classroom technology is the area most at risk, with 42% of respondents citing this concern. Devices follow at 39%. Cybersecurity is next with 29%; it is the only budget area with a reduced risk assessment, down from 35% the prior year. About a quarter of districts (26% this year, 25% in 2025) still have concerns about the loss of emergency funding impacting their ability to purchase software licenses. Less than a fifth (20%) of respondents indicated budgets are at risk for any of the other items on the survey. Thirteen percent (13%) reported that none of the budget categories on the survey were at risk, and only 3% reported there were other areas at risk.

Assessment of Areas at Risk with End of Federal/State Emergency Funding by Year



Districts are planning improvements to their privacy practices. Data security is a focus for 60% of respondents. Half (50%) have professional development plans to train staff and provide resources for parents on privacy and security, underscoring the importance of proactive, transparent communication with communities. Thirty-seven percent (37%) will be improving their vetting process for agreements with third-parties that receive student data. Two-thirds (36%) will be addressing leadership practices that improve student data governance. A third (34%) will focus on building their students' privacy knowledge, and 31% will be improving their classroom practices by building privacy knowledge while advancing curricular goals.

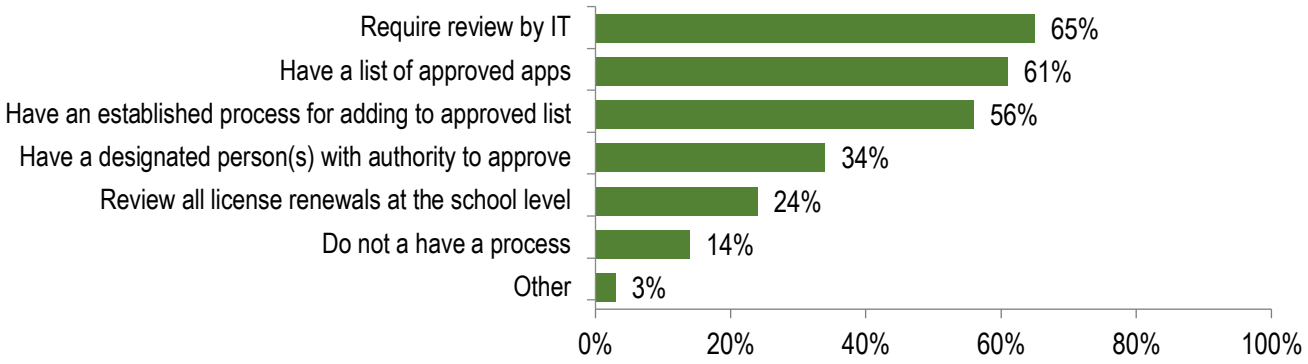
Areas for Improvement in Privacy Practices



Data and cybersecurity risks are not limited to paid software, so it is important to have a procedure in place to vet tools before they are used in schools. The good news is that the vast of majority (86%) of districts do so. About two-thirds (65%) require a review by IT, 61% create a list of approved apps, and 56% have a defined process for adding apps to the list. A third (34%) have a designated person(s) with approval authority, 24% review all license renewals

at the school level, and 3% use other methods not listed on the survey. Of course, having a process for vetting is only effective when districts use it, as one respondent reported.

Approval Processes for Use of Free Tools



Education Technology Leader Profiles

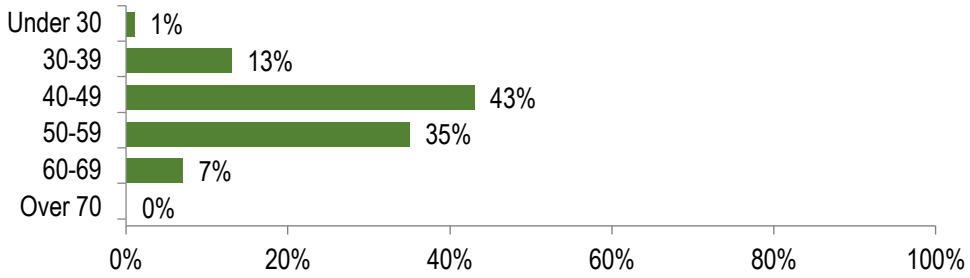
The significant shift in female-to-male ratios within the ranks of education technology leaders was first detected in 2025 and held constant for 2026. This observed decline in the proportion of female respondents is notable and warrants continued monitoring.

Education Technology Leaders segmented by Female / Male

Education Technology Leadership	2026	2025	2024
Female	29%	29%	37%
Male	69%	69%	62%
Prefer not to answer	2%	1%	1%

The majority (78%) of education technology leaders are in their 40s and 50s, including 43% who are in the 40-49 age bracket. Only 14% are under 40 with an even lower percentage (7%) over 50. Respondents over 70 accounted for less than 0.5%. *(Note that since responses are reported in whole numbers, rates less than 0.5% are rounded down to zero.)*

Ages of Education Technology Leaders



The vast majority (88%) of education technology leaders are white, a survey result that has not changed beyond a margin of error since respondent race and ethnicity data started to be collected in 2014. Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx account for 5%. Respondents identifying as Black, African American, or Sub-Saharan African account for 2%. The remaining three categories—Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and multiracial/multiple races—each account for 1% of respondents. Four percent (4%) chose not to answer the question.

Education Technology Leadership by Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity	Percentage
White, Caucasian, or European	88%
Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx	5%
Black, African American, or Sub-Saharan African	2%
Asian (East, Central, South)	1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Multiracial/Multiple races	1%
Middle Eastern/North African	<.5%
Other	0%
Prefer not to answer	4%

The sum exceeds 100% since participants could select more than one answer.

Education technology leaders report primary backgrounds in technology and education at similar rates, 48% and 45% respectively. However, rates for a secondary background in technology (41%) are nearly double those in education (21%). This could suggest there is an increased need to focus on the "technology" of educational technology. It is also notable that more than a fifth

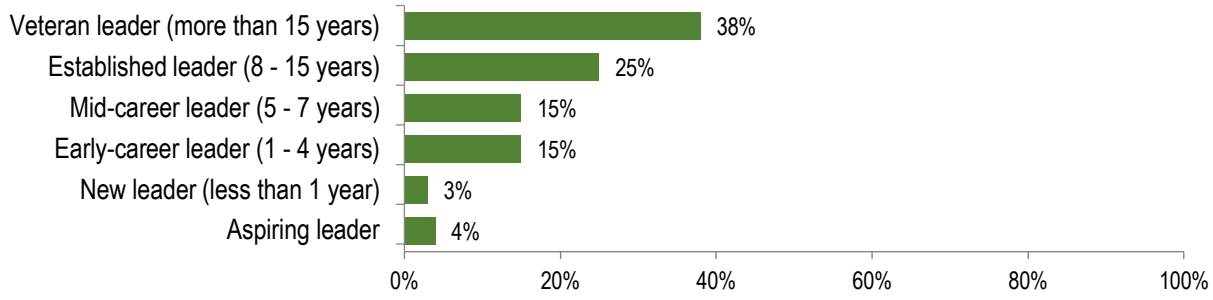
(22%) of respondents have a secondary background in business/management. Those skills are likely to be helpful to education technology leaders as they navigate budgets and change management issues.

Comparison of Primary/Secondary Professional Backgrounds

Professional Background	Primary	Secondary
Technology/Technical	48%	41%
Education/Instruction	45%	21%
Business/Management	5%	22%
Other	1%	2%
Not applicable	--	14%

Veteran leaders (more than 15 years of experience) comprise 38% of respondents. Those with eight to 15 years of experience account for a quarter (25%). Mid-career leaders (five to seven years) and early-career (one to four years) each comprise 15%. Education technology leaders with less than a year's experience and those aspiring to become leaders combine for 7% of respondents.

Career Stages of Education Technology Leaders

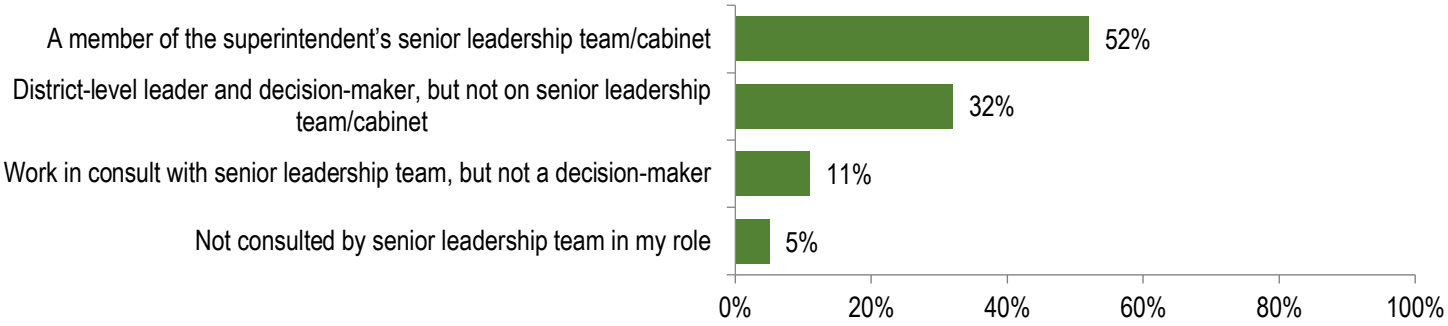


More than half (52%) of respondents are members of their superintendent's cabinet, a CoSN best practice. Nearly a third (32%) are district-level decision-makers but are not part of the superintendent's cabinet. Eleven percent (11%) are not decision-makers but consult with the senior leadership team. Just 5% are not consulted by their leadership team when decisions are made. However,

this percentage should be zero, as technology touches virtually everything in a district. As one respondent explained:

> *"Districts need an IT leader on cabinet to advise the superintendent on effectively managing inter-departmental communications, champion change, create efficiencies, manage projects, and automate workflows leveraging the latest state-of-the-art tools. A CTO in education also understands and applies learning theory to help with student learning."*

Education Technology Leaders' Involvement in District-Level Decisions



Responses indicate an upward trend for districts' top technology leader salaries. While the majority (55%) still earn less than $130K, the percentage of those earning $130K or more has increased to 41% from 21% two years ago. Those in the $160-200K bracket have more than doubled to 16% this year from 7% in 2024. Although still in the single digits, those earning more than $200K have tripled in the same time frame, from 2% to 6%.

Salary Ranges by Year

Salary Range	2026	2025	2024
Less than $70K	9%	9%	18%
$70-99,999K	17%	21%	25%
$100-129,999K	29%	33%	27%
$130-159,999K	19%	20%	12%
$160-200K	16%	14%	7%
More than $200K	6%	3%	2%
Did not provide	4%	1%	8%

Analysis of salaries by district enrollment reveals that education technology leaders serving small and very small districts tend to fall at the lower end of the pay scale. More than half (53%) of respondents in very small districts earn under $100K and more than half (52%) of respondents in small districts earn less than $130K. In comparison, a majority (63%) of those working in medium-sized districts earn $130K or more. Districts with the most students tend to pay at the top salary ranges. Education technology leaders earning $160K or more comprise 60% of respondents in large districts, and more than three-quarters of respondents (76%) in very large districts.

Top Education Technology Leader Salary by Enrollments

Salary Range	Very Small (1-1,749)	Small (1,750-5,999)	Medium (6,000-24,999)	Large (25,000-149,999)	Very Large (150,000 +)
Less than $70K	22%	3%	1%	4%	0%
$70-99,999K	31%	15%	3%	0%	0%
$100-129,999K	27%	34%	28%	11%	0%
$130-159,999K	12%	22%	26%	22%	25%
$160-200K	3%	17%	28%	41%	13%
More than $200K	2%	4%	9%	19%	63%
Did not provide	3%	5%	5%	4%	0%

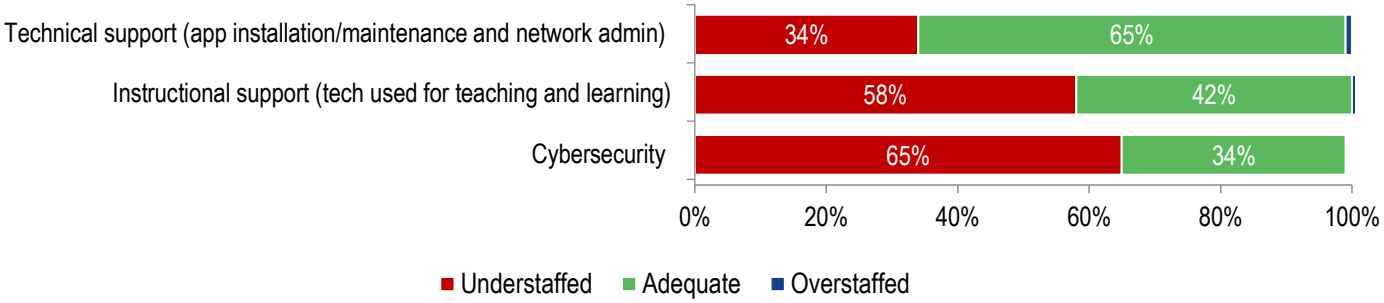
Staffing

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents report they have sufficient staff to provide district technical support, including the 1% who report being overstaffed in that area. A third (34%) lack the staffing levels needed for adequate app support and network administration. The rate of inadequate staffing is much greater for instructional support, with 58% reporting they are understaffed when it comes to technology used for teaching and learning. This lack of instructional support can impact the efficacy of programs purchased by districts. As one respondent lamented:

"Attention has shifted away from supporting teachers with technology and applications and we just expect them to figure it out or just know how to use technology tools. Money is wasted on curriculum, software tools, and subscriptions without software supports."

A larger majority, at an alarming 65%, report they lack the staff needed for district cybersecurity. As cybersecurity is ranked as districts' top priority, cybersecurity staffing levels is one aspect that districts will need to review.

IT Staffing Levels

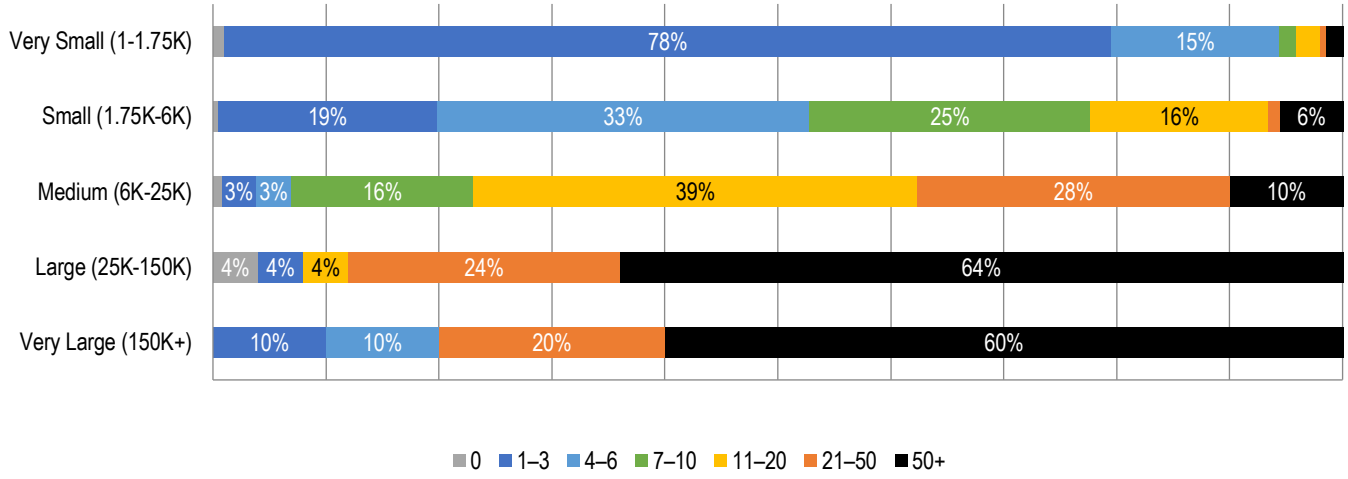


Unsurprisingly, smaller districts have fewer IT FTEs per enrollment than larger districts. More than three-quarters (78%) of very small districts have only one to three IT FTEs. The majority (52%) of small districts employ six FTEs or less. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of medium-sized districts have 11 to 20 FTEs, with 21 to 50 FTEs for the next largest segment (28%). The majority (64%) of large districts have 50 or more FTEs, slightly more than very large districts where 60% employ 50 or more.

It is important to note that enrollment is an inadequate indicator of users. Teachers, administrators, and support staff need to be added. Also, the number of users is just one aspect to consider when determining appropriate IT staffing levels. The complexity of the digital environment involves other factors such as the number of applications, level of interoperability, variety and ages of devices, and the extent of remote learning. Other aspects that impact IT FTE staffing include degree of automation, outsourcing strategies, and a district's

technology maturity. The sheer number of variables make meaningful cross-district benchmarking difficult.

Number of IT FTEs or Equivalents



Devices

Districts report a high level of access to digital devices across grade levels, expanding access for students who may not otherwise have it and supporting learners who benefit from digital tools to effectively participate in learning.

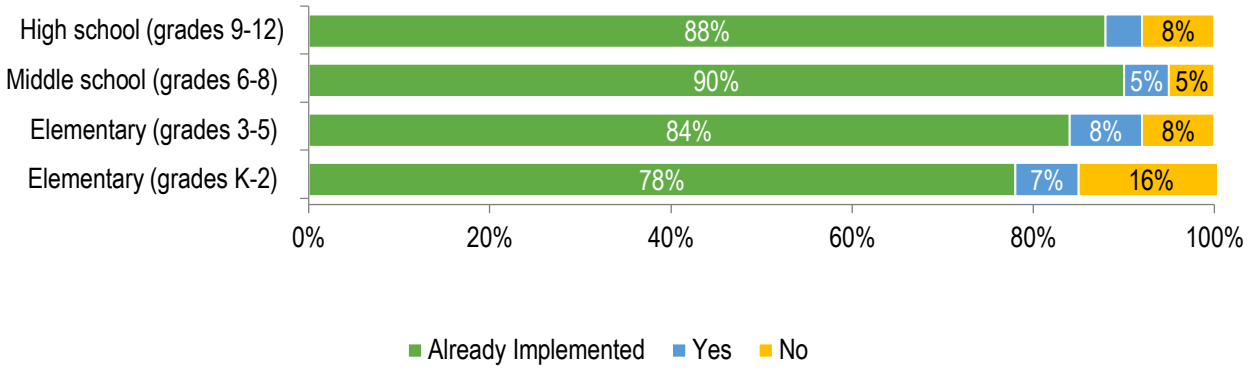
The highest levels of device availability are in high school and middle school grades, where 88% and 90%, respectively, have access to 1:1 device use. Elementary access is lower, with 84% of respondents reporting 1:1 device availability in grades 3–5 and 78% in grades K–2.

District approaches to technology vary by age group, reflecting intentional decisions about age-appropriate instructional use. Sixteen percent (16%) report that individual device assignments are not planned for K–2 students, compared with significantly smaller shares in grades 3–5 (8%), middle school (5%), and high school (8%). More than a third (38%) of districts expect reduced funding

for devices, which could lengthen refresh cycles and/or impact student-to-device ratios. As one respondent in a current 1:1 district reports:

> *"Due to budget horizons... [the district is] considering moving to cart-based 6-12, implying their move to only have a fraction of devices per student."*

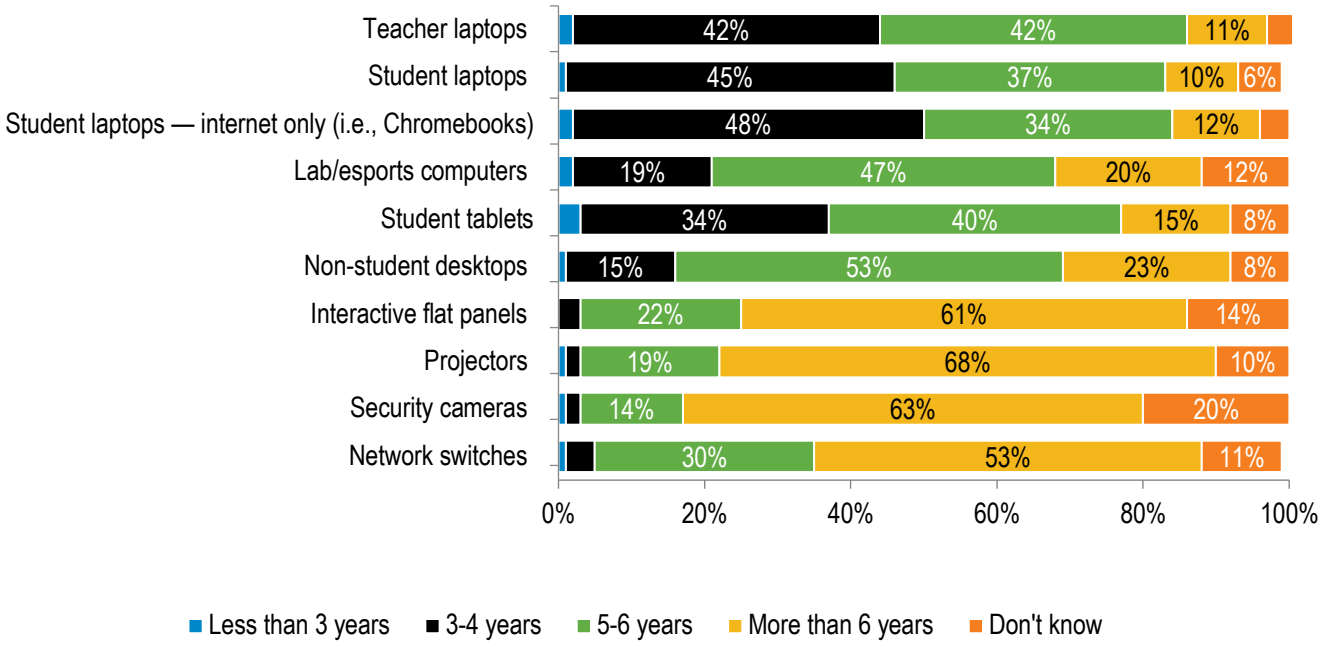
1:1 Goals



Refresh rates differ by device type. The device with the shortest time between refreshes is the internet-only student laptop. Half (50%) of respondents replace them in four years or less, including 2% who replace them in under three years. Standard student laptops are refreshed in the same time frames at similar rates—46% replace within four years, including 1% that replace in less than three years. Student tablets are refreshed less frequently than other 1:1 devices; only 37% are replaced in the four-year time frame, although 3% replace in less than three years.

Teacher laptops are refreshed relatively frequently; 44% of districts replace them in four years or less, including 2% that do so in less than three years. Less than a quarter (22%) of districts replace their lab/esports computers in four years. Only 16% of districts refresh non-student desktops within the four-year time frame. Non-computer devices have the longest refresh cycle—more than six years—in most districts. Replacements are extended beyond six years for projectors (68%); security cameras (63%), interactive flat panels (61%), and network switches (53%).

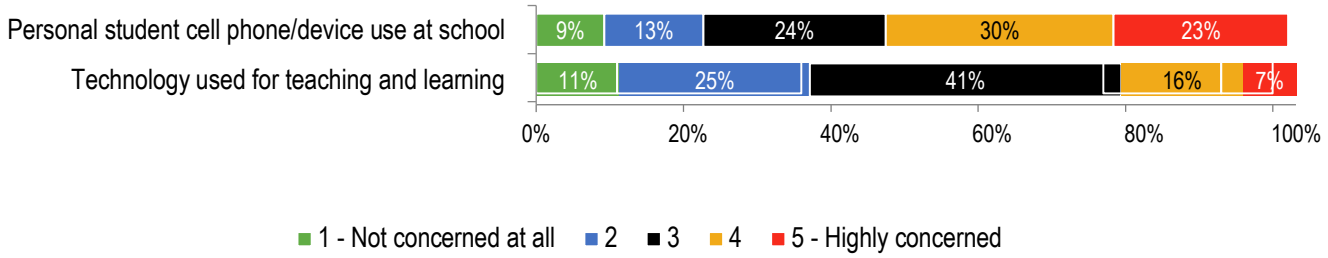
Refresh Cycle by Device Type



Broader conversations about children's screen time are increasingly shaping public dialogue, driven primarily by concerns related to social media and other forms of recreational technology. As these discussions expand, technology used for learning has also entered the spotlight, prompting policymakers and education leaders to examine how digital tools are used safely, responsibly, and effectively across different grade levels and instructional contexts.

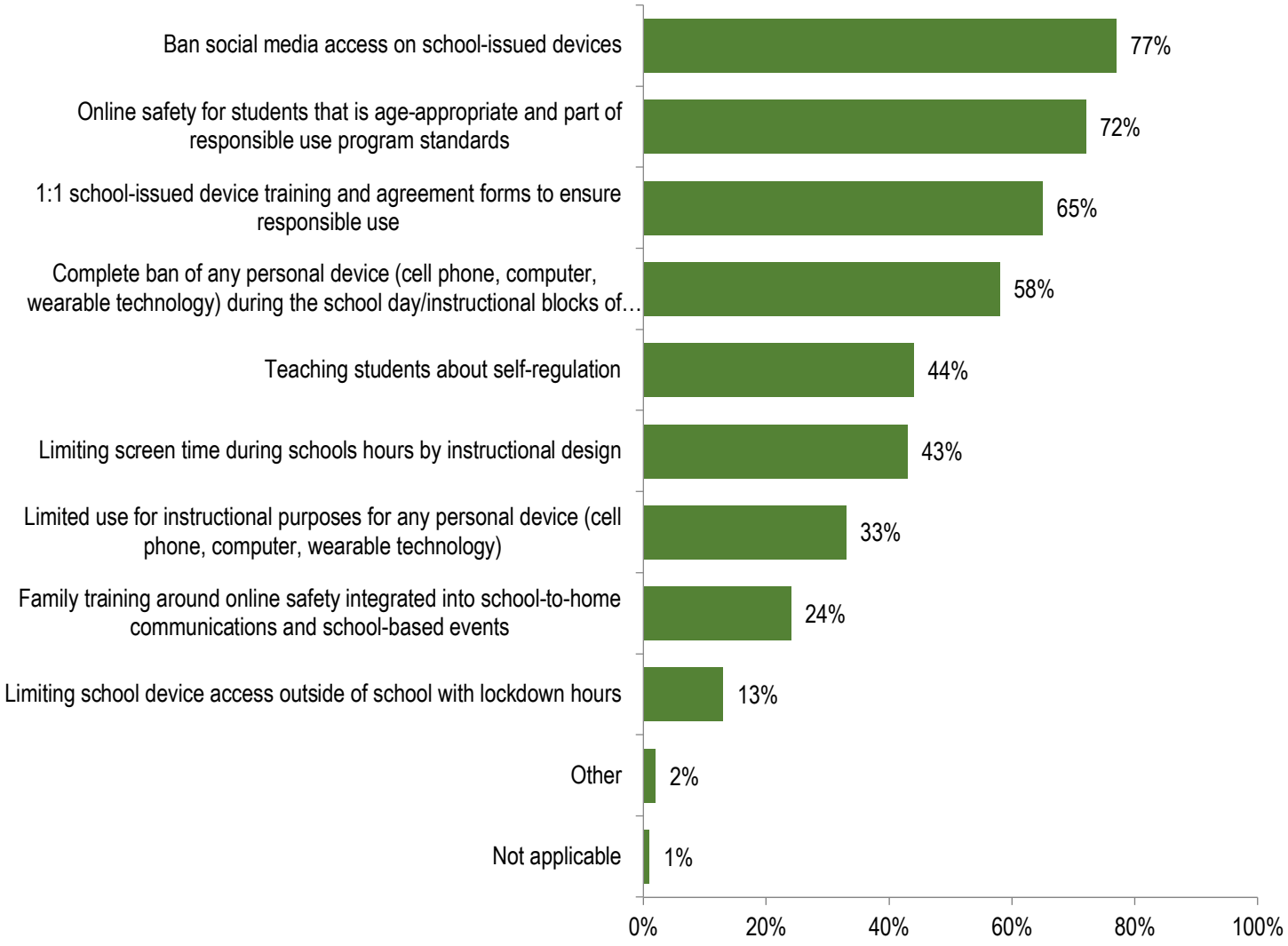
Survey results show an important distinction in community perceptions: Concerns are significantly higher surrounding students' use of personal devices in school than for education technology used to enhance teaching and learning. More than half (53%) of respondents report relatively high degrees of community concern about personal device use in schools. By contrast, only 23% of districts characterize concern about education technology as high. These findings suggest that communities generally view education technology more favorably than unrestricted personal device use—and recognize its instructional purpose when implemented thoughtfully.

Degree of Community Concern about Screen Time



Virtually all (99%) respondents report that their districts have practices to help students make healthy technology choices. More than three-quarters (77%) ban social media access on school devices. Seventy-two percent (72%) have age-appropriate responsible use programs, 65% have training and agreement forms to ensure responsible use on school-issued devices, and 58% ban personal devices (including wearables) during school. Teaching students about self-regulation (44%) and limiting screen time during school hours by instructional design (43%) are also common practices. A third (33%) limit personal device use for instructional purposes and 24% integrate family training around online safety into school-to-home communications and school-based events. At 13%, using lockdown hours to limit school device access outside of school is the tactic least employed by school districts.

Support for Healthy Technology and Online Choices



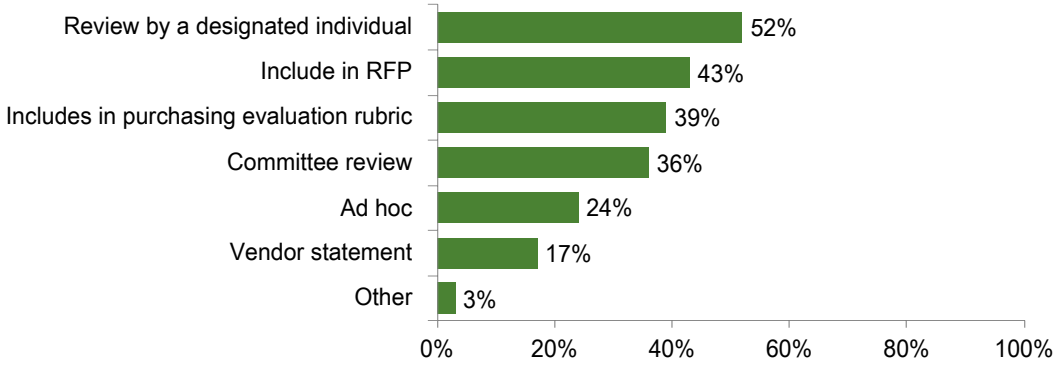
Procurement

When making purchasing decisions about educational or operational technology, a key consideration is how well it will integrate into a district's digital ecosystem. The most common district practice to address interoperability is designating an individual to review during the procurement process (52%). Forty-three percent (43%) of districts include interoperability requirements in their RFPs and 39% include interoperability in their evaluation rubric. More than a third (36%) use a committee review process, 17% require a vendor statement, and 3% use methods not listed on the survey. However, nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents reported their districts do not have an established purchasing process to assess interoperability. One respondent complained:

> *"There are still many instances that come across my desk where a supervisor or director purchased a technology and did not do any research."*

An ad hoc approach is the least desirable method, as it can lead to costly and delayed implementation and can put district data at risk.

Process for Addressing Interoperability During Procurement

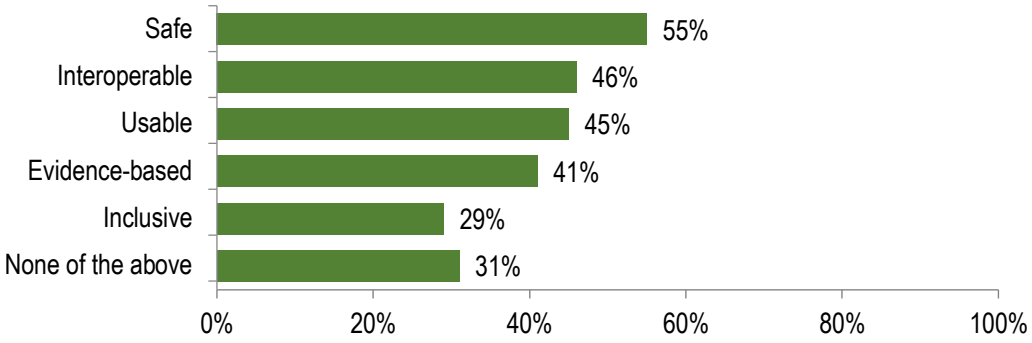


Although the majority (54%) of respondents are unfamiliar with the Five Quality Indicator Framework,[3] 69% require vendors to provide information on at least one of the five factors. Not surprisingly, information about safety is required by the majority (55%), followed by interoperability (46%), usability (45%), and

[3] https://www.cast.org/our-impact/projects/edtech-coalition-quality-indicators/

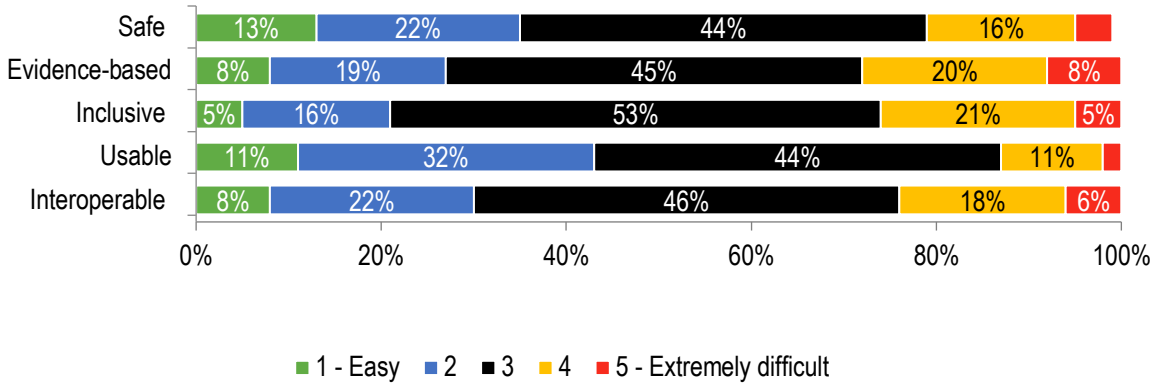
evidence-based design (41%). Unfortunately, less than a third (29%) require information about a product's accessibility for all learners.

Required Vendor-Provided Quality Indicators



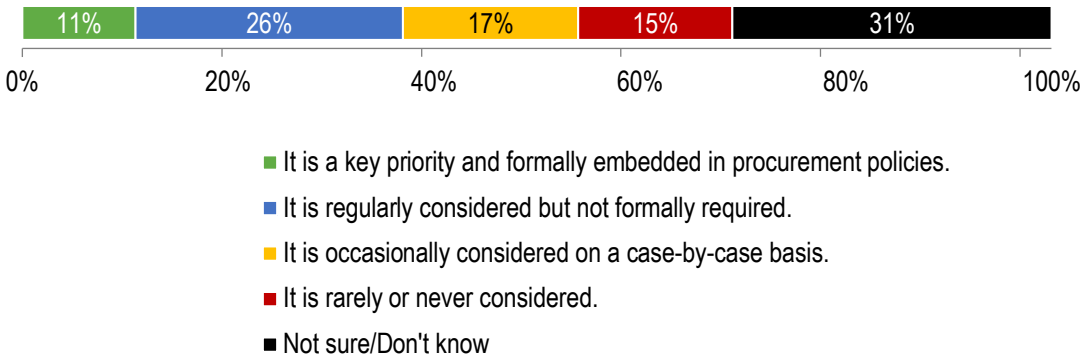
Most respondents rated the difficulty of achieving the five indicators as moderate to easy. Assessing a product's usability is the least difficult; 43% rate it on the lower end of the scale, including 11% who characterize it as easy. The factor most difficult to achieve is evidence-based, with 28% rating it as difficult, including 8% who described it as extremely difficult. The inclusive/accessible aspect of tech products also has a relatively high percentage skewed toward greater difficulty, with 26% rating it difficult to achieve, including 5% characterizing it as extremely difficult. Twenty-four percent (24%) find assessing interoperability to be difficult, including 6% rating it extremely difficult.

Degree of Difficulty Achieving the Five Quality Indicators



Generally, accessibility and WCAG 2.1AA[4] compliance is not a factor when making digital content purchasing decisions. Less than a third (26%) of respondents advised it is regularly considered, and only 11% have formal procurement policies that require it. Districts that address it occasionally account for 17%, with 15% rarely or never considering accessibility. The additional 31% of respondents who were unsure about their district's policy indicates digital content accessibility is not a priority for many districts. These results are somewhat surprising as WCAG 2.1 AA compliance is a federal requirement. So, it is good news that the federal deadline for compliance was extended to April 2027 for school districts serving large communities and to 2028 for smaller districts.[5] While the underlying accessibility requirements remain unchanged, the additional time is intended to support more thoughtful, sustainable implementation.

Addressing Accessibility and Adherence to WCAG 2.1AA Standards During Procurement



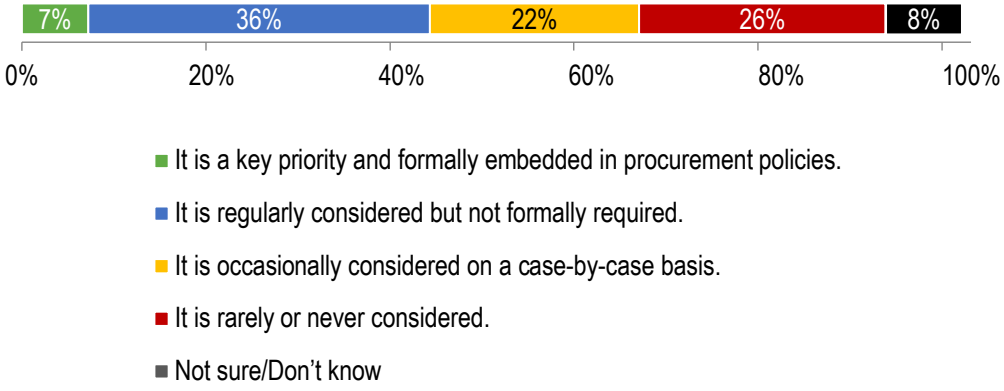
Only 7% of respondents report environmental sustainability as a priority consideration when purchasing technology, while more than third (36%) consider it regularly. However, more than a quarter (26%) rarely or never consider it and 22% only occasionally consider it. As concern grows about e-waste, energy consumption, and the environmental impact of sourcing the

[4] https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/

[5] https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/04/20/2026-07663/extension-of-compliance-dates-for-nondiscrimination-on-the-basis-of-disability-accessibility-of-web

materials used in the making of devices, the desire and demand for sustainable products is likely to grow as well.

Addressing Environmental Sustainability During Procurement



Summary

Keeping networks and people secure is an ongoing challenge for districts. Districts increasingly are leveraging operational AI to enhance school safety, with cybersecurity remaining as the top priority. However, respondents cite the lack of a dedicated budget as the top barrier to addressing cybersecurity and rank overall budget constraints as their top challenge. Increasing the financial pressure on districts is the rising cost of cyber insurance, which paradoxically pulls money away from staffing and systems that could reduce the need to use that insurance. With the majority of education technology leaders also reporting they do not have the staff needed for cybersecurity, it is clear many districts struggle to protect their systems and data.

Leveraging AI to support security measures and improve productivity increases efficiencies and helps address operational staffing gaps. However, the benefits of AI use are counterbalanced by its risks. The overwhelming majority of education technology leaders have concerns about the impact on student data privacy and the new forms of cyberattacks enabled by AI—so it is encouraging that 80% of districts have a defined approach to AI usage and 79% have adopted AI policies. The ongoing challenge will be keeping those guidelines up to date with the rapid changes in AI capabilities.

Year after year, education technology leaders report they lack necessary resources and work in siloed environments which make technology planning difficult. Yet, as one respondent highlighted, education technology leaders "keep everything running." An apparent shift in profiles toward technology backgrounds reflects the expanded role played by education technology leaders beyond the support of technology used for teaching and learning. Although educational software has become more intuitive to use, most districts still face challenges from insufficient staffing to effectively support teaching and learning technology. With current community concerns regarding education technology, staffing gaps will need to be addressed to ensure that "education technology advances K-12 learning and prepares students to succeed after graduation.[6]"

[6] https://www.cosn.org/cosn-news/leading-education-organizations-highlight-importance-of-technology-and-connectivity-for-learning-as-senate-committee-examines-impact-of-technology-on-youth/

CoSN Resources

Current CoSN resources include:

- **Framework of Essential Skills** (www.cosn.org/framework)
  The Framework of Essential Skills of the K-12 CTO comprises three primary professional categories in the education technology field: leadership and vision, educational environment, and managing technology and business. Each of these categories includes 10 essential skill areas, outlining the responsibilities and knowledge needed to be a viable educational technology leader. Each of these skills, and the knowledge required for them, are included in CoSN's Certified Education Technology Leader (CETL) certification exam.

- **The Digital Leap Success Matrix** (www.cosn.org/successmatrix)
  School system leaders need guidance to advance their technology goals and to overcome challenges, both unexpected and expected. The newly updated Digital Leap Success Matrix outlines the practices needed to create a successful digital school system. The Matrix is aligned to CoSN's Framework of Essential Skills of the K-12 CTO.

- **Peer Reviews** (www.cosn.org/peer-review)
  This rigorous process for assessing a school system's digital readiness is based on CoSN's Digital Leap Success Matrix.

- **2025 Blaschke Report and Toolkit | Screens in Balance: Education, Technology, and Community Conversations**
  https://www.cosn.org/2025-blaschke-report-toolkit/
  The ubiquity of screens in American K–12 schools has become a pressing and controversial issue 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 the inevitable impact on children

- **Cybersecurity Resources** (www.cosn.org/cybersecurity)
  This suite of resources addresses cybersecurity in K-12 organizations around planning, prevention and preparation, implementation, responses, and more.

- **2025 State Cybersecurity Legislation Report** (https://www.cosn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-State-Cybersecurity-Legislation-Report.pdf)
  In 2025, school districts continued to face increasingly complex and costly cybersecurity challenges—yet most remain under-resourced and underprepared. As this report shows, while federal support is shrinking, several states advanced innovative, bipartisan legislation to help safeguard student data, improve incident response, expand insurance access, and build the cybersecurity workforce we urgently need.

- **CoSN's NIST Cybersecurity Framework Resource Alignment for K-12 v2.0** (www.cosn.org/Cybersecurityframework)
  This site seamlessly aligns the NIST Cybersecurity Framework with a wealth of free and CoSN member resources, empowering school districts to fortify their cyber programs and safeguard their educational environments against evolving digital threats. Use it to find the resources you need to build and expand your cybersecurity program.

  Trusted Learning Environment (TLE)
  (www.cosn.org/Trusted; www.cosn.org/TLEPartner)
  This program is designed to help K-12 schools and districts build strong, effective privacy programs and a culture of trust and transparency with 25 essential privacy practices. States can support their districts through the CoSN TLE State Partnership Program, bringing privacy resources and improvements to all districts in their state. Districts can take a step-by-step approach and apply for a mini seal in one TLE practice area at a time or apply for the full TLE seal all at once.

  Student Data Privacy (www.cosn.org/privacy)
  These resources educate district technology leaders about student data privacy requirements and provide actionable guidance on creating and improving districtwide student data privacy programs while building trust across the larger district community.

- **CoSN 2025 National Student Data Privacy Report**

  Part 1: www.cosn.org/2025dataprivacypart1

  Part 2: www.COSN.org/2025dataprivacypart2

  The CoSN 2025 National Student Data Privacy Report provides results of an extensive survey of district representatives about their privacy expertise and district privacy practices. Divided into two parts, this one-of-a-kind report provides an unprecedented look into how districts are managing the critical task of safeguarding student data.

- **Gen AI Readiness and Maturity Tool** (www.cosn.org/ai)

  To empower school districts to assess preparedness for responsible Generative AI integration, CoSN and the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) collaborated to develop the online K-12 Generative AI Maturity Tool, which expands upon the K-12 Generative AI Readiness Checklist.

- **The CTO's Strategic Guide to Sustainability**

  (www.cosn.org/sustainabilityguide)

  The biggest hurdle to budget stability is the short replacement cycle of instructional tech. Many budget devices have built-in end dates tied to software support expiration. This “Chromebook churn” forces IT teams to retire perfectly functional hardware, saddling the district with premature replacement costs and mountains of e-waste. Nationally, doubling the usable lifespan of K–12 devices could save an estimated $1.8 billion. To help districts address this challenge, CoSN developed the Sustainable Procurement Guidelines in partnership with SETDA and UDT. This framework offers a menu of options across six pillars to help you build a more durable fleet.

- **Interoperability Toolkit** (www.cosn.org/interoperability)
  These resources help districts increase the interoperability of their academic and operational systems.

- **2025 CIRCUITS Resources** (https://www.cosn.org/edtech-topics/circuits/)
  CoSN's CIRCUITS Committee focuses on advancing Critical Infrastructure and Resilient Clouds for Unified Innovation and Technology in Schools, ensuring that K–12 districts have the reliable, secure, and adaptable technology systems needed to power modern education.

- **EmpowerED Superintendent Resources** (www.cosn.org/superintendent)
  CoSN provides targeted resources for district leaders through the EmpowerED Superintendents initiative, including leadership tools; free critical issue one-pagers on topics like AI, cybersecurity, and data privacy; and the EdLeader Panel series to support superintendent learning and collaboration. CoSN also offers ongoing professional development and events to build skills that strengthen technology leadership across districts.

- **Driving K-12 Innovation** (www.cosn.org/k12innovation)
  This annual report examines key trends around emerging technologies to transform learning, organized around Hurdles, Accelerators, and Tech Enablers.

- **K-12 Technology Environmental Sustainability**
  (www.cosn.org/sustainability**)**
  Resources help school leaders implement environmentally sustainable practices in educational technology, including guidance on procurement, energy efficiency, and responsible device management.

- **Accessibility** (www.cosn.org/accessibility)
  CoSN offers the AI & Accessibility in Education Blaschke Report, guidance, and policy support to help school leaders ensure educational technology is accessible, inclusive, and compliant with legal standards.

In addition to these public resources, CoSN offers members extensive exclusive content and tools designed to support district leadership. This includes resources like the **CoSN/ASBO Toolkit** for strengthening

collaboration between school business officials and CTOs, and the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for Schools Toolkit (part of CoSN's Building Capacity for Generative AI in K-12 Education initiative).

CoSN also publishes member exclusive briefs and national survey reports that offer timely guidance on innovative technologies and key issues in K-12 education. Recent member briefs include insights on screen time in "Screens in Balance: Education, Technology, and Community Conversations." Ongoing professional development opportunities include webinars, online courses, and EdLeader panel series that focus on pressing issues like cybersecurity, data privacy, and AI in schools—all free or discounted for members.

CoSN continues to expand its member offerings with new briefs and reports that address the evolving education technology landscape. Members also gain access to premium tools, guides, and implementation resources through the Member Exclusive Resource Center, ongoing professional learning opportunities, and survey-driven research on topics like operational AI in education—all designed to help district leaders make informed decisions and lead with confidence.

About the Survey

The 45-question survey was emailed to U.S. school district education technology leaders on Jan. 14, 2026, with periodic reminders sent to non-respondents until the survey's close on March 2, 2026. Respondents could also participate via a public link. There were 607 district responses. Only one response per district was included. The response of the most senior education technology leader, as defined by title, was selected in instances where more than one response per district was received.

The survey has a 4% margin of error at the 95% confidence level. Survey responses were received from 44 states; there were no respondents from Delaware, Hawaii, Mississippi, New Mexico, Rhode Island, or West Virginia.

The vast majority of respondents (93%) work in public school districts. Religious schools comprise 3% of respondents, charter school districts account for 2%, and private schools account for 1%. Respondent percentages, by district population, are:

- Very small districts (less than 1,750 students): 34%
- Small districts (1,750-5,999): 35%,
- Medium size districts (6,000-24,999 students): 23%
- Large districts (25,000-149.999): 5%
- Very large districts (150,000 or more): 2%

CoSN, the world-class professional association for K-12 education technology leaders, is driven by a mission to equip current and aspiring K-12 education technology leaders, their teams, and school districts with the community, knowledge, and professional development they need to cultivate engaging learning environments**.** Visit cosn.org or email membership@cosn.org to find out more about CoSN's focus areas, annual conference and events, advocacy and policy, membership, and the CETL® certification exam.

CDW Education makes technology work so students can do great things. We are a trusted partner to schools, districts, and institutions of all sizes. CDW Education leverages a unique combination of decades of boots-on-the-ground education experience and best-in-class partners, solutions, and services to help you drive the education outcomes that are most important to you.

With more than 25 years of serving education, Lightspeed Systems helps district leaders address today's top challenges—from cybersecurity and student safety to screen time, AI use, and limited IT resources. Lightspeed delivers the visibility and control schools need to keep students safe and engaged, protect data, and make smarter decisions about technology.

Purpose-built for K–12, Lightspeed's cloud-managed solutions include web filtering, student safety monitoring, analytics, classroom management, and device management. Headquartered in Austin, Texas, Lightspeed serves over 23 million students across 31,000 schools in 43 countries, managing 15 million devices. Get your free screen time report at https://www.lightspeedsystems.com/screen-time-audit/.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 10,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to equitable access for all students to the highest-quality public education. For more information, visit www.aasa.org.

Sogolytics helps organizations transform feedback into action through an easy-to-use experience management platform that unites powerful survey tools, managed research, automated analytics, and real-time reporting. Whether measuring customer satisfaction, employee engagement, or market sentiments, Sogolytics simplifies data collection and turns insights into impact.

With customizable solutions, enterprise-grade security, and expert support, organizations of all sizes can make smarter decisions, improve performance, and build stronger partnerships. From credit unions to K-12 institutions, Sogolytics makes it easy to listen deeply, respond effectively, and drive meaningful change.

MCH Strategic Data is a pioneer and innovator in educational marketing data. For nearly a century MCH has helped businesses reach administrators and educators within school districts nationwide and of all sizes. Trusted by the CDC, National Institutes of Health, and Harvard to provide the most up-to-date school district data during the pandemic, they offer national data coverage, invaluable expert insights, and top-tier personal service to help clients reach their customers with pinpoint accuracy.

About the Survey Report Author

Paula Maylahn is an education consultant with 40 years' experience across K-20. She is a project director for CoSN's interoperability initiatives, contributing author on "The Experts' Guide to the K-12 Market" and "The Experts' Guide to the Postsecondary Market," and the author of the paper "Interoperability: Definitions, Expectations, and Implications." Paula is a council member of the Women's Education Project, a twice-elected board member of the Software & Information Industry Association Education Division, former executive council member of the PreK-12 Learning Group of the Association of American Publishers, and former board member of the United Design Guild where she chaired the education council.