New report: How the pandemic is driving a shift in student-directed learning and agency

Project Tomorrow research documents why digital and mobile tools will continue to play a role in the classroom

IRVINE, CA – Project Tomorrow, a national, education nonprofit supporting the implementation of research-based learning experiences, and Blackboard, a leading EdTech software and solutions company, today released the final installment in a series of reports investigating the impact and expectations for digital learning from the point of view of K-12 students, parents and educators. The final report, “Sponsoring Student Ownership of Learning,” examines how the pandemic is fueling a shift toward student-directed learning and how digital and mobile tools will likely remain a key part of the classroom even after students return to in-person instruction.

Project Tomorrow’s Speak Up Research Project surveyed the perspectives of over 137,000 K-12 students, parents and educators, revealing how they see technology as a critical tool in increasing students’ ownership of their learning journey.

“As the classroom shifted to the kitchen table, parents saw firsthand the power of digital and mobile tools in driving student-led learning,” said Dr. Julie A. Evans, chief researcher and CEO of Project Tomorrow. “This research illuminates why even as we return to a more traditional in-person classroom experience, technology will continue to underpin student-led learning.”

Key findings from the fourth report: “Sponsoring Student Ownership of Learning”

• The percentage of students using digital tools to do online research, take an online course, use online writing tools or watch videos to learn a skill outside the classroom rose across the board during the pandemic (pg.5).
• The number of parents who believe the use of technology within learning results in greater student ownership of the learning process increased by 41% because of their child’s remote e-learning experience in spring 2020 (pg.6).
• 72% of principals and 63% of teachers say that mobile learning results in students taking greater responsibility for their own learning (pg.9).
• The increased usage and reliance upon mobile devices in spring resulted in 55% of teachers now saying that they are comfortable supporting their students’ use of mobile devices as a learning tool (pg.9).
• Only 18% of K-12 teachers say that they are very comfortable with a learning environment where students can choose their own learning path (pg.3).
The research provides valuable insight into how the experience gained during the pandemic will shape future tools and support structures that promote student-led learning.

“The path toward an educational experience highly directed by each student individually is beginning to take shape,” said Christina Fleming, Vice President for Blackboard K-12. “Project Tomorrow’s research offers valuable insight into how we can harness these shared experiences and develop environments that put learners in the driver’s seat of their educational journey.”

“Sponsoring Student Ownership of Learning” is the final report in a series of executive briefs called 90 Days that Changed K-12 Teaching and Learning. The series leveraged Speak Up Research Project findings on the front-line perspectives of over 137,000 K-12 students, teachers and parents on the role of technology and new learning models within education, including changes in their views and values around digital learning during school closures. The Speak Up Research Project is a strategic initiative of Project Tomorrow.

More information on the series and downloadable links to the reports are available here: https://tomorrow.org/speakup/2020-90-Days-That-Changed-K-12-Teaching-Learning.html

About Project Tomorrow
Project Tomorrow’s nonprofit mission is to support the effective implementation of research-based learning experiences for students in K-12 schools. The organization’s landmark research is the Speak Up Research Project which annually polls K-12 students, parents, educators and community members about the impact of technology resources on learning experiences both in school and out of school, and represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder voice on digital learning. Since 2003, almost 6 million K-12 students, parents, teachers, librarians, principals, technology leaders, district administrators and members of the community have shared their views and ideas through the Speak Up Project. Learn more at www.tomorrow.org.

About Blackboard
Blackboard is a leading EdTech company, serving higher education, K-12, business and government clients around the world. We connect a deep understanding of education with the power of technology to continuously push the boundaries of learning. Our mission is to advance learning together with the world’s education community, so that all learners, educators and institutions can realize their goals today and prepare for tomorrow.

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