Students Take Charge of Learning, Empowered by Technology

More than 400,000 Students Across U.S. Share How & When They Learn (Hint: Not Simply with Teachers in School)

Irvine, Calif. – Aided by technology, students across the country are self-directing their own learning, no longer waiting for teachers or schools to catch up. More than 400,000 K-12 students shared how and when they learn via the Speak Up 2016 Research Project for Digital Learning.

In their latest Speak Up data release, Ten Things Everyone Should Know about K-12 Students’ Digital Learning, 2017, Project Tomorrow details some of the findings from the student responses:

• Access to mobile devices in and out of school continues to grow. Over just a two-year period, twice as many students are now using Chromebooks in school (2014 to 2016).
• Students are using mobile devices to self-direct learning by:
  o doing research on the Internet (84%)
  o looking up class information (59%)
  o creating documents to share (54%)
  o emailing teachers with questions (47%)
  o setting up reminders about class due dates (43%)
  o taking notes (40%)
• Students are exploring online learning. More than one-third of middle school students say they have already taken an online class in Math, Science and English. The subjects that top their wish list for online classes include: college prep/study skills (58%), art appreciation (58%), world languages (56%), career technical/vocational education (51%) and computer science (47%).
• More than 1/3 of students say they want to learn about future jobs and careers via online tools: online course, digital game, online videos and social media.

“Students have always self-directed some of their own learning, but with the explosion of mobile devices, 24/7 connectivity and digital resources, students are leaving adults behind as they explore subjects that interest them in the ways they learn best,” said Dr. Julie Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow. “Despite all of the opportunity at their fingertips with the growth in educational technology access in schools, more than half (56%) of students say they use technology more often for learning outside of school than in school.”

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The disconnect between how students learn and how educators think they learn is especially evident in the findings about using the Internet for homework. The majority of students (79% of high school students, 69% of middle school students and 63% of students in grades 3-5) use the Internet at least once a week to support homework and school assignments. Nearly half (48%) of high school students say they use the Internet daily to support school work. However, just 14% of teachers say they are assigning Internet-dependent homework on a weekly basis.

“Despite teachers’ concerns about the homework gap, students so highly value using the Internet as a learning tool that they resourcefully find ways to get online to pursue their academic interests and add depth and efficiency to their learning processes,” said Evans.

And, where are students going online to do their schoolwork? Speak Up asked students about all the places they have used the Internet to do homework or schoolwork assignments this year. Here are some of the most common locations for doing online schoolwork outside of class:

- at home (78%)
- on campus before/after hours (50%),
- at a fast food restaurant or coffee shop (28%)
- in the public library (20%)

Community location or type (urban, rural or suburban) seems to have limited impact on where students access the Internet with one exception. Students in rural communities (44%) are less likely to say they are staying after school hours to use the school wifi.

Each year, the Speak Up project polls K-12 students, parents and educators about the role of technology for learning in and out of school. Since 2003, more than 5 million K-12 students, parents, teachers, librarians, principals, technology leaders, district administrators, communications officers and members of the community have shared their views and ideas through Speak Up. Speak Up 2016 findings on students, teachers, parents, administrators, communications officers, technology leaders and community members will be released throughout 2017. All the data releases can be found at www.tomorrow.org/speakup. (To be added to the media list to receive new data, please email ataylor@tomorrow.org.)

About Project Tomorrow & Speak Up
Project Tomorrow is the nation’s leading education nonprofit group dedicated to ensuring that today’s K-12 students are well prepared to become tomorrow’s leaders, innovators and engaged citizens of the world. The Speak Up Project for Digital Learning is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow. Since 2003, the annual Speak Up project has collected and reported on the views of more than 5 million K-12 students, teachers, administrators and parents representing more than 30,000 schools in all 50 states. This represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder input on education, technology, schools of the future, science and math instruction, professional development and career exploration.

Speak Up is supported by many of our nation’s most innovative companies, foundations and nonprofit organizations including Apex Learning, Blackboard, BrainPOP, DreamBox Learning, Qualcomm® WirelessReach™, Rosetta Stone Education and Scholastic.

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