Parents Increasingly Exercising 'Digital Choice' In Education

Annual Survey Reveals Parents More Open To Technology In Classrooms; Educators and Administrators Still Hesitant

Irvine, Calif.— The majority of parents now support mobile devices for learning, according to the results of Project Tomorrow's Fall 2010 Speak Up survey released today at a Congressional Briefing held in Washington, DC. The annual survey found that 67 percent of parents said they would purchase a mobile device for their child to use for schoolwork if the school allowed it, and 61 percent said they liked the idea of students using mobile devices to access online textbooks.

These numbers represent a dramatic shift in parents' support of the use of technology in schools. In 2008 for example, only 21 percent of parents supported the idea of online textbooks; now in 2010, almost two-thirds of parents view online textbooks as a good investment to enhance student achievement.

As parents continue their efforts to more directly control their child's education, they are now more likely to favor digital tools and services to enhance student learning.

"A trend we are seeing is that parents want more control over their child's classroom education," said Julie Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow. "Similar to choosing schools, parents are increasingly leveraging technology to enable and empower their child's education. We call it the 'parental digital choice.'"

The report can be found online: http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup/speakup_congress.html

Parents reported that they would also like to use technology to better track their child's grades and progress in school. Nearly 75 percent of parents said they would like home access to curriculum materials and online textbooks, and 62 percent said they would like daily updates online about their child's upcoming assignments and tests.

Parents were found to be more open than educators in regards to digital learning. In contrast, 65 percent of administrators strongly disagreed with allowing students to use their own mobile devices for instructional purposes in school.

"If digital devices and online sites are to be incorporated into today's classrooms, the prevailing notion that these devices and sites are only for social use will have to be re-examined," Evans said. "Our survey showed that digital devices and online content have a place in the classroom when used in tandem with traditional instruction."

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E-textbooks are still a relatively novel concept in the classroom, with only 35 percent of high school students reporting that they currently use an online textbook or other online curriculum as part of their regular schoolwork.

The survey also found that nearly 30 percent of high school students have experienced some type of online learning, and that between 2009 and 2010, the number of middle and high school students who accessed smart phones increased by 42 percent.

The results revealed a large gap between students and parents' views and teachers' views on technology. Fifty-three percent of middle and high school students reported that the inability to use cell phones, smart phones or MP3 players was the largest obstacle when using technology in school. Additionally, 71 percent of high school students and 62 percent of middle school students said that the number one way schools could make it easier to use technology would be to allow greater access to the digital content and resources that Internet firewalls and school filters blocked.

When asked if their school was doing a good job using technology to enhance learning and student achievement, 74 percent of high school teachers, 72 percent of principals and 62 percent of parents said yes. Conversely, 47 percent of high school students agreed.

"These results show that new technology has dramatically changed the way students learn and how they view education," said Evans. "The survey also shows the digital disconnect between students, parents and educators on emerging technologies. Parents think that schools are doing a good job of integrating new technology in their curriculum while students are reporting that this isn't necessarily the case."

Since 2003, more than 2.2 million K-12 students, teachers, librarians, administrators and parents from more than over 30,000 schools in all 50 states have participated in Speak Up. The online survey is facilitated by Project Tomorrow and supported by many organizations, including Blackboard, Inc., CDW-G, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, K12, Inc., Schoolwires and SMART Technologies.

Project Tomorrow partners with more than 75 different education associations, organizations and think-tanks for outreach to schools and development of the survey questions, including the Consortium for School Networking, iNACOL, International Society for Technology in Education, National School Boards Association, National Science Digital Library, Southern Regional Education Board and State Education Technology Directors' Association.

About Project Tomorrow
Speak Up is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow, the nation's leading education nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that today's students are well prepared to be tomorrow's innovators, leaders and engaged citizens of the world. The annual Speak Up survey represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder input on education, technology, 21st century skills, schools of the future and science instruction. Education, business and policy leaders report use the data regularly to inform federal, state and local education programs. For additional information, visit www.tomorrow.org.

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