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Students Say They Have to ‘Power Down’ When They Enter Schools Education Report Signals Weakness in U.S. Global Competitiveness

Student “Digital Advance Team,” Insights Being Used by Schools Around U.S. to Determine How to Spend Stimulus Dollars

Washington, D.C. – Despite overwhelming agreement among parents, teachers and principals that the effective implementation of technology in schools is crucial to student success, students say they “step back in time” when they enter the school building each morning, according to today’s release of the 2008 Speak Up survey.

The most significant impact of the data every year is on the schools and districts nationwide that use Speak Up as a guide for planning technology use, investments and implementation strategies within their community. This year, with the historic education stimulus funding, the role of the Speak Up data, and especially the ideas and views of K-12 students, is more important than ever before.

“When it comes to how to invest the stimulus dollars, our recommendation is that we listen to the stakeholders with the most skin in the game – the students themselves – or as we refer to them, our nation’s ‘Digital Advance Team,’” said Julie Evans, President and CEO of Project Tomorrow. “We should all listen to how they are approaching learning and living everyday, their frustration points with their schools, the challenges they face in learning in the 21st century, and their aspirations for how schools can be improved so that all students can be successful.”

To start on that path, the report recommended, it is critical to acknowledge the frustration that many students have with school today. Only 39 percent of high schools in this year’s Speak Up poll think that their school is doing a good job preparing them for the jobs of the future (in fact, only 32 percent of parents believe that). Yet, a majority of school principals (56 percent) say that their schools are doing a good job. This disconnect is symptomatic of the larger issue at work – the vision of students for learning today is dramatically different than the vision being implemented.

Schools districts around the country are already using the findings as they determine how to invest federal stimulus dollars directed into education technology. The Speak Up findings reveal several recommendations for how schools can better incorporate technology, with implications for investing stimulus funds, including:

- Un-tether learning and leverage mobile devices to extend learning beyond the school day and meet all learners in their own world
- Create new interactive, participatory learning spaces using tools such as online classes, gaming and simulations, online tutors, and virtual reality environments
- Incorporate Web 2.0 tools into daily instruction especially those that develop collaborative or social-based learning and provide unique opportunities for students to be content developers
- Expand digital resources in the classroom to add context and relevancy to learning experiences through new media tools
- Get beyond the classroom walls and make learning truly experiential such as using high tech science instrumentation and creating podcasts with content experts

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“We will not move to becoming more globally economically competitive until we can fully leverage technology as a tool for learning. The kids are screaming for this, but still the adults are stuck in old paradigms,” explained Evans. “This data helps to underscore the need for not just the schools but the county as a whole to rethink education to not only meet the needs of today’s learners but to take advantage of American innovation to create a new sustainable, competitive advantage.”

“Today’s students are early adopters and adapters of new technologies, creating new uses of the products to meet their sophisticated needs, and serving as tech trend setters for their peers and increasingly also for their parents and educators,” said Evans. “The technologies that they use in their personal lives slowly infiltrate their schoolwork, and, many have ultimately found a home in their school day, even with teacher usage.”

For example, in 2006, while student use of email as a communication tool was at its zenith, only 64 percent of teachers reported using email on a regular basis for communications, and most of that use was primarily with colleagues or the district office. Today, more than 94 percent of teachers report using email communications regularly and strongly articulate the benefits of this connectivity with parents and students on learning outcomes.

It is not surprising, the report concluded, that when asked about how their schools could make it easier for them to work electronically, the number one response from the students was “let me use my own devices and tools in the school day.”

Through Speak Up, students consistently report they are inhibited from effectively using computers or the Internet at school. Besides lack of time at school to use technology, students (6th-12th grade) report their technology use is impeded by the ever present school filters or firewalls which block access to websites they need (43 percent), teachers who limit their technology use (35 percent) and rules that limit their use of technology at school (26 percent).

One-third of the 3rd – 12th grade students say that their inability to use their own mobile devices (laptops, cell phones, MP3 players) and communicate with their classmates via personal email accounts or IM while at school is also a significant obstacle in their learning lives. It is widely accepted by students that arrival at school means “powering down” for a few hours. After leaving school, they resume their technology-infused lives and leverage a wide range of emerging technologies to fine tune their skills in communicating, collaborating, creating and contributing in ways that are never approached during the school day.

One idea students and parents are both interested in is the digital textbook. Currently, 29 percent of middle and high school students say that they are using some kind of online textbook or online curriculum as part of their regular schoolwork. Many of today’s print textbooks are heavy, costly and difficult to transport back and forth from home to school. And for many students the idea of using a hard copy textbook that is out of date as soon as it is printed is as archaic in today’s world as the abacus in a math class.

Students suggested that the ultimate digital textbook include:

- The ability to personalize their book with electronic highlights and notes (63 percent)
- Quizzes and tests for self-evaluation (62 percent) or self-paced tutorials (46 percent)
- Access links to real-time data such as NASA, Google Earth (52 percent)
- Links to PowerPoints or class lectures that support textbook content (55 percent)
- Games (57 percent) or animations and simulations (55 percent)
- Links to videoconferences (30 percent) or podcasts from subject experts (34 percent)

Chris Rother, group vice president, CDW Government, Inc. said, “Speak Up provides valuable insight into how educational technology can capture students’ imagination. The Speak Up 2008 results demonstrate that from e-textbooks to online courses, students are eager to use new technology and teachers are ready to integrate it into the classroom.”

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Speak Up 2008 polled more than 280,000 K-12 students from schools and communities in all 50 states to better understand how emerging technologies are shaping the educational destiny of today's students and the data results can provide unique insights into not only how students want to learn today but how schools should approach the investment of these historic stimulus funds to create that next generation of innovators, leaders and engaged citizens of the world learning.

"For most students, technology is an integral part of their toolkit for participating in the world," the Speak Up Report revealed. "Technology has enabled students to be not only uber-communicators, but also to develop strong teamwork skills and to view the process of content development as a key part of the new learning process. For many students the process of developing that content is as valuable, or more valuable, than the end result."

"The learning process is king today," the report concluded, "not just the learning outcome."

For more information, visit www.tomorrow.org

About Speak Up

The annual online survey collected input from more than 280,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade from October-December 2008. More than 28,000 teachers, 21,000 parents and 3,000 administrators also participated.

Since 2003, more than 1.5 million K-12 students, teachers, and parents from more than 14,000 schools in all 50 states have participated in Speak Up. The online survey is facilitated by Project Tomorrow and supported by many of our nation's most innovative companies, foundations and nonprofit organizations including CDW-G, SMART Technologies, PASCO scientific, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Wimba and 1105 Media Education Group.

Individual participation and responses provided in the Speak Up survey are completely confidential and completing the online survey takes only 15 minutes. The Speak Up surveys are open to every public and private school and district in the United States, American schools on military bases and other interested schools worldwide.

About Project Tomorrow

Speak Up is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow (formerly known as NetDay), 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. Since fall 2003, the annual Speak Up project has collected and reported on the views of over 1.2 million K-12 students, teachers, administrators and parents representing over 14,000 schools in all 50 states. The Speak Up data 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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