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Students Want the 21st Century Classroom, but Schools Not Meeting Student Expectations, According to Latest National Study

Students Readiness for Mobile Technologies Signals Digital Disconnect with Schools

Washington, DC – Today, Project Tomorrow released results from the 5th Annual Speak Up survey, the largest annual national survey of K-12 students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, about the use of technology and science resources to prepare students for the 21st century. The 2007 online survey collected authentic, unfiltered views and ideas from over 367,000 education stakeholders representing schools in all 50 states, bringing the total of survey participants to over 1.2 million over the past 5 years.

Speak Up 2007 revealed a growing “digital disconnect” between students and their teachers and parents about the role of technology for learning, and how well schools are doing to prepare students for the jobs of the future. This disconnect is evident in the fact that 66% of school administrators, 47% of teachers, and 43% of parents say “local schools are doing a good job preparing students for the jobs and careers of the future,” but over 40% of middle and high school students stated that teachers limit their use of technology in schools. Forty-five percent of middle and high school students indicated that tools meant to protect them, such as firewalls and filters are inhibiting their learning.

“Students continue to be on the leading edge in terms of adopting, modifying and re-using digital content and technology tools to enrich both their personal and educational lives. The students in many ways are far ahead of their teachers and parents not only in the sophistication of their technology use, but in the adoption of emerging technologies for learning purposes,” said Project Tomorrow CEO Julie Evans. “It is in our nation’s best interest that we support and facilitate student usage of technology for learning.”

In addition to collecting viewpoints on teaching and learning with technology, 21st century skills and science instruction in America’s schools, this year’s Speak Up

surveys also polled students, parents and educators on the influence of such new emerging technologies as educational gaming, online learning, and mobile devices within learning environments.

"It is an exciting time in educational technology," said Christina V. Rother, CDW-G group vice president, public sector. "We're seeing students from rural communities to the nation's largest districts embracing technology as both communication devices and as learning tools. Kids understand technology and, as the Speak Up results show, they are integrating it into their learning environments already. They want to explore with it, and we can't and we shouldn't hold them back."

Educational Gaming

According to the Speak Up 2007 national results, more than two-thirds of students in grades K-12 surveyed said they regularly play online or computer games in their personal lives using a wide range of devices including cell phones, console players, computer software and through online environments. Students' views about the value of educational gaming make a strong case for why gaming is effective in helping them learn.

- 51% of 6 – 12 graders said games make it easier to understand difficult concepts
- 46% say they will learn more about a subject if it is presented to them through a game
- 44% say that gaming would make it more interesting to practice problems
- More than 33% of students say that the use of games in schools will help them learn how to work in teams and see the direct results of their problem solving activities

Among teachers who participated in the survey:

- 65% said gaming will help engage their students in the coursework and provide them with an effective tool for teaching to students with different learning styles;
- More than 50% expressed interest in learning more about educational games while 11% are currently using some kind of "educational computer game" in their classroom; and,
- 46% said they would like to receive specific professional development on how to effectively integrate gaming technologies into curriculum.

Online Learning

Both students and educators expressed interest in exploring online learning opportunities; however, the percentage of students with direct experience with online learning remains small (8% with school-based online class experience, and 6% with “out of school” personal experience):

- More than 33% of high school students, 24% of middle school students, and 19% of 3 – 5 grade students with no previous online class experience stated they would like to take an online class, with girls having a slightly stronger interest than boys;
- 45% of school and district administrators identified online learning as a way to boost student engagement; and,
- 33% of teachers have explored how to incorporate online learning into their classroom.

When students were asked why they would be interested in online learning:

- Over one-quarter of all students, grades 3 -12, see online courses as a way to work at their own learning pace;
- High school students were most interested in earning college credit (43%);
- Middle school students are seeking extra help in a subject (39%), and;
- Elementary students view it as a new way to learn something (31%).

One-third of teachers surveyed said they were interested in online learning for professional development – an increase of 29% from 2006 – and 26% stated that online learning is their preferred training methodology.

Mobile Technologies

Use of mobile technologies such as laptops, smart phones, and MP3 players by students in all grades K-12 has exploded, according to the survey, creating new challenges for schools and creating a new digital disconnect battlefield.

Students (more the 50%) would use technology more easily at school if they could use their own laptop, cell phone or mobile device to work on projects, access related software applications and the Internet, and communicate with classmates. And many have the means to do so.

- Over 33% of K-12 students stated they have personal access to a laptop
- 35% of K-5 students, 52% of students in grades 6-8, and 67% of high school students have a cell phone
- 75% of middle and high students have an MP3 player resulting in an average 58% increase in MP3 access of over 2006 across grades K-12.

Despite some concerns about digital equity, teachers, parents, and school administrators agree that the use of these mobile technologies can support learning:

- 52% believe these technologies increase student engagement in learning;
- 43% extend learning beyond the school day; and,
- 42% prepare students for the world of work.

At the Congressional Briefing, Project Tomorrow's CEO, Julie Evans, announced that additional findings from Speak Up 2007 would be released including special reports on student, teacher, parent and school administrator perspectives on science instruction and STEM careers, and on the challenges faced by today's school leaders. With the release of Speak Up 2007 results, Evans called upon education leaders at all levels to put aside their own "digital immigrant" paradigms and to listen to students who are not only on the cutting edge of technology innovation but whose future is dependent upon our ability to deliver upon the promise of a world quality, global 21st century education.

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About Project Tomorrow

Project Tomorrow (formerly known as NetDay) is a national education nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that all students are well prepared to become tomorrow's innovators, leaders and engaged citizens of the world. Project Tomorrow's mission is to support and promote the effective and appropriate use of science, math and technology resources in K-12 education so that every student has the opportunity to fully participate in today's global economy and community. For additional information, visit: www.tomorrow.org. Speak Up 2007 is sponsored by CDW-G, SMART Technologies, PASCO scientific, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Discovery Education, Futurekids, and KI Education.