

Teachers Weigh the Realities of Classroom Technology in New National Survey

New report finds educators want better vetting, more input, and greater classroom oversight rather than strict device limits

WASHINGTON, D.C., Sept. 16, 2026 — New research from the Walton Family Foundation and Gallup, in partnership with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, captures teachers' views of the challenges and opportunities learning devices pose in K-12 education today. The report—[Teaching for Tomorrow: Screen Wise](#)—finds that while classroom technology is nearly universal, educators are navigating a growing disconnect between how digital tools are mandated and how they actually function.

The survey shows that while a majority of teachers (59%) agree digital tools help students learn effectively, only 10% strongly agree. More than half (52%) say devices do as much harm as good, with more seeing net harm (29%) than net benefit (18%). While more than six-in-ten teachers say students should spend less time on screens during the school day, they are not calling for mandatory daily screen-time limits. Educators believe blanket restrictions would increase their workload and would hurt students' digital readiness.

Instead, educators would value having a greater voice in deciding what technology is adopted, as only 29% say they've ever been asked to weigh in on a new classroom tool. They also want better monitoring tools to oversee how students engage with devices during class to better avoid distractions.

"This survey shows that teachers value educational technology when it has a clear purpose, and they have a voice in choosing it and overseeing its use," said Michael Preston, Executive Director of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center. "They are more skeptical when those conditions are not met. With classroom time at a premium, we should ensure that teachers have clear information about what digital tools are meant to accomplish and the practical support they need to manage their use effectively and keep it focused on learning."

From Selection to Purpose: What It Takes to Make Digital Tools Work

Most teachers favor each of three possible changes to how schools adopt new digital tools:

- 95% support standardizing teacher input (including 58% strongly)
- 92% support giving families more transparency about which tools are used and why
- 92% support clear quality standards before adoption

Teacher involvement directly shapes how educators view classroom technology. Teachers who are consulted on digital tools view learning devices more positively: 70% of teachers with input say digital tools help students learn effectively, compared with 55% of those who were not consulted. Similarly, 76% of teachers who had input report that their tools are a good fit for their students, compared to just 60% of their peers without a say.

"Teachers aren't asking schools to eliminate technology from the classroom," said Stephanie Marken, senior partner at Gallup. "They're asking for a greater voice in which tools are adopted and more control over how those tools are used. The findings suggest that when teachers have that input and oversight, they're more likely to see technology as useful and less disruptive."

The findings also highlight why instructional clarity is so important. Teacher engagement rises from 18% among teachers who say the goals of new technology are rarely or never clear, to 31% among those who say they are sometimes clear, and 46% among those who say they are clear all or most of the time. Further, only 37% of teachers say classroom tools are adequately reviewed all or most of the time.

Oversight Emerges as a Dividing Line Between Skeptics and Advocates

How much control teachers feel they have over student device use is one of the strongest predictors of how they view classroom technology, yet fewer than half (42%) say they have a lot of oversight of what students are doing on their devices during instruction.

That control tracks closely with confidence in the tools. Teachers with substantial oversight are less than half as likely to call devices a major or moderate distraction (20%) as those with little or no oversight (52%), and they are consistently more likely to say the tools help students learn effectively, fit their students' needs, and do more good than harm.

The challenge grows as students get older. A lot of oversight falls from 51% of elementary school teachers to 28% in high school, even as reports of students finding workarounds rise from 17% to 67%. Together, the findings point to oversight, not just screen time, as a lever schools can pull to improve how technology works in the classroom.

Elementary Teachers Worry Least About Screens

Much of the public and media conversation about classroom screen time has centered on the youngest students, yet elementary school teachers both use devices the least and report the fewest challenges with them. Only 25% say devices are used in all or most class periods for main lessons, compared with 45% of middle school and 44% of high school teachers. They are also far less likely to see problems, with just 18% calling devices a major or moderate distraction, versus 42% and 50% in the higher grades, and only 17% saying students often find workarounds, compared with 59% and 67%.

Elementary teachers also feel the most in control. A full 51% report a lot of oversight of student device use, compared with 44% in middle school and 28% in high school. The strain grows as students get older and more technically independent— suggesting the screen-time debate may be aimed at the wrong end of the K-12 spectrum, with the least supervised and most disruptive device use concentrated not in the early grades that dominate the headlines, but in middle and high school.

Teachers Value Devices for Accessibility

Teachers widely value devices as a tool for differentiation strategies— tailoring instruction to students' varying needs— even as they are less convinced devices improve learning overall. Majorities say devices are very or somewhat important for English learners (77%), students with an IEP or 504 plan (76%), students needing enrichment or extension (72%), and those needing extra academic support or intervention (71%).

Methodology

Results are based on a web survey conducted May 6 - May 29, 2026, with a sample of 2,101 U.S. teachers working in public K-12 schools. Teachers were recruited from the RAND American Teacher Panel, a nationally representative, probability-based panel of U.S. public school teachers. More information about the RAND American Teacher Panel is available [here](#).

The final sample was weighted to match the school- and teacher-level demographics of K-12 public school teachers in the U.S., including school level, student poverty, student race and Hispanic ethnicity, school size, school urbanicity, teacher gender, teacher race and Hispanic ethnicity, and teachers' years of experience. Targets for these characteristics were retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics. Teacher-level characteristics were based on the 2020-2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey, while school-level characteristics were based on the 2023-2024 Common Core of Data.

For the total sample of 2,101 U.S. teachers, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

About the Joan Ganz Cooney Center

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop is an independent research and innovation lab dedicated to advancing learning and well-being in a digital age. Through research, convenings, and practical resources, the Center works to ensure that emerging technologies and media experiences support positive outcomes for children and families.

About the Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.