Minutes
Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time   September 26, 2024

The sixth meeting of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time began at 4:00 p.m. on September 19, 2024. The meeting was virtual.

 Co-Chairs: Principal Brian Houghton and Student Ava Gustin.

Statement of Purpose
Develop guidance/recommendations, based in research, on:
- students' personal device use in school,
- screen time and mental health, and
- parental oversight of district-owned devices.

Welcome from Dr. Jake Steel
Dr. Steel noted that starting next week, October 3, the focus will be on developing policy to present to the Kansas State Board of Education in November. There will not be a panel, and conversation will be focused on policy for the three topics (see above). Today is the second week of panelists with expertise around parental oversight of district-owned devices.

Breakout Rooms Report from September 19th
Gabrielle Hull gave a summary of the previous week's breakout room discussions. The conversations centered on educating parents, parental control of devices, setting healthy boundaries and communicating why boundaries are needed, and ensuring parents have guidance but are supported in setting expectations for their children. Recommendations were discussed for schools and districts to provide clear training and guidance to parents on having these parental control features and monitoring tools, especially once school owned devices are sent home with students. That included ensuring resources were available to parents in languages they speak, at various times that work best for the parents, and in different formats.

Several groups discussed that it would be ideal for parents to have access that mirrors the level of access controls available for their students on devices at school and groups discussed that recommendations may be best developed by age and grade level. That has been brought up for several weeks and KSDE staff will track that when developing policy.

Breakout
Summary
from 9/19
03:15

Research
Payton Lynn shared research on today's topic of parental oversight of students' district owned devices. This week Miss Lynn looked at parents and their understanding of the devices that students are bringing home, and what those relationships might look like.

Acceptable Use policies: Most districts have a policy telling students what they can or cannot do with school devices, and what the rules are around the usage. Looking at Kansas district policies, she noticed the negative language being used. In some cases, there were lists of 10-25 things that kids cannot do.
 For example:
> "The following acts are prohibited: Using technology resources for non-educational purposes. This includes, but is not limited to, playing non-teacher approved computer games, and using network resources to access websites and digital media that do not support class, school, or district goals...."

In her review of ten Kansas districts, she assessed:
> Average reading level of written Acceptable Use policies: 12th grade
> Lowest reading level: 10th grade
> Highest reading level: 13.4 years of education

She explained that 54% of U.S. adults read below a 6th grade level, and the average reading level of US adults of 7th to 8th grade. The policies were written in a way that most students and parents would not understand.

Opt-out choices:
With the 1:1 device situation (each child in school having a device) she noticed that it is typical that there are **no opt-out choice**.

- "A family may not opt-out of receiving a device for student's use at home as many assignments will require a computer to complete. All students will use a device at school even if they do not take it home." [(Parent Guide to 1:1 Technology/Agreements USD497.org)](Parent Guide to 1:1 Technology/Agreements USD497.org)

The student must take whatever device the school gives them.

The other option is to **take home opt-out**, where a student can use their own computers at home and keep their school devices at school. Such as:

- "We strongly believe students benefit when learning expands beyond the classroom walls and school day. However, there may be specific instances where a parent would prefer the device stay at school. Most of the district's digital resources are web based and can be accessed from any device anywhere, however there might be some content that may be only available to students using their school issued device. Students that do not bring home their device will have them stored and charged each evening in a centrally located secure location." [(Take-Home Opt-Out)](Take-Home Opt-Out)

These situations were usually accompanied by a parent signing an agreement that they do not want the school device to be brought along.

The last option is a **full opt-out**. This is rare, but Miss Lynn shared this example:

- "Parents or guardians have the right to terminate their student's access to electronic tools and resources by signing this Opt-Out form. If you do not want your student to use District technology resources, please be aware that your decision to eliminate access to these tools may significantly affect your student's ability to work collaboratively with his or her peers on class assignments and project and may impact the development of skills necessary to live and work in this increasingly digital world." https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/546819/Technology-Internet_Opt-Out_Form.pdf

Panel Principal Houghton welcomed the panelists and introduced them. He asked each to share their initial thoughts on tools and strategies that are available to assist in providing support to parents on students' school issued devices.	Panel 11:45

- Dean Mantz, Technology Coordinator, Sterling USD 376
- Dr. Beth Rabbitt, CEO, The Learning Accelerator
- Christopher Rinkus, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education, US Department of Education

Dean Mantz, Technology Coordinator, Sterling USD 376

Dean Mantz shared this is his 32nd year in education. In early 2003, the schools he was working in was one of the first to go to 1:1. He has many years of experience of working with school owned devices that are taken home by students. He has three kids of his own; his oldest daughter is now a teacher. In Sterling, with the Chromebooks, they are technically grades 2-12 1:1, and the students in grades 7 & 8 have these devices kept in cabinets. If they need to take them home, they can check them out through their "Success" teacher. In high school they are responsible for their own devices. They have a content filter which works at school and at home. In 2021, the filter added the ability for parents to monitor their kid's computer use.

Mr. Mantz is the only tech person for his school district, and he suggested that with the policies on devices, it is important to realize that many schools have limited IT support staff. This is especially difficult for parents who want to ask questions "after hours" and if there is only one IT person this results in lots of calls at night. To train parents, it takes time and investment of resources.

Dr. Beth Rabbitt, CEO, The Learning Accelerator

Dr. Rabbitt shared that this topic is nuanced, and we are all learning so much as technology becomes a big part of education. She has worked in this area for twenty years. The Learning Accelerator is a national non-profit exploring tech innovation and improvement. She has been a classroom teacher and is a parent of two middle-school daughters. Her perspective is from multiple points of view. Her research is independently supported and not funded by technology companies. Her focus is on the risks and potential benefits of using tech devices in schools.

Screens are a vehicle for experience. They are not good or bad. What is important is **how** they are used in education. Active use of screentime when engaging with others has strong cognitive benefits. The application and purpose of how the screen is being used must be the focus. Social media does appear to be associated with mental health problems for teenagers, but this may not be a causal relationship. For instance, it may be the case that persons who have mental health problems use social media more often.

Nationally, as policies are being established on the local level, there are huge gaps emerging between parental perceptions and support for school devices, exclusive of mobile phones, and how educators feel. There have been several surveys that have found many parents are supportive of technology and mobile phones being in schools (with boundaries). 56% of educators are similarly supportive. As policies are being created it is critically important that parents and students are actively engaged in the conversation. In one study, when parents were asked if they have been engaged in the school policies on technology, only 30% answered yes. Dr. Rabbitt emphasized that support from home is crucial.

There also is a struggle with making sure policies acknowledge developmental stages. For instance, a senior in high school needs to learn about digital engagement skills, literacy skills, and self-modification skills because they will be moving into a world where digital skills are necessary in the workforce and future learning. School is a time for students to learn how to use technology, and sometimes fail, in a highly supportive environment, rather than not have any engagement at all.

In considering this topic, Dr. Rabbitt encouraged the task force to balance the benefits and challenges.

<u>Christopher Rinkus, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education, US Department of Education</u>
Mr. Rinkus lives in Washington D.C., and he has been in and around education for over 10 years. He has a real fondness for talking to actual practitioners, as he spends lots of time with researchers and policy makers. He likes to learn from those who are "on the ground."

He works for GoGuardian® but he is not advocating for one security solution. There are many solutions on the market. At his company they conducted a poll (2022, a diverse group nationally) about school devices. There is a lot of research on young people and personal devices but not much on school owned devices and the relationships with parents. In the GoGuardian® survey there were several top-line findings. 75% of parents were concerned about students accessing harmful content through a school device. There were high concerns about students' mental health. There were beliefs that mental health is directly impacted by what is being experienced online. Most parents felt there is a need for schools to invest in filters and controls to keep students from accessing harmful content. Mr. Mantz noted that 90% of U.S. students have been given school owned devices.

Within that same survey, GoGuardian® found interest from parents in advanced technology, using AI, for instance, to flag cues from young people who are in distress. For instance, if a child were repeatedly searching for harmful content, or googling how to hurt themselves or others, the parents responded that they would be interested in a technology that would send parents/school a message to warn of this.

Mr. Rinkus offered the thought that just as schools focus on students' physical security, so there needs to be a focus on keeping students secure from online harms. He referred to digital footprints and clues that are often left by students that have chosen self-harm or been involved in school shootings. Those clues might only appear on a personal device, but it is plausible, and has been reported, that kids seek these things out on a school device. In some ways, it is easier for parents to monitor their children's personal devices than the school devices. It may be an incentive for students to use their school devices for this type of search.

Discussion with Task Force
Kansas State School Board Chair Melanie Haas asked about restricting traffic with tools like GoGuardian®. What does the task force need to know about how those devices filter content? Mr. Mantz shared that with their current filtering product parents can pause the internet after school hours, and the product allows parents the ability to put the filter on a personally owned device, which allows parents to manage more features of a personal device. Presently, when the students are at home and connected to the internet, the filter is the same as when used at school. Mr. Rinkus added there are multiple good vendors. All the products come at a cost, so how it is funded and sustained is important to ask. Switching between applications is particularly burdensome for IT departments. He shared that there needs to be a list of sites that are clearly harmful, but there are "gray" areas, like TikTok, YouTube, or YouTube after certain hours of the day. Each local area must decide what is acceptable for that community.

Parent Kim Whitman (Phone-Free Movement) asked about the contract with a filtering company. What does the contract say about student data? Is it sold to third parties? Mr. Mantz answered that student data privacy is a major issue that he has been trying to bring more to the forefront. His filtering product, Linewize® meets several of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations. He believes any sale of student data is a student privacy concern. There are agreements with vendors that can be negotiated so that no student data is sold. Mr. Mantz added that his experience with the vendor is that there is no incentive for them to sell or market data. They are functional utilities and designed to be FERPA, COPA compliant. There is a different expectation for school products, he compared a student locker at school and a closet at home. Mrs. Whitman commented that COPPA and FERPA are several decades old and may not be protective in the present. Mr. Mantz answered he feels the standards are still very current because they are about *objectional content*.

Parent Amy Warren asked Dr. Rabbitt asked about the concept of "it's not about how much screen time but what is being done with it." She feels there is too much screen time because it displaces many other activities, affects children's eyesight, can create myopia, and increase obesity. She wanted the panelists to address the effect of excessive time online. Dr. Rabbitt answered that we must look at screentime within the total context of learning. She offered data showing that if

students are engaged with other students – via screen- that activity is like being in the same space. There are impacts on eyesight, but that relates to the total experience that a child is having. There are activities, watching television on the couch, scrolling without engaging, and doing screentime alone, that are harmful. When screentime displaces exercise, outdoor time, or engaging with others, then there are harmful effects. She does not want to downplay that, but blunt policies that cut off all access are not useful. Mr. Mantz added that with his thirty two years of being in education, being a parent of three, having been involved with 1:1 for 20 years, he has two hats. As a parent, he is the supervisor of his kids. If they have been on screens too much, he says offers other choices such as going outside or reading a book. It is parental engagement that sets those necessary boundaries. His IT side says it should not be his job as an IT director to manage the child's technology access outside of the school. Parent/family time is not the IT director's job. Technology is not a babysitter. Mrs. Warren replied that she agrees, but there needs to be guidance for all kids, and some kids do not have as much oversight at home. She wonders what the responsibility is with schools in this area. Mr. Mantz responded in his schools, even though the kids have Chromebooks accessible, most teachers are off the screens more than they are on them.

Parent Katie Allen brought up whether screentime is the best method for learning. Mr. Mantz added that in Sterling, parents have the option to allow their students to use devices, or to access the internet, google account, and those are enrollment options. Some parents choose not to have laptops brought home. He does not think any school district would force a device on a student at home. Dr. Rabbitt agreed and noted that most districts have choice. She defers to educators on how much to use screentime in schools. Technology can be incredibly helpful in teaching/learning. Pedagogical decisions need to be left up to the teacher.

Teacher Tawna Hall teaches English language learners, and she sees the usefulness of technology. She wonders how to balance using technology in home where parents are not equipped to handle that. (These are homes where the parents may not speak English.)
Mr. Mantz mentioned some teachers will add sites, translators, etc. on their page to help students at home.

Representative Scott Hill asked whether anyone had documented research that demonstrates enhanced student performance utilizing technology vs. traditional instructional methods? Dr. Rabbitt answered that most of the research has focused on specific technology and interventions, where a traditional classroom environment is compared to a specific technology to support specific outcomes. It is important to be aware of who is funding this type of research. There are many studies that have found tools, such as those aimed at reading intervention and supporting kids who have many different phonic needs in one classroom, and those studies do show that outcomes are better than in a classroom where a teacher is trying to help many kids without the use of technology. She recommended a government organization called *What Works Clearinghouse*, which looks at specific tools, applications, and curriculum. Dr. Rabbitt expressed that there will never be a replacement for human to human interaction. A teacher who knows a student and is interacting with them is irreplaceable, but that is not what is happening in all classrooms. There are meta-analysis that look at many research studies and finds patterns. When comparing at kids learning online vs. traditional settings, these meta studies found that the two methods are similar in effectiveness, and that the combination of the two is the most effective. Mr. Mantz added that there

is research that unsupervised internet use leads to adverse outcomes for young people. He referred to a study that shows a rise in suicide rates in young adolescents. Part of what researchers are trying to understand are the contributing factors, and he feels unsupervised internet use is one of those factors. If devices are being sent home, it needs to be as easy as possible for parents to supervise their children on those devices. When kids are supervised online, it cuts out most potential harms.

Parent Katie Allen referred to the vast amount of school "learning management systems" (LMS) where everything is online. Mr. Mantz remembered that during Covid the online system was all they had, but even though it is available to the teachers in Sterling, he noted they do not use it very much. They are hands on. There is paper everywhere. Dr. Rabbitt added that this is an area that must be guided by student development. What a second grader might need is quite different from a student in high school. Schools need to make decisions attuned to learning stages.

Principal Houghton thanked the panelists, and the group moved into breakout sessions.

Question to discuss in the breakout groups: Taskforce members have explored the topic of parental oversight regarding district-issued devices. Reflecting on the breakout sessions, panelist insights, research, and discussions, what key points or considerations about parental oversight should be included in the final report?

The notetakers will compile the suggestions and main points from the breakout room discussions and present some of those back to the whole group at the beginning of the next meeting.

At the end of the meeting Commissioner Watson joined the meeting. He reminded the task force that over the coming two weeks there will be a transition from gathering facts to focusing on policy. It is essential to continue to listen to multiple perspectives, especially to those opinions and thoughts that are different. Being informed and coming to good conclusions would come from examining all these viewpoints. He encouraged the task force to keep asking questions and stay engaged in this journey as critical thinkers and learners.

Student Ava Gustin shared that one of the topics that came up often in the breakout groups was the use of personal devices in an emergency. There was not a presentation on that, but she wanted the group to be prepared to discuss that as part of the policy conversations.

She thanked the group and reminded everyone that the next meeting is October 3, at 4:00 – 5:30.