



Voices & Views from Today's Tech-Savvy Students
Highlights from NetDay's National Report on Speak Up Day 2003
February 12, 2004

Participation Overview

210,000 surveys submitted by students from 3,000 schools during the survey time period October 25 through November 3, 2003

- Grade distribution: K-3 (5%) 3-6 (26%) 6-12 (69%)
- Gender distribution: Female (50%) Male (50%)
- Survey type: Class version (70%) Individual version (30%)
- Geography: All 50 states + DC + DOD schools worldwide
- Community profile: Urban (27%) Rural (32%) Suburban (41%)
- School profile: Charter (1%) Private (3%) DOD (4%)
Catholic (5%) Public (87%)

Major Themes of National Findings

Today's students are very technology savvy, feel strongly about the positive value of technology and rely upon technology as an essential and preferred component of every aspect of their lives.

Students are not just using technology differently today, but are approaching their life and their daily activities differently because of the technology.

As students get older, their use of technology becomes more sophisticated, but, comparatively, the younger students are on a fast track to becoming greater technology users and advocates.

The access point for technology use, particularly for the older students is home-focused, not school-focused.

A new digital disconnect in attitude and use is emerging between students that consider themselves tech savvy and the students that assess their technology knowledge at a beginner level.

Technology is allowing today's students to be ultra-communicators.

Who are today's students in terms of technology familiarity, proficiency and habits of use?

- Across all grade levels, students are using email as a communication tool with a significant increase in accessibility as the student gets older.
 - Almost one-third of students in grades K-3rd (29%) have email accounts already, 45% of students in grades 4-6 and 79% of students in grades 7-12.
 - From 3rd grade to 6th grade, email accessibility increases by 22 percentage points. The key watershed point for email accessibility is 6th grade when a new majority of students have an email address (56%).
 - Interestingly, 41% of students in grades K-3 believe that their teachers are communicating with their parents via email indicating a high level of awareness about email capabilities and value.
- Students in grades 7-12 are also active users of IM (instant messaging) systems as evidenced by their acquisition and use of a plurality of screen names.
 - 70% of all students in grades 7-12 have 1-3 IM screen names with 18% having 4+ IM names.
 - 54% of the students know more of their friends' screen names than home phone numbers.
- Students in all grades have access to a wide range of technology devices. The most frequently cited devices (in order of student response strength) are the desktop computer, cell phone and CD burner.
- Across all grade levels, students are familiar with and using the Internet in ways that are consistent with their age-appropriate interests and level of access. Top Internet tools are email, search engines, IM, online games.
 - 78% of students in grades K-3 know what the Internet is
- Students find new technology and Internet sites outside of the formal learning environment from friends, parents and through personal online exploration, rather than from a class or a teacher recommendation.
- While two-thirds of students in grades 7-12 consider their technology knowledge "average," over three times as many of these students consider themselves "advanced" in their technology knowledge (26%) as "beginners" (7%). The gender divide is still very real for this age group in terms of technology knowledge with a differential of 14 percentage points between the males and females assessing themselves as advanced.
- For the students that assess themselves as "beginners" in technology use, this group is significantly less likely to have an email address or an IM screen name and more likely to say that they avoid technology as much as possible and do not value the role of technology in education.
- A overwhelming majority of students in grades 4-12 enjoy using technology and learning new ways to use it ((73%) with a third of this cohort group stating that they often help their friends with technology problems.
- Today's students from all grades believe strongly that technology use is important to their education.
 - 97% of students in grades 7-12
 - 95% of students in grades 4-6
 - 82% of students in grades K-3.

How are students using technology to help with their schoolwork?

- Technology plays an important role in student's schoolwork in all grades. In elementary school, 74% of students (grades K-6) say that technology helps them with their schoolwork; in grades 7-12 that number jumps to 91%.
- Home is the primary access point for using technology for schoolwork for 70% of the students in grades 7-12 and 57% of the students in grades 4-6.
 - Only a small percentage (4-8%) of students indicate that they do not have Internet access at home.
- When at school, students in grades 4-12 are using technology in a computer lab setting predominantly (64%). This same cohort uses technology at school to find information for reports, visit class or school websites and take tests online. The students in grades K-3, whose access to technology is mostly through their classroom, use technology to play learning games, create pictures and practice spelling and reading.
- The Internet has dramatically changed the way students conduct research and write school reports. Confronted with an assignment to write a report about a topic that they know little about, the first response for 67% of students in grades 7-12 is a technology-based response – do an Internet search or visit a bookmarked website – over visiting the library to find a book on the topic (10%), asking their teacher for help (9%) or looking for information in their textbook (5%). 45% of students in grades 4-6 would also gravitate first to the technology option.
 - Students that assess themselves as advanced in the technology knowledge are almost twice as likely to do an Internet search to find information on their report topic than students that indicated they are beginners.
- Students see access as the overarching obstacle to using technology more at their school. For students in grades 7-12, the most frequently cited obstacles are lack of time during the school day, slow Internet access time, school filters and firewalls, not enough computers and non-functioning computers. The differential spread for these five responses is only 8% with significantly minor numbers for responses such as outdated software or lack of teacher knowledge.
 - 44% of students in grades 7-12, however, believe that filters are good for a school.
- 61% of students in grades 7-12 told us that they approved of schools using students to provide tech support.
- Students not only highly value the importance of Internet access for their education; they are also very dependent upon it. Over three-quarters of students in grades 7-12 (83%) said that the loss of Internet access would have an impact on their schoolwork. In a similar way, 79% said that the loss of Internet access would also impact their personal life.

How are students using technology in their free time outside of school?

- Students' primary activities using technology beyond schoolwork evolves as they mature. Students in grades K-6 indicate a very strong preference for playing online games. For the youngest students (grades K-3) the playing games response was four times as strong as the next most popular response, listening to music. Almost half of the students in grades 4-6 (49%) list gaming as their number one use of technology outside of school, followed by email with friends and family at 20%. In concert with the emergence of more email accounts by students in 6th grade, the email response jumps by 12 percentage points from 3rd to 6th grade.
- For students in grades 7-12, 43% of students indicate that emailing with friends or family is the top preference, followed by gaming (31%) and listening/downloading music (17%).

- 73% of students use email or IM to communicate at least twice a month with friends who live outside of their local area with 39% communicating daily.
- Students do a variety of activities online that mirror their daily lives including getting directions, checking on sports team schedules, visiting college websites, sending invitations, buying movie tickets, going to online museums and learning about community service projects.

How would students like to see technology used in their schools to improve learning?

- Students in all grade levels have very distinctive ideas on how technology funds should be spent in their schools. When asked to prioritize expenditure items, overwhelmingly across all grades (K-12) the top priorities for increased spending was to buy more computers and to buy better software for student use.
 - Students want to expand their active online communications lives into their school environment. If they could change one thing about technology at their school, students in grades 7-12 would allow students to use IM and email at school. That response outpolled having online classes and online textbooks by almost 3:1.
 - Students in grades 4-12 are frustrated by the access obstacles at their school and would design a new school with fast, wireless access throughout their school, new computers so students could go online anywhere in the school, and computer labs that stayed open after school and on weekends.
 - Students have a very clear sense of the value of technology to their education. If a school had a lot of technology available to students, students in grades 4-12 believe that students would learn more, school would be more fun, student projects would be better and students would get higher grades in class and on tests.
 - Students in all grades chose their teacher as the person they are most likely to share a good idea with about improving technology at their school.
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End Notes: These selected findings are based upon the surveys submitted by students in grades K-3 using the group survey format, students in grades 4-6 using the individual survey format and students in grades 7-12 using the individual survey format. This survey was a convenience sampling with students and schools self-selecting their participation. We have not conducted any statistical significance testing on this data.