

K-12 Education Technology, Including AI

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Overview

People with disabilities have long benefited from technological advances. For decades, [assistive technology](#), ranging from low tech to high tech, has supported the learning of students with disabilities. For students receiving services in K-12 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team may determine that the student needs full-time, part-time, or specific allotted time to use a computer, tablet, cellular phone/its apps, or other device(s). Many students with disabilities depend on critical assistive technologies for access to the curriculum, which often require the use of devices. Recently, a surge in policy proposals at all levels (i.e., federal, state, and local) seeks to limit screen time further, restrict access to a 1-on-1 device, or require instruction to be “pencil and paper. These policies have the potential to negatively impact students’ academic outcomes and/or inclusion in schools.

Educational technology tools, including AI, hold promise for making lessons more accessible. When not thoughtfully conceived, designed, procured, implemented, or evaluated with the needs of all students in mind, they can exacerbate and magnify existing inequalities in our education system. Ensuring the benefits while avoiding the pitfalls requires frank, inclusive conversations, thoughtful action, and unwavering commitment to inclusion and accessibility by a range of stakeholders.

What We Know

The shift into leveraging educational technologies (EdTech) happened quickly, but was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and schools needing to rapidly adopt digital tools. Post-pandemic, the arrival and rapid adoption of generative AI has found us at a pivotal juncture in using technology for both teaching and learning.

[One estimate suggests that students now spend 20% of the instructional day in front of a screen.](#) While some questions remain about the impact of EdTech use on student engagement and learning outcomes, one reality remains clear: the fast shift into an EdTech-saturated classroom happened at a speed and scale for which few educators, schools, and systems were prepared.



Use of Educational Technologies by Students

1. Educational technologies hold promise for improving academic access and outcomes for students with disabilities.

While evidence on the impacts of educational technologies, including AI, for students with disabilities remains limited, emerging research suggests that these tools have potential to expand accessibility, learning opportunities, and outcomes. Research findings¹ have shown that the use of assistive technology can contribute to greater inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities, as well as to increased autonomy, independence, participation, and motivation. Specific software, such as text-to-speech and speech-to-text, captioning, and spelling and grammar tools, is vital for individuals with learning disabilities (LD). For students with certain learning disabilities, access to a device affords access to the curriculum (i.e., a student with dysgraphia who struggles with writing). Text-to-speech software has assisted students in improving reading speed, fluency, and content retention². Other research findings³ have shown that assistive technology can boost motivation for schoolwork. Early evidence from a review of research on AI use in K-12 education⁴ suggests that AI tools have the potential to expand access to individualized academic support for students with disabilities. Still, their benefit will depend on access to well-designed AI tools, supportive technologies and infrastructure in schools and at home, and their digital literacy.

2. Using technology, including generative AI, is becoming an inevitability for students' college and career readiness. Training in appropriate use, safeguards, and supportive policies is essential for maximizing benefits and mitigating potential harms to students with disabilities.

While research on the use and benefits of generative AI among students with disabilities is still emerging, its prevalence and use are rapidly evolving. The prevalence of AI on college campuses is ubiquitous, and most college students with disabilities believe it's a critical tool for supporting their academic engagement, performance, and workplace readiness, while also expressing concerns about

¹Fernández-Batanero, José María et al. "Assistive Technology for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities: A Systematic Review." *Educational technology research and development* 70.5 (2022): 1911–1930. Web.

²Raffoul, S., & Jaber, L. (2023). Text-to-speech software and reading comprehension: The impact for students with learning disabilities. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, 49(2), 1-18

³Svensson, I., Nordström, T., Lindeblad, E., Gustafson, S., Björn, M., Sand, C., ... & Nilsson, S. (2021). Effects of assistive technology for students with reading and writing disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, 16(2), 196-208.

⁴Fesler, L., Martinez, J., Agnew, C., Loeb, S., "The Evidence Base on AI in K-12: A 2026 Review," AI Hub for Education of the SCALE Initiative, Stanford University, 2026.

accuracy, academic integrity, and a need for more training in proper use⁵. Stakeholders throughout the field call for proper training, as well as supportive policies and safeguards, which are critical for mitigating the risks and potential harms of educational technology and AI⁶.

Parent: I have become very aware of how Educational Technology and emerging AI tools are being used in classrooms. Overall, I see many positive benefits. Technology can personalize learning, provide immediate feedback, and offer multiple ways for students to access information. For students like my son, visual supports, structured digital platforms, and interactive tools can make lessons clearer and more engaging. EdTech can also help teachers differentiate instruction more effectively so that students with different learning needs can participate meaningfully in the same classroom.

Parent: "While on one hand I think tools, including AI, are incredibly helpful and should be used, I also hesitate in fear that this could 'harm' students. Are students informed? Is the information collected a part of their permanent record? If students are informed, would that change what/how they use AI?"

Use of Educational Technologies by Educators and Administrators

3. Educational technology and AI have the potential to support educators in individualizing instruction for students with disabilities.

Early research on educators' use of AI for instruction suggests that AI tools may effectively support teachers in tailoring instruction and improving student outcomes⁷. While this could potentially help address inequities in students with disabilities' access to qualified and experienced educators, their effective use of technologies depends on their access to the right tools, training, time, and supportive technological infrastructure.

⁵ Zhao, X., Cox, A., & Chen, X. (2025). *The use of generative AI by students with disabilities in higher education. The Internet and Higher Education*, 66, 101014. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2025.101014>

⁶ McGee, N. J., Kozleski, E., Lemons, C. J., & Hau, I. C. (2025). *AI + learning differences: Designing a future with no boundaries*. Stanford Accelerator for Learning, Stanford University. https://acceleratelearning.stanford.edu/app/uploads/2025/07/AI-Learning-Differences-Designing-a-Future-with-No-Boundaries_Final.pdf

⁷ Ibid.

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4. **Educators' usage of AI to support teaching and learning, including in special education, may be outpacing guidance and training.**

According to a 2024 survey, approximately 70% of principals and district leaders are considering, actively exploring, or piloting the use of AI technologies in their special education programs⁸. Many special education teachers use it also. Another survey⁹ found that 57% of teachers reported using AI to develop an IEP or 504 plan. This widespread use of AI, both through formal adoption and informal use, indicates a need for strong support and guardrails that may not exist yet. In a recent report¹⁰, only 18% of principals nationally reported that their schools or districts provided guidance on the use of artificial intelligence in their school.

5. **When used for surveillance, some technologies employed are not evidence-based and have the potential to cause more harm than good, particularly for students with disabilities.**

For example, student online activity monitoring software, many of which use AI, is being employed more widely to monitor and surveil what students are doing online – disproportionately impacting students with disabilities, despite little evidence supporting the efficacy of this software and demonstrates significant risks beyond academic¹¹. Nearly 9 in 10 teachers say that their school monitors students' online activities¹². However, 61% of students with learning disabilities report that they do not share their true thoughts or ideas online because of monitoring and concern about student data privacy and security is higher among parents of children with disabilities (79% vs. 69%). This surveillance may also occur when using artificial intelligence for academic performance or behavior monitoring. The use of AI to surveil these factors

⁸ Klein, A. (2024, May 13). *The pros and cons of AI in special education*. *Education Week*.

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-pros-and-cons-of-ai-in-special-education/2024/05>

⁹ Laird, E., Dwyer, M., & Quay-de la Vallee, H. (2025, October). *Hand in hand: Schools' embrace of AI connected to increased risks to students*. Center for Democracy & Technology.

<https://cdt.org/insights/hand-in-hand-schools-embrace-of-ai-connected-to-increased-risks-to-students/>

¹⁰ Kaufman, J. H., Woo, A., Eagan, J., Lee, S., & Kassan, E. B. (2025). *Uneven adoption of artificial intelligence tools among U.S. teachers and principals in the 2023–2024 school year* (Research Report No. RR-A134-25). RAND Corporation.

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR134-25.html

¹¹ Paige, J. W., Holmes, P., Blagg, T. L., & Mendon-Plasek, S. J. (2024). *Artificial intelligence–based student activity monitoring for suicide risk in K–12 schools: Implementation and stakeholder perspectives*. RAND Corporation.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911757/>

¹² Laird, E., Dwyer, M., & Grant-Chapman, H. (2023, September 20). *Off task: EdTech threats to student privacy and equity in the age of AI*. Center for Democracy & Technology. <https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/091923-CDT-Off-Task-web.pdf>

may decrease students' willingness to take risks or make mistakes, thereby impacting the students' growth and development¹³.

6. **Large language models and algorithms may perpetuate biases due to a lack of disability data. Some tools have been shown to discriminate against people with disabilities and other marginalized populations.**

AI tools have been shown to discriminate against people with disabilities for behaviors related to their disability in education and employment settings. For example, online proctoring practices may unintentionally discriminate against students with disabilities who require accommodations like unfairly flagging a person as cheating on a virtual assessment due to slower reading speed or atypical eye movements¹⁴. AI chatbots can often show an ability bias, often outright excluding individuals with disabilities. Worse, these chatbots can generate responses that describe individuals with disabilities as having significantly fewer favorable traits and more limitations than those without disabilities.¹⁵

NCLD Believes

1. **When employing educational technology, including AI, students with disabilities' civil rights must be firmly upheld.**

Access to technology, and AI policies and practices must uphold the civil rights of students with disabilities, including those under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the IDEA, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). No federal, state, or local policy to restrict device or screen time access should interfere with a student's rights under these laws.

2. **Inclusion is a bedrock principle of IDEA and policies that single out some students are antithetical to that principle.**

At a minimum, any policy under consideration restricting screen time or device access should include exceptions for students with disabilities with accommodation

¹³ Zhu, H., Sun, Y., & Yang, J. (2025). Towards responsible artificial intelligence in education: a systematic review on identifying and mitigating ethical risks. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), Article 1111. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05252-6>

¹⁴ Johanson, A. (2025). *How remote proctoring continues to discriminate against disabled students: (specific subtitle if available)*. *The Journal of Law and Education*. Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3248&context=jled>

¹⁵ Urbina, J. T., Vu, P. D., & Nguyen, M. V. (2025). Disability Ethics and Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Identifying Ability Bias in ChatGPT and Gemini. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 106(1), 14–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2024.08.014>

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or educational support needs. However, when an exemption applies to students with disabilities, those principles of inclusion and universal design for learning are threatened. Further, some children may not yet be eligible for that exemption (i.e., are in the process of attaining an IEP or 504 plan) and would be impacted. State and district leaders should clearly articulate how a new policy that would limit access to technology is more positive than the potential stigmatization that occurs when a student is singled out.

3. **Education technology tools, including AI adoption and use, must include robust protections for student data privacy.**

It is essential to protect student privacy while tracking data elements necessary to evaluate AI tools' efficacy. Students with disabilities must also be reflected in training datasets and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.

4. **Educators must have comprehensive training and guidance on appropriate AI usage by students and teachers, particularly for special education purposes.**

For school use of AI in special education programs, guidance must be developed and shared with teachers and administrators to ensure quality, individualization, and protections for student privacy. Additionally, teachers and students alike must have training in appropriate use of generative AI as a tool to assist access and deepen learning opportunities. Educators, families, and students must have informed consent to technologies being used with opportunities for users to raise questions or opt out, if necessary.

5. **Education technology tools, including AI, must be procured and adopted to address clearly defined, specific needs of schools and students and with intentional community input.**

Any new investment but especially education technology tools must undergo thorough vetting of privacy protections, accessibility requirements, and demonstrate efficacy in supporting students with disabilities before being approved for use in schools.

6. **More research is needed to understand the impact of using AI tools for both students and teachers, particularly students with disabilities.**

Of over 800 research papers on AI in K-12 education, there are no studies to date that provide high-quality evidence on the impacts of AI tools based on their use in the

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context of K-12 schools in the United States.¹⁶ Because AI is not going away and will only expand, there needs to be a significant investment and attention to the evidence that can support thoughtful adoption of tools and products in schools. Research that examines AI use in the context of US schools and for different student groups including those with disabilities and LD specifically is critical for harnessing the potential of AI and ensuring equitable learning environments.

Additional Resources

- [Prioritizing Students with Disabilities in AI Policy](#)
- [Addressing the Impacts of Student Online Activity Monitoring Software on Students with Disabilities](#)

¹⁶ Ibid.