

A Parent's Guide for Responsible Tech Use

Understanding Educational Technology

School apps are made for learning. They include online tutors, grading tools, and lessons that adjust to your child. Unlike social media or AI chatbots, school apps should be chosen by your school, guided by teachers, and required to protect your child's data under privacy laws.

Doctors from the American Academy of Pediatrics say school-based technology can help kids learn and develop when it is used as designed and teachers receive proper training. To make sure educational technology helps kids learn and grow, schools need clear rules. Teachers also need time to collaborate and specialized training on how to use these tools.

Screen Value Over Screen Time

Instead of just setting a strict time limit, look at what your child is actually doing on their screen. The quality of the screen time is what matters most.

- **Busy does not always mean learning.** An app might be full of bright colors, fun sounds, and things to click. That keeps a child's attention, but it does not mean they are learning.
- **Real learning lasts.** True learning gives kids knowledge they can apply in the real world, away from the tablet or computer.
- **Try to "look and ask."** The American Psychological Association suggests watching your child use the app. If they're mostly earning points, dressing up characters, or tapping flashing lights, they may not be learning much.
- **Know what good looks like.** A strong app makes your child think: solving problems, explaining answers, creating something, or reading and writing. It gets harder as they improve and explains mistakes instead of just moving on.

The Performance Gap with Generative AI

We need to be careful with AI in school. It can hide what a child still needs to learn and it can keep them from thinking critically on their own.

- AI might help a child turn in a great paper, but it does not always mean that the child is thinking critically or writing better.
- Instead of banning AI tools, we must teach kids how to double-check the answers it gives.
- Kids should learn to question what the AI chatbot says and look for mistakes. They should treat AI as a tool to test out ideas, not just an easy answer machine.

The Crucial Role of Recess

Given more screens in school, kids need free time away from computers to grow and develop.

- Recess gives the brain a rest. It helps students focus better, feel happier, and handle stress.
- After working hard in class, a break helps the brain lock in new information so kids remember what they learned.
- Recess belongs to the students. It should never be taken away to finish classwork or as a punishment.
- Free time lets children choose how to play with friends. This teaches them how to share, work together, and solve problems on their own.

Questions Parents Should Ask Schools

Here are a few ways to talk with your child's teacher and school so you can feel good about the technology they use:

Ask what the apps are meant to teach.

What are the learning goals for this instructional tool and what is expected of my child?

This can help you understand if the technology is building skills or keeping kids busy. It helps to know exactly how the teacher uses them in class.

Check how your child's information is kept safe.

How are you ensuring my child's data, information, and privacy is being protected?

Ask whether the school uses tools designed specifically for students, rather than open apps available to anyone on the internet.

Talk about the balance of screen time.

How do you balance screen time with hands-on learning and play in your classroom?

Ask how much time is spent on devices versus working with classmates, writing on paper, or having free time. Learning works best when it is mixed with hands-on activities.

Ask how the school handles AI tools.

How does the school teach children about AI, and what rules guide how they use it?

If kids use AI to help with work, ask how teachers are showing them to double-check the answers and think for themselves.

Work together as a team.

What can I do at home to support the school's technology rules?

Teachers want the best for your child, too. Ask how you can support the school's technology rules at home so everyone is on the same page.

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