

# Learning in the 21st Century: A Trends Update

*In October 2007, Project Tomorrow, a national education nonprofit organization, in collaboration with Blackboard, Inc., released a new national report that examined data collected through the online Speak Up surveys in fall 2006 about student, teacher and parent attitudes and aspirations for online learning. This groundbreaking report also included interviews with six education leaders about their school district's "real world" experiences with online learning. The report, **Learning in the 21st Century: A National Report of Online Learning** provides valuable input into the national conversation about how to ensure that every student has access to a 21st century education.*

With the most recent Speak Up online survey (fall 2007), Project Tomorrow probed deeper on this important national topic with new questions for students, teachers and parents about technology and 21st century learning. Additionally, the survey queried education leaders including school principals and district administrators. The data findings from this year's Speak Up surveys compel us to release this addendum to the National Report as a means to share with the education community the latest findings on online learning. This addendum, entitled *Learning in the 21st Century: A Trends Update*, provides new and timely data on the growth of online learning in America's schools for both student learning and teacher professional development, and the challenges faced by school and district leaders in regards to technology and learning.

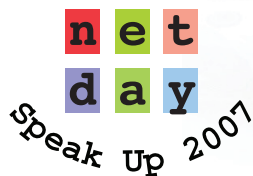
## 2007 Data Findings

One of the key findings from the Speak Up 2007 data is the continuing, "digital disconnect" between students and the adults that support their education. How today's students are using technology to learn and to live continues to be very different than how their teachers and parents use technology, and how these "digital immigrants" are trying to engage the students with technology applications. This digital disconnect cuts across the use of all technologies. Thus, it is not surprising to us that we see this division of use and aspirations in our discussion of online learning. In this *Trends Update* we identify several key findings that go beyond the simplicity of student-educator differences and enlighten us on both the challenges and benefits of infusing online learning across K-12 education.

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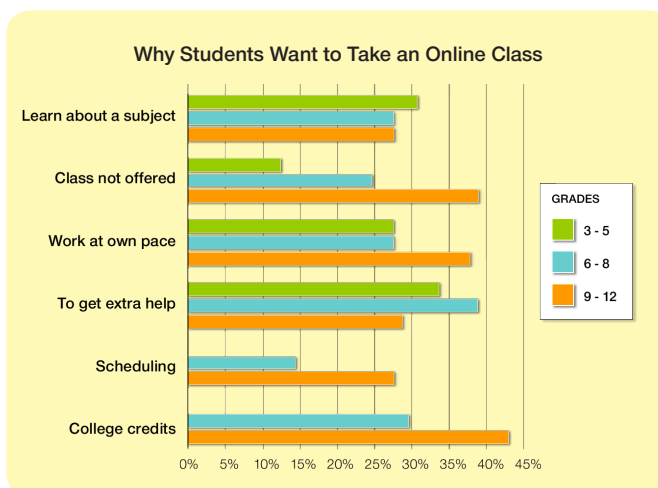
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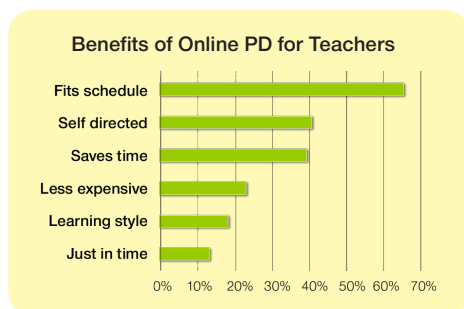
## Students and Online Learning

Students from elementary through high school are increasingly interested in online learning. Over 29% of middle school students and 36% of high school students have had some interaction with online learning – either through a class that is taught 100% online, a class with online components or through their own personal pursuit of learning via non-school related online courses. **This explosion in familiarity with online learning represents an 80% increase in high school student experiences over 2006 data findings.** An additional cohort of 24% of middle school students, and 33% of high school students who have not had direct experience with online courses say that they would be interested in taking an online class if available to them.



When asked to explain their interest, the trend we first uncovered with the *National Report* continues. Middle school students in grades 6-8 are primarily interested in taking an online class to get extra help to support a traditional class where they are struggling to grasp the content. **High school students in grades 9-12 are more interested in online learning classes to gain college credit or to access courses not currently available at their high school.** Both middle school students and elementary students in grades 3-5 also highly value self-directed and self-paced learning, and feel that the online courses may allow them a more personalized learning environment.

## Teachers and Online Professional Development



Teacher interest in online learning, which has traditionally lagged behind student interest, took a huge step forward as documented through our Speak Up 2007 data findings. **In a significant new finding, over 1/3 of teachers said they had explored opportunities for integrating online learning into their classroom.** An additional 31% of teachers said that though they had no previous experience, they would be interested in learning more about online learning. This new interest in exploring online learning mirrored the growth in teachers' personal involvement with online learning modalities.

Increasingly, teachers are also recognizing the benefits of online professional development. **While only 7% of teachers in 2006 identified online classes as their preferred methodology for their own professional development, over 26% of teachers in 2007 chose online learning as their first choice for training.** The value proposition for today's teachers about online learning closely matches their students' interests as well. Teachers cite the flexibility of scheduling, self-directed learning, and saving time as key benefits.

## Designing the 21st Century School

Each year the Speak Up surveys ask students, educators and parents to envision the ultimate school for today's 21st century learners. While students in all grades continue to voice strong support for personal laptops that they can use both in school and at home as a key part of their ultimate school, student interest in online learning, and specifically the use of online tools, continues to grow. Over 46% of students in grades 6-12 include online tools to help them with organization of class work and assignments in their ultimate school, and 41% would like tools to better communicate with their teachers. Over 1/3 of the students would like to see greater use of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, social networking sites and wikis in the classroom. **And over 41% of students believe that online classes will have the greatest positive impact on their learning, a growth of over 20% from the 2006 data findings.**

The Speak Up 2007 data also revealed a growth in teacher interest in online learning as part of their ultimate school. **Over 20% of teachers chose online classes as a key element for increasing student achievement in the 21st century school, an increase of almost 28% over the 2006 findings.** Additionally, 19% of teachers included a learning management system in their wish list for the ultimate school.

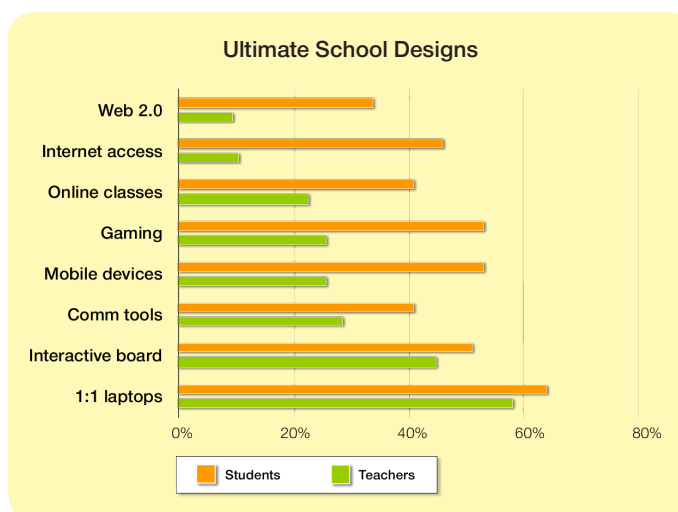
Parents continue to be strong supporters of online learning as well. In a new question about technology skill development, 11% of parents felt that taking an online class would be the best way for their child to acquire the technology skills needed to be successful in today's world.

In fall 2007, the Speak Up surveys collected the authentic, unfiltered viewpoints of 319,223 K-12 students, 25,544 teachers, 19,726 parents and 3,263 school and district administrators from 3,739 schools and 867 districts across all 50 states. As with all Speak Up events, every school in the United States was invited to participate in the surveys, and each participating school and district received free online access to their aggregated quantitative data with national data results for benchmarking.



## School Leaders Support Online Learning

For the first time with Speak Up 2007, school principals and district administrators had an opportunity to share their views on technology and 21st century education. As we discussed in the *National Report*, online learning can encompass many different implementations. While 34% of the administrators in our 2007 poll had not yet implemented any online classes, the distribution across the schools and districts where online learning is already implemented covers a wide spectrum of creativity with the greatest concentration on teacher professional development courses.



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### How has your school or district implemented online courses?

Instructor-led, online courses on campus	23%
Instructor-led, online courses taken anywhere	20%
Self-paced, student directed	26%
Blended online course with face-to-face teacher interactions	20%
Professional development for teachers	49%

Approximately one-third of school leaders said that student interest in taking an online class and teacher interest in teaching an online class would be significant factors in their decisions to provide or expand those kinds of learning opportunities.

Our nation's education leaders, at both school sites and district offices, appreciate the value of technology within a 21st century education. While the everyday challenges these administrators face are taunting, **over 88% say that the effective implementation of instructional technology is core to their mission, and 84% believe that technology use does indeed enhance student achievement.**

As our national discussion continues about how to effectively prepare today's students for changing dynamics of the 21st century workplace and society, the voices and ideas of students, teachers, parents and school leaders shared through Speak Up and these reports will continue to inform and impact K-12 education.

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## About Project Tomorrow

Speak Up is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow (formerly known as NetDay), the nation's leading education nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that today's students are well prepared to be tomorrow's innovators, leaders and engaged citizens of the world. Since fall 2003, the annual Speak Up project has collected and reported on the views of over 1.2 million K-12 students, teachers, administrators and parents representing over 14,000 schools in all 50 states. The Speak Up data represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder input on education, technology, 21st century skills, schools of the future and science instruction. Education, business and policy leaders report using the data regularly to inform federal, state and local education programs. For additional information, visit [www.tomorrow.org](http://www.tomorrow.org).

## About Blackboard

Blackboard solutions empower K-12 schools and districts to focus on powered learning: connected, personalized teaching and learning that expands opportunities for all learners anytime, anywhere. As trusted partners in education for over a decade, Blackboard solutions enable K-12 districts to create connected e-learning environments that provide technology-enhanced learning opportunities for teachers and students, regardless of time, place or situation. Each day over 12 million learners around the world use Blackboard solutions to support a 21st century educational experience that is engaging, individualized, and effective.

**For information about Speak Up, visit: [www.tomorrow.org/speakup](http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup)**

To download the original report, *Learning in the 21st Century: A National Report of Online Learning*, please visit [www.blackboard.com/k12/onlinelearningreport](http://www.blackboard.com/k12/onlinelearningreport).



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