

Our Children @ Risk

EdTech*: The latest push from corporate “school reform” threatens children’s health and well-being, parental control, family privacy, and the quality of teaching and learning



In the face of strong pressure from the parental opt-out movement, and criticism that the misuse and overuse of standardized tests harms children and their education, corporate reformers and “Big Testing” seem to have changed their tactics.

These education profiteers are promoting even more lucrative testing and teaching strategies, called “personalized,” or “competency-based” learning and “embedded” or “adaptive” testing, which may or may not be tied to the Common Core State Standards or the PARCC or SBAC national tests.

These products help Big Testing continue to control the curriculum and access vast amounts of student data. Meanwhile, students are spending increasing hours glued to computer screens and other digital devices which leaves less time for interacting with other children, adults or their own imaginations, and exposes them to new dangers.

PAA is not against the appropriate use of technology in schools. Just as we oppose standardized test misuse and not the tests themselves, we challenge technology use that reduces schooling to a data-mining computer game. We acknowledge that parents must work harder to monitor their children’s use of technology at home; however, we believe that schools, school districts and states must become far more cautious, diligent, transparent and accountable about their technology decisions.

Parents must be alerted to the many potential risks of EdTech, and be prepared to challenge and, if necessary, opt out of school-based technology that may be harmful to our children. For example:

- **Dangerous amounts of screen time:** PAA’s fact sheets** provide disturbing detail about the many serious negative effects of excessive screen time on children’s mental and emotional development, ability to learn, vision, physical health, exposure to radiation, and other issues.
- **Daily testing:** “The new plan is to replace end-of-year standardized tests with what could be daily testing. The core of education will consist of modules of programmed instruction that students will work through online and be tested on, which will drastically diminish the role of teachers and increase profits of technology companies.” (56)***
- **Learning as “data tags”:** “Critics noted... that Common Core standards could be better understood as data tags. Every single thing a student does would be recorded, cataloged, tagged, bagged, and tossed into the bowels of the data mine, where computers will crunch data and spit out a “personalized” version of their pre-built educational program.” (62)
- **Requiring inappropriate skills** to enable computer testing and data collection: “How do you teach letter keys when the youngest kids are still learning their letters?” Lynch said. “I can tell them to press ‘A,’ but they may not know what that is yet.” (63)
- **Massive collection of student data** without parental consent: “Currently, schools collect much more information on students than most parents realize. While some was required by *No Child Left Behind* and individual state mandates, much of the data now collected appears to transcend legal requirements. (69)

*We use the term EdTech to cover the many terms and buzz words associated with digital learning.

**Please see the rest of our materials at (<http://tinyurl.com/PAAEdTechreports>) for a fuller picture of the dangers of EdTech.

*** The parenthetical numbers refer to entries in our documentation paper (<http://tinyurl.com/edtechdocu>)