

Student Data Privacy Concerns

Whether in person or remote, this year's back-to-school season is bringing with it a host of new data privacy concerns.

Chief among them: How to safely and legally store and share videos of classroom lessons featuring students, and what to do with all the new sensitive health information being collected by schools now administering health surveys, doing daily temperature checks, and tracing the contacts of students and staff who have contracted or been exposed to the coronavirus.

"Reopening plans must balance protecting health and protecting student privacy and educational rights," says Amelia Vance, director of youth and education privacy at the Future of Privacy Forum, which released "Student Privacy and Virtual Learning Guide" along with the National Center on Learning Disabilities.

Schools and districts, she advised, should have clear plans for how they

will collect, use, and store health data to ensure it is not ultimately used to limit educational access or opportunities for vulnerable students.

With the coronavirus pandemic still sowing uncertainty in schools, 9 in 10 district leaders say they plan to incorporate some level of remote instruction into their reopening plans, according to the most recent survey of K-12 professionals administered by the Education Week Research Center.

That means an abundance of platforms, software programs, and apps will be a regular part of students' education. With this reality comes concerns about how that technology will be collecting, storing, and using students' personal information. Parents who wish to opt out of such technology usage, already limited in their options before the pandemic, will now be even more constrained.

To minimize the potential risk and build trust, Vance said, schools should

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Some High School Sports Can Play this Fall, With New Rules

To play or not to play? That's the question student athletes and their families have been asking during these pandemic months, wondering the status of the 2020-2021 school sports schedule in an era of social distancing and remote or hybrid learning. Last week, the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, in collaboration with the state's office of Environmental and Energy Affairs (EEA) and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), released guidelines and a modified schedule for approved sports.

Citing the importance athletics hold for a well-rounded education experience – even during the COVID-19 pandemic – DESE sent guidelines to school administrators for modified sports seasons for 2020-21.

Based on statewide data, the fall sports considered "higher risk" for

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Students Under Pressure: Survey reveals mental health concerns during the pandemic

Life has been turned upside down by COVID-19. For kids and teens, the predictability of familiar routines—going to school, seeing friends, participating in extracurricular activities—is no longer a source of comfort and structure. And unfortunately, it doesn't look like things will be going back to normal anytime soon.

Additionally, in these times of increased uncertainty, fear and anxiety

for adults, we can expect that these feelings are passed along to children and teens. These drastic changes have had a significant impact on the mental health of our students. Although knowing these issues exist is not surprising, a better understanding of the data can help you to further understand these challenges in order to fully support our students and families. The data collected from Mental Health America's (MHA) screening

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MASC 75th Annual Delegate Assembly: Save the Date: 11/7/20

The MASC Board of Directors has announced that the Association's Annual Meeting, which is usually held during the Joint Conference, will take place on **Saturday, November 7 at 1:00pm.**

While MASC hopes that the meeting will be able to be held in person, it is likely that the event will be either

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NATIONAL NEWS

NATIONWIDE LAPTOP SHORTAGE

As back to school nears, there is a new concern: a nationwide laptop shortage as many schools adapt to remote learning. It's tough to find a computer right now for yourself or (especially) your child.

This spring, Americans went on a home electronics-buying craze spurred by the pandemic, and it has lasted for far longer than anyone predicted. Manufacturers haven't been able to keep up. Now, as children start returning to classrooms – in person or virtually – the computers popular for school have been in particularly short supply.

The result is that it's been hard to find many computer models, particularly the stripped-down laptops called Chromebooks.

According to a Supply Chain Management Review, the pandemic has halted China's production of laptop parts, resulting in supply chain issues. Laptop maker Acer is warning that it's not even close to being able to supply enough chromebooks to support a virtual classroom experience. Screens, batteries, and processors are also seeing shipping delays, which analysts say could exacerbate the problem in the near future. If you're struggling to find the school computer you want at a price you can stomach, here are some tips:

Be flexible: Have a plan B, C and D if you're eyeing a particular computer model. You might have to hunt around. Consider buying a used computer or desktop PCs, which tend to be in better supply than laptops. (One warning: Desktops often don't come with webcams needed for virtual school. And webcams are hard to find because again – pandemic buying.)

MA NEWS

STATUS OF FY 2021 STATE BUDGET

The Legislature has extended formal sessions through the end of the year due to the Covid 19 crisis. This allows the Legislature to address a variety of issues.

The FY 2020 budget expired on July 1, 2020 and has been extended by enacting a series of 1/12 budgets as necessary. The House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means recommended a three-month budget commencing August 1, 2020 through October 31 with support from the Governor. The interim FY 2021 budget contains \$16.53 billion. Furthermore, Chapter 70, General Aid to Education, includes a provision that ensures funding of not less than the FY 2020 amount.

The Legislature and the Governor expect to address a final 2021 budget later this Fiscal Year. There is some light at the end of the Covid tunnel due to an unanticipated increase in July 2020 revenues of approximately 7% over July of 2019. Hopefully, the month of August will show similar gains in revenues.

This is a most unusual year due principally to the Covid 19 virus that resulted in a postponement of the state income tax deadline to July 15, 2020, resulting in less timely information as to income tax receipts. Also, state lawmakers are waiting for the Congress to appropriate potentially significant monies to state and local governments. More time for crucial budgetary information could allow for more flexibility in the state budget. As more relevant information becomes available we will provide you with updates.

MASC PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Michael O'Neill, a longtime member of the Boston School Committee, has been named Chair of the Board of Directors of the Council of Great City Schools, a coalition of 76 large urban school systems nationwide.

O'Neill will serve in the post for one year and will lead the 152-member board in a search to replace the Council's current executive director who is retiring.

A resident of Charlestown and a graduate of Boston Latin School, O'Neill has been a member of the Boston School Committee since 2008 and has served as the Committee's Vice Chair. He has been a member of the Committee's two most recent superintendent search teams and in 2015 he was named to MASC's All-State School Committee.

ADDITIONAL NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION SESSIONS SCHEDULED

Attention newly elected school committee members! MASC will be presenting its six new member orientation sessions on three evenings in late September in the event that you were unable to attend any or some of the sessions when they were offered in July-August.

The online program will be presented as follows. There is no charge to attend, but you must register online in order that we can send you materials and a Zoom link in advance.

Tuesday, September 29

5:30-7:00pm: Roles & Responsibilities
7:30-9:00pm: Ethics/Conflict of Interest

Wednesday, September 30

5:30-7:00pm: Budget and Finance
7:30-9:00pm: Superintendent Evaluation/Special Education

Thursday, October 1

5:30-7:00pm: Open Meeting Law
7:30-9:00pm: Collective Bargaining

Register online (www.masc.org) on the Upcoming Events page.

Social Media: Pandemic-era guidance

In this unprecedented time, as the already tired phrase goes, even more of the community discussion around education in our communities has moved to social media. While this continues to present challenges, it also gives school committee members a renewed opportunity to be a clear and trusted resource for the school district.

As you engage with your constituents online, the following are some considerations MASC would recommend:

The Open Meeting Law: The danger of social media is the potential for deliberation of an item under the Committee's purview by a quorum of the Committee outside of a posted public meeting. This is true for quorums of the full committee, and quorums of subcommittees. Members should be aware of colleagues who may be on the same social media threads. Remember that deliberation is discussion towards deciding an issue, so steer clear of comment threads on items that have not yet come before or been decided by your committee. Be very cautious in your interaction with other school committee members on social media; "liking" a comment, even without further comment, is tacit support.

The Code of Ethics: Keep in mind the state code of ethics when online. Deliberation belongs at a posted public meeting, not on the town Facebook group. Never commit to or preview your votes. Deliberation at the meeting may change your mind, and proposals may change. Be considerate of your responsibilities to your administrators, your colleagues, as well as to your constituents. Be professional regarding those with whom you work. Always make it clear you speak only for yourself, not for the district, and not for the full Committee (unless you have had that responsibility specifically delegated to you).

Collective bargaining: Many Committees are currently engaged in negotiations with collective bargaining units regarding reopening. Labor law prohibits speaking directly to members of the union about items that may be under negotiation, as that is an unfair labor practice. Commitments should come directly through negotiations, not comment threads. Consequently, members need to be aware of what is and isn't up for negotiation.

Be a good resource: Members should inform the public of upcoming public meetings and forums, remind families and staff of due dates, and clarify decisions that have been made. Direct people back to district, state, and other documents to provide further clarity and explanation. If questions arise, and there is a factual answer, provide it. Offer links to relevant information if possible. You do have the right to explain votes that you have taken. Remember, however, your responsibility as a member of the committee is to accept decisions that have been made, whether or not you supported them when the vote was taken. We recognize that Committee work right now is exhausting work, but it is also crucial. The lack of press coverage and the inability to gather in person have made forums where information can be shared, explained and confirmed that much more vital. Trustworthy voices are needed. Those voices are yours.

MASC 75th Annual Delegate Assembly: Save the Date

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entirely remote, or a hybrid of virtual and on site. No matter, mark your calendars for Saturday, the 7th.

Delegates to the annual meeting will vote on the incoming Board of Directors as well as ten resolutions that have been presented on issues ranging from MCAS and High Stakes Testing; Lowering the Voting Age for Municipal Voting; CO-VID-19 State Funding; and School

Committee Anti-Racism resolution, among others. These resolutions are printed in the 2020 Delegate Manual which is currently in production and will be sent to all MASC members. Resolutions will also be posted on the MASC website.

Prior to the Delegate Assembly, MASC is also planning for a 9:00am professional development program on equity, and the issues around it that the pandemic has exposed.

There will be no charge to attend the morning session or the assembly, but you must register in advance in order to receive materials and the session link.

Committees will also need to designate their delegate to the assembly. The delegate form is included in the "Forms You Need" booklet which can be downloaded at: <https://www.masc.org/member-resources-4/forms/forms-you-need>.

High school sports

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spreading the COVID virus (football, cheer and unified basketball) would be limited to “practice only; sports deemed “low” or “moderate” risk – cross-country, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, girls’ volleyball, fall swimming and diving, and soccer – may be held during their normal seasons, with a start date of September 18, if modifications are made to eliminate contact and to adhere to other sport-specific modifications that are being developed. These are likely to include eliminating deliberate contact, modifying or eliminating intermittent contact, and increasing distancing.

“Organized physical activity should be encouraged, within clear health and safety parameters,” read the DESE statement. “Most sports can be played in ways that minimize those risks. In many cases, that will mean that interscholastic competitions may not look

the same and may need to be played under fairly stringent restrictions with modified rules. Unfortunately, in some cases, competitive play may need to be cancelled or postponed.”

The guidance also allows for a “floating season” between the winter and spring sports calendars. During that time, sports that were unable to play earlier could hold competitions if allowed under state guidelines and schools that were remote-learning only could use the season for games that were missed during the remote learning time. Any sports played during the winter, floating, and spring seasons would be subject to updated EEA guidelines.

School districts in cities or towns labeled as “high risk” (color-coded “red” based on the Department of Public Health’s metrics) are instructed to postpone their entire season, including practices, until the floating season later in the year. Districts designated as yellow, green, or unshaded based on

DPH metrics – who have their students learning remotely – may delay their fall season to the floating season. Any school district in those three categories doing remote-only learning may still participate in the fall season, pending approval of its local school committee.

According to the guidelines, the proposed winter sports (start date yet to be determined) would include gymnastics, indoor track, skiing, dance, winter swimming/diving, cheer, hockey, basketball, and wrestling. The spring season, which would also start at a date to-be-determined, would include girls’ golf, baseball, softball, tennis, boys’ volleyball, lacrosse, track and field, and rugby.

The higher risk sports in later seasons, including basketball, hockey, wrestling, boys’ lacrosse, and rugby, will continue to be evaluated in light of health metrics and EEA guidance. Those guidelines, according to the statement, “are subject to change throughout the school year.”

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consider establishing a set of limited and vetted ed-tech products to use during remote learning.

That list shouldn’t include social media. Despite the appeal of reaching students on the platforms they regularly use teachers and administrators should avoid delivering instruction on platforms such as Instagram Live, TikTok, and YouTube.

And what about providing teletherapy services to students with special needs or disabilities?

Avoid “public-facing” platforms like Facebook Live, the new virtual learning guide advises, and, if possible, use platforms that your school district has a contract with. The federal department of Health and Human Services has offered greater flexibility around using commercial services that are not public-facing, such as Zoom, Facebook Messenger, and FaceTime.

How are schools managing the shift to video-based instruction?

Eighty-two percent of district leaders expect teachers to pre-record video lessons and make them available for students to watch on demand, according to the most recent EdWeek Research Center survey. As for live videoconferencing, 8 in 10 principals/district leaders have been using Zoom for Education and Google Hangouts. Smaller numbers have approved use of Microsoft Teams, GoTo-Meeting, Skype, and other platforms.

A student’s mere participation in such videoconferencing likely does not trigger the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, the nation’s primary student data-privacy law. That likely changes, however, the moment “a student’s image, name, or voice is recorded and stored by the school,” according to the new NCLD and Future of Privacy Forum guide. Federal laws such as the (FERPA) and the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) can also help guide school leaders in deciding what new technologies to use.

To make sure schools are protecting students’ privacy during videoconferences, the Consortium for School Networking, a professional association for school-technology leaders, developed an online guide.

Whenever possible, avoid recording classroom discussions with students, the group advises. Create guidelines that ensure any videos involving students are secure both in transit and while being stored. Make sure only necessary personnel can access the videos and set a schedule for deleting all videos after a set period of time. The Consortium also advises avoiding any practices that might result in the videos being publicly available. That means no open Google Drive links, posts to private YouTube accounts, or emailed files.

One strategy used by many school districts trying to

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mental health concerns during pandemic

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program allows for rare insights into the mental health of young people during this pandemic.

MHA's screening program (MHAScreening.org) has a suite of free, confidential, and anonymous clinically validated tools available to individuals to assess their mental health and determine if they are experiencing symptoms of a mental illness. One of these screens is specifically designed for youth (ages 11-17) who are concerned that their emotions, attention or behaviors might be signs of a problem.

The screening shows that more young people are concerned about their mental health, with a 20% increase in the number of people taking the Youth Screen between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020. And not only are more young people taking the test, but more are also scoring at-risk.

THE RESULTS

Unsurprisingly, the main contributor to youth mental health problems right now is loneliness or isolation, with 75% of youth who scored at risk indicating this as a source of their problems. This is followed by the related issues of social life or relationships (69%). Family relationships can be stressed by increased time in close quarters, but may be especially troubling for LGBTQ youth whose families are not supportive.

Nearly half (44.6%) of at-risk youth screeners say that past trauma is affecting their mental health now, which is concerning if a parent or guardian is the source of that trauma. In pre-COVID days, school personnel may be in a position to identify a young person whose behaviors indicate problems at home, but with no in-person contact between teachers and students, that resource is lost.

Difficulties at school with academics or learning also were reported by nearly half (44.1%). The abrupt shift from

face-to-face to remote learning likely has been a factor. Stress may be compounded in situations where multiple children are living in one home without a digital device for each child or where there is no internet access.

For those who have learning disabilities, the lack of one-on-one, in person assistance and other accommodations in remote settings is an added challenge. Furthermore, materials or learning tools in languages other than English may be limited, and young people in households where parents or guardians are not English speakers can't get help with their schoolwork.

Coronavirus rounds out the list of the top five issues causing mental health distress to youth at 27.7%. They see that it has other people worried, and that worries them as well. Family finances is another source of stress, as households are upended by business closures and layoffs. In addition, children who participate in free or reduced-cost school meals programs have had that lifeline disrupted by COVID-19 school shutdowns.

HOW TO HELP

Young people aren't the only ones struggling. The crisis has parents dealing with many stressors, including job security and financial stability. If they're not able to work from home, they need childcare

in order to continue to work. And they still need to help their children when they get home.

With the limitations of remote learning and social distancing, there are nevertheless ways that school personnel can help using technology. One-on-one video chats between teachers and students, and teachers and parents can be used. And when video chat isn't an option, don't overlook the telephone as a way to connect.

However much school personnel want to help, it is important to avoid making assumptions about what is needed for support. Listen to families and encourage parents and caregivers to listen to their children. Encourage and provide them with strategies for taking advantage of virtual social opportunities. Collaborate with wrap-around service providers and keep families informed of available supports. Ask students and their families about the challenges they are facing and the kinds of support they need to better deal with both remote learning and the stress of these forced changes.

This article is adapted from one which appeared in NSBA's American School Board Journal, August 2020. Authors Danielle Fritze and Maddy Reinert are, respectively, director of public education /visual communication for Mental Health America, and program manager of population health at Mental Health America.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mental health-focused resources to help with school reopening

- "An Initial Guide to Leveraging the Power of Social and Emotional Learning as You Prepare to Reopen and Renew Your School Community." CASEL.
https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CASEL_Leveraging-SEL-as-You-Prepare-to-Reopen-and-Renew.pdf
- "Plan Ahead to Support the Transition Back of Students, Families and Staff": UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/spring20.pdf>

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take such concerns into account: Using learning management systems that are specifically designed for K-12 schools and have built-in tools for meeting with students, such as Canvas.

Another new concern for schools is all the sensitive health data on students now being collected. In late July, 3 in 5 district leaders told the EdWeek Research Center they planned to do daily temperature checks of students and staff. A handful were also planning to administer their own COVID tests. In addition to state reporting requirements and privacy laws, schools also need to consider the implications for anti-discrimination laws, labor laws, and more.

Schools should avoid rushing a

technology solution into place just to create the appearance of action. Strong privacy and security measures—including legal reviews for compliance with state and federal law, plans to minimize the data that are actually stored, limiting access to those data, and ensuring that strong physical, technical, and administrative controls are in place—are essential.

One tangible example of data minimization is the following: A record stating that a given student will be attending classes remotely for two weeks is far less invasive, sensitive, and susceptible to misuse than a record indicating that student had a high temperature and exhibited other coronavirus symptoms and therefore

is being forced into quarantine for two weeks.

There are also important considerations around equity and anti-discrimination to consider. Trust is essential, said Vance, so parents and students feel comfortable honestly reporting their symptoms, without worry that such information might be used to exclude them from certain classes or educational opportunities down the road.

To that end, experts across the board stressed a common point: In a time of high anxiety and tremendous uncertainty, as back-to-school season is certain to be, transparency is critical. If there was ever a time to over-communicate with parents about your privacy plans, this is it.

Comcast offers low-cost internet to help low-income students

Comcast recently announced a new program for cities, schools, and nonprofits to connect large numbers of low-income K-12 students to the Internet at home.

The "Internet Essentials Partnership Program" offers households low-cost, broadband Internet service for \$9.95/month, the option to purchase a heavily subsidized computer, and multiple options for digital literacy training. Today, Comcast also announced it is giving all Internet Essentials customers its innovative xFi platform, which enables parents to control and manage their children's WiFi connected devices. Comcast will also offer, through the end of 2020, all new Internet Essentials customers two months of free Internet service and it will forgive back debt due so more families can apply.

The program also includes two months of free Internet service for new Internet Essentials customers. For more information: comcastcorporation.com/IEPP, touch base with your local Comcast contact, or connect with Rebecca_Fracassa@comcast.com.

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