

School should be a safe environment for all students. Phones, social media use and their presence in schools along with required exposure to online and digital products in school (and the collection and misuse of student data which perpetuates bias and discrimination) violates student civil rights by creating an unsafe learning environment for students.

References:

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- Survey Reveals Extent to Which Cops Surveil Students Online at Home and in School <https://www.the74million.org/article/survey-reveals-extent-that-cops-surveil-students-online-in-school-and-at-home/>
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Youth in Vermont are in a mental health crisis. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth.

References:

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Digital and online products contribute significantly to this youth mental health and therefore public health crisis.

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Digital and online products are used in schools. The companies that own these digital and online products collect and misuse data associated with students.

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Tech used in schools routinely pass student data to advertisers and other third parties. <https://www.the74million.org/article/startling-96-of-school-tech-exposes-student-data-research-finds/>
- Student Data Privacy Project, What's at Stake <https://www.studentdataprivacyproject.com/theproblem/thestakes>
- Human Rights Watch Report: How Dare They Peep into My Private Life? Children's Rights Violations by Governments that Endorsed Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/05/25/how-dare-they-peep-my-private-life/childrens-rights-violations-governments>

Misuse of student data negatively impacts the safety of students and contributes to health harms by limiting access to opportunities such as education, credit, employment and housing. These are all categories of social determinants of health. Social determinants of health contribute to wide health disparities and inequalities which impact an individual's health and safety. Digital and online products are commercial determinants of health as they both directly and indirectly impact the health of children.

References:

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In 2023 alone by mid-October there were nearly 1,000 suicide related youth emergency room visits in Vermont. This imposes a significant financial cost on the State and health care system. In 2021, 1466 Vermont youth ages 17 and younger were seen in Vermont emergency rooms due to mental, behavioral, and neurodevelopmental disorders. The average facility charges were \$2,890 per visit for a total of \$4,236,760 for youth mental health-related ED visit costs in 2021. Many of these youth suicide related emergency room visits can be prevented by providing youth an environment free of digital and online harms (i.e. a safe school environment).

Reference:

- Vermont Department of Health Suicide Surveillance Dashboard <https://www.healthvermont.gov/stats/surveillance-reporting-topic/suicide-data>
- Data Notes: Data comes from the Vermont Uniform Hospital Discharge Data Set, 2021. Mental health related visits are defined using the Clinical Classification Software Refined Diagnosis Group 5 = “Mental, Behavioral and Neurodevelopmental Disorders” www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/toolssoftware/ccsr/ccs_refined.jsp. All data are for Vermont residents seen in Vermont hospital emergency departments. Charges are based on total facility charges associated with each visit.

In order to reverse the current inadequate conditions of schools as an unsafe environment we must protect students against digital and online product harms. It is in the public interest to provide as safe a school environment as possible as well as educating stakeholders on the risks and harms of exposure to these products. It is our responsibility to provide an environment free of these harms where students can thrive and optimize their future potential.

References

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