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New Report: Chicago Students Infrequently Use Technology for School

At a time when technological proficiency is a prerequisite for most careers, about half of sixth-through twelfth-graders in Chicago Public Schools report using technology for school less than once a week, according to a new report from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Between 20 and 30 percent of students report never or rarely using technology for school—at most once or twice a semester, the report found. At the same time, the vast majority (92 percent) report having access to the internet at home, signaling a clear divide between how students interact with technology in and out of school.

“Given that low-income students are the least likely to be exposed to technology at home, we were surprised and encouraged by the large percentage of Chicago students who reported having access to the internet,” said Stacy Ehrlich, lead author of the report. “However, we were disappointed to learn that widespread access outside of school did not translate into widespread use for academic purposes.”

The report, *The Use of Technology in Chicago Public Schools 2011: Perspectives from Students, Teachers, and Principals*, is based on 2011 and 2012 survey data from CPS teachers, principals and students.

Other key findings from the report:

- **Technology use varied significantly from school to school in Chicago.** Technology use is much more frequent in schools that serve higher-achieving students. For example, more than 80 percent of students in selective enrollment high schools use the internet weekly for school, compared with 57 percent of students in neighborhood schools and 62 percent in charter schools. Roughly 20 percent of students in neighborhood and charter schools report

never using the internet, or using it only one to two times per semester, compared with just 6 percent of students in selective enrollment schools.

- **Students use technology more frequently in schools where teachers also use technology more and have higher expectations for use.** Unfortunately, only 45 to 50 percent of teachers use computer programs in delivering lessons at least weekly. And less than half ask their students to complete coursework using technology on a weekly basis. Teachers in magnet elementary and selective enrollment high schools use technology more, expect their students to use technology more, and feel a more supportive culture for the use of technology in their schools.
- **Principal expectations set the stage for technology use among teachers and students.** Students and teachers use technology more, and feel more support for integrating technology into teaching and learning, in schools where principals say they have higher expectations for use. Teachers also use technology more, and feel more support for the use of technology, in schools where principals report fewer barriers to the use of computers and technology.

“CPS and other districts across the country have made huge strides in providing students with laptops and internet access,” Ehrlich said. “But these findings are a reminder that access does not always lead to use. Schools are under a lot of pressure to increase their technology supply, especially for the administration of computer-based assessments. Going forward, we need to ensure that this newly purchased technology is not only used—but used in ways that build skills and offer more complex learning opportunities.”

Go to ccsr.uchicago.edu to access a copy of the full report.