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US Department of Education EdTech Impact Assessment Grants

Funding an Equity Impact Assessment on School Monitoring Software and Emerging Technologies in Educational Technology

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The US Department of Education's Student Privacy Policy Office, in partnership with the Office of Educational Technology, should fund research grants evaluating the impact of educational technology monitoring software installed on school-issued devices and the application of emerging technologies in edtech on student data protections, learning outcomes, and well-being.

BACKGROUND

Google Chromebooks are the leading school-issued device in the nation, with over 85 percent of US schools and districts having a Chromebook program in place today.[1] Chromebooks often have GoGuardian monitoring software installed, which is used by an estimated 23 million students nationwide.[2] A survey from the Center for Democracy & Technology found that over 80 percent of US teachers report that their schools use monitoring software.[3] However, there is a lack of comprehensive independent research related to how monitoring software on school-issued devices affects student data protections, learning outcomes, and well-being.

Initial research has shown that school monitoring software disproportionately affects historically marginalized students. Schools with a higher proportion of students of color or students from low-income households are more likely to issue a device and expose students to monitoring software. The increased use of monitoring

software in schools serving predominantly students of color has been shown to contribute to the preschool to prison pipeline.[4] Research has also shown that student surveillance restricts self-expression, which may have disparate impacts on students' socio-emotional development.[5]

RECOMMENDATION

The US Department of Education, in partnership with the National Science Foundation, should fund research grants evaluating the impact of school-issued device monitoring software on student data protections, learning outcomes, and well-being.

The Department of Education would benefit from this investment in the following ways:

▸ **Protect critical infrastructure by providing evidence-based strategies and frameworks for schools nationwide to implement comprehensive cybersecurity and student data protection practices.** Research findings would expand the capacity of school communities and policymakers to facilitate student data protection and well-being by creating the supporting tools to ensure that school personnel are able to redress the potential harms of monitoring software.

▸ **Advance the Department's goals for educational technology equity by identifying and mitigating unintended consequences of school monitoring software**. The Department would create more equitable learning environments by reducing disparate impacts of school monitoring software on historically marginalized communities.

▸ **Inform evidence-based policymaking for the Department of Education to strengthen student data protection policies and regulations**. An impact assessment of school monitoring software would increase the Department's understanding of gaps in student data protection regulations and pathways to create more robust protections for schools.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

IMPLEMENTATION

To support the implementation of this opportunity to invest in protecting the nation's critical infrastructure, please review the attached template for the Funding Opportunity Announcement in the Appendix.

The funding for this program would ideally be reallocated from the National Science Foundation. If such funds are not available, the Department of Education could seek funding in a future federal budget request.

Appendix

US Department of Education Funding Opportunity Announcement Template

Language for this draft grant announcement is borrowed from other Department of Education grant announcements.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Applications for New Awards; Grants

AGENCIES: Office of Educational Technology and National Science Foundation

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Department of Education (Department), in partnership with the National Science Foundation (NSF), is issuing a notice inviting applications for fiscal year (FY) 2023 for the School Monitoring Software Equity Analysis (SMSEA) Grant Program, Assistance Listing Number XX.XXXX.

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

Purpose of Program: The purpose of the Grant Program is to evaluate the impact of school-issued device monitoring software on student data protections, learning outcomes, and well-being.

Background:

Google Chromebooks are the leading school-issued device in the nation, with over 85 percent of schools and districts having a Chromebook program in place.[6] A survey from the Center for Democracy & Technology found that over 80 percent of US teachers report that their schools use monitoring software.[7] Chromebooks often have GoGuardian monitoring software installed, which is used by an estimated 23 million students nationwide.[8] However, there are gaps in available independent research related to the potential impacts of edtech monitoring software installed on school-issued devices on student data protections, learning outcomes, and well-being.

Initial research has shown that school monitoring software disproportionately affects historically marginalized students. Schools with a higher proportion of students of color or students from low-income households are more likely to issue a device and expose students to monitoring software. The increased use of monitoring software in schools serving predominantly students of color has been shown to contribute to the preschool to prison pipeline.[9] Research has also shown that student surveillance restricts self-expression, which may have disparate impacts on students' socio-emotional development and ability to self-determination.[10]

Priorities: This notice contains one absolute priority and two competitive preference priorities.

We are establishing these priorities for the FY 2023 grant competition and any subsequent year in which we make awards from the list of unfunded applications from this competition, in accordance with section 437(d)(1) of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), 20 U.S.C. 1232(d)(1).

Absolute Priority: This priority is an absolute priority. Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), we consider only applications that meet this priority.

This priority is:

Projects that will serve school communities with a body of research on the impacts of school-issued device monitoring software on student data protections, learning outcomes, and well-being, as well as frameworks to redress harms by:

(a) Engaging school communities exposed to school-issued device monitoring software in related research through activities and strategies to support them in sharing their experiences with the impacts on student performance, social-emotional development, and student digital rights in technology-mediated learning environments. Hosting focus groups, interviews, surveys, youth-centered research, and community town halls, and/or providing the necessary support services to ensure engagement such as child care, transportation, accessibility, accommodations, translation services, participation honorariums, and other wraparound supports;

(b) Supporting the development and implementation of comprehensive digital literacy and data protection programs that integrate multiple services or initiatives across schools, neighborhoods, community organizations, government departments, and school vendor stakeholders in a way that leads to exercising the digital rights of students, parents, caregivers, and school personnel

and engaging in healthy civic discourse;

(c) Supporting the development and implementation of high-quality and accessible professional development and training opportunities for education personnel, students, vendors, parents, caregivers, and school partners that increase digital literacy and data protection, cater to their unique needs, and align with career pathways to cybersecurity, student data protection policy, information systems management, privacy by design product development, etc.;

(d) Supporting the development and implementation of evidence-based strategies for students exposed to monitoring software to recover from adverse impacts, engage in healthy civic discourse, promote their socio-emotional development of the knowledge and skills necessary for success in technology mediated classrooms; and

(e) Implementing a sustainability plan to maintain programs and services after completion of the grant.

Competitive Preference Priorities: These priorities are competitive preference priorities. Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(i), we award up to an additional 10 points to an application, depending on how well the application meets these priorities. An applicant may address one or both of the competitive preference priorities. The point value for each priority is in parentheses.

These priorities are:

▸ **Competitive Preference Priority 1: Student-Centered Research (up to 5 points).**

Projects that are designed to promote educational equity by centering the lived expertise of communities disproportionately affected by school-issued device monitoring software through student-centered, culturally and linguistically responsive research models that create and provide high-quality opportunities to share. Disproportionately affected communities include but are not limited to: rural communities, LGBTQIAA+ communities, communities of color, immigrant communities, students with disabilities, low-income communities, foster communities, justice system impacted communities, and energy justice communities, among other historically marginalized groups.

▸ **Competitive Preference Priority 2: Strengthening Cross-Sector Collaboration and Community**

Engagement to Advance Systemic Change (up to 5 points).

Projects that are designed to take a systemic approach to developing frameworks for identifying and mitigating the risks of monitoring software in learning environments for disproportionately affected students through engaging cross-sector stakeholders including, but not limited to: students, parents, caregivers, education personnel, government agencies, school vendors, school partners, civic leaders, nonprofit organizations, and nongovernmental organizations.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

Type of Award: Discretionary grant.

Estimated Available Funds: $XX,XXX,XXX.

Contingent upon the availability of funds and the quality of applications, we may make additional awards in subsequent years from the list of unfunded applications from this competition.

Estimated Range of Awards: $X,XXX,XXX to $X,XXX,XXX.

Estimated Average Size of Awards: $X,XXX,XXX.

Maximum Award: $X,XXX,XXX.

Note: The maximum award is based on a 2-year budget period. Applicants will need to prepare a multiyear budget request for up to 2 years.

Estimated Number of Awards: 8.

Note: The department is not bound by any estimates in this notice.

Project Period: Up to 24 months.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Eligible Applicants: For the FY 2023 grant competition, the following are eligible applicants: nonprofit organizations, nongovernmental organizations, research institutions, and higher education institutions.

ENDNOTES

1   Kajeet, "Chromebooks, Classrooms, & Connectivity: The Age of Chromebooks," February 11, 2019, https://www.kajeet.net/chromebooks-classrooms-connectivity-the-age-of-chromebooks/.

2   *Slate*, "How Schools Surveil Your Kids," *What Next: TBD* podcast, November 5, 2021, https://slate.com/podcasts/what-next-tbd/2021/11/goguardian-and-school-surveillance-software-on-what-next-tbd.

3   DeVan L. Hankerson et al., "Online and Observed: Student Privacy Implications of School-Issued Devices and Student Activity Monitoring Software," Center for Democracy & Technology, September 2021, https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Online-and-Observed-Student-Privacy-Implications-of-School-Issued-Devices-and-Student-Activity-Monitoring-Software.pdf.

4   *Id.*

5   Barbara Fedders, "The Constant and Expanding Classroom: Surveillance in K-12 Public Schools," *North Carolina Law Review 97*, no. 6, article 4 (September 1, 2019), https://scholarship.law.unc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6749&context=nclr.

6   See Kajeet, *supra* note 1.

7   See Hankerson et al., *supra* note 3.

8   See Slate, *supra* note 2.

9   See Hankerson et al., *supra* note 3.

10 See Fedders, *supra* note 5.