

Stories from #StudentsNotProducts

Governments around the world endorsed the use of education technologies (EdTech) during Covid-19 school closures. Human Rights Watch examined more than 150 EdTech products, recommended by 49 governments (including India, Taiwan, and the United States) of the world's most populated countries, to check how they handled student's data. Below are quotes from some of the students, parents, and teachers HRW interviewed. To read the full report visit: <https://www.hrw.org/StudentsNotProducts>



Stories from Students and Parents

- “These companies, they don’t let us know. They’re not transparent with us, saying that this is exactly where your data goes, and this is exactly what happens with it. We’re trusting them blindly without knowing what’s going on. And us kids won’t doubt it at all—we won’t even think that something bad is happening behind our backs. The amount that we’ve shared, all that we’ve done online, that it’s all gone to some strange person ... The whole idea starts haunting you, and you get really scared.” —Priyanka S., 16, Uttar Pradesh, India
- “How dare they? How dare [these companies] peep into my private life” — Rodin, 9, Istanbul, Turkey
- “The teacher also asked me to download BiP [a government-mandated messaging app for government and school use during the pandemic] to communicate with him. I’d heard that the app was not secure in terms of data privacy, so I said no. The teacher said, ‘Well, then you can’t communicate with me.’ I didn’t want to download the app, so I told him, ‘I don’t have space on my phone.’ The teacher said, ‘Well, you can’t communicate with me,’ and blocked us all on WhatsApp to prevent all parents from contacting him on secure apps. So, I haven’t been able to talk to him since.” — Mother of 9-year-old student Rodin, Istanbul, Turkey.
- “I just trusted the school had looked into [privacy and security]. What would we do about it anyway?... We were worried about the tension and uncertainty around this pandemic, so we were trying to make things work.” — Hayley John, a mother of two in Murwillumbah, Australia
- “This is scary. Especially us kids, we blindly trust our country, the whole education system, because we don’t question these things yet. We don’t have enough experience. ... As kids, we feel powerless. What can I even do as a kid to stop these companies? That idea itself hurts a lot.” — Priyanka S., 16, Uttar Pradesh, India
- “Rodin’s teacher forced all these 8-year-old kids to use Facebook. He made Rodin, who was 8 at the time, open a Facebook account, and told him to upload his homework there. Now, the teacher is forcing the kids to use Facebook when they’re taking tests.” — Mother of 9-year-old student Rodin, Istanbul, Turkey. Facebook’s terms of service prohibit children under 13 years old from using its services.

Stories from Teachers

- The Iranian government compelled those in public schools to use Shad, an app built by Iran’s Education Ministry for online learning during Covid-19. One teacher said: “The principal called and said that if I do not install the Shad app, I would be recorded as absent. The authorities do not accept teaching in Telegram and WhatsApp.... Students have also been told that if you are not in this app, your score will not be approved and will not be sent to the [school].”
- In October 2021, the Iranian government reported more than 18 million active users of Shad. Technical analysis of Shad’s code found that the app can collect children’s precise location data, the time of their current location, the child’s last known location, their Wi-Fi SSID, IP address, the child’s contacts, and any saved photos of their contacts.



- “Teachers were using [an online platform] which has no privacy protection. I was worried because, especially for our kids, this is not safe for them. Sixty to seventy percent of our kids had one primary family member that had been deported or was currently in ICE [US Immigration and Customs Enforcement] holding. So, this is unacceptable, and it is a dangerous situation to put these kids in.” —Abby Rufer, an algebra teacher in Texas, US, said that her school district initially did not implement protections for students’ privacy.
- “Because Spain was in a state of emergency, the Ministry of Education communicated [to teachers] that consent for privacy, or data protection, was no longer required ... Privacy and all that has gone into the background completely, but we have done it because the Ministry has said so.” —Secondary school science teacher, Madrid, Spain
- “I’m not sure what the school has done.[...] I’m not aware that any student has signed any kind of waiver or consent form. I certainly haven’t.” — secondary school teacher in London, United Kingdom, was told by his school to begin teaching in Google Classroom.
- The platforms were activated from the Huechuraba education department. They activated everything and sent us an institutional email, no more. We have never been asked to sign or accept anything.”
— Fifth-grade teacher Daniela Andrea Ribeiro Espinoza, in Santiago, Chile

What can I do?

- **Educate your community.** Hold a data-privacy simulation, so students can learn how EdTech and AdTech companies collect, buy, and sell students’ data without consent.
- **Ask your schools or school districts** what they are doing to protect students’ privacy in online classrooms. Meet with the decision makers in person to voice your concerns.
- **Tell your lawmakers to act now.** Call, email, or write a letter advocating for national modern child data protection laws.

Visit our Action Plan to get started:

<https://www.hrwstf.org/wordpress/studentsnotproducts/>

