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The idea that an app on an iPad can better teach my kids to read or do arithmetic, that’s ridiculous.

Alan Eagle

Google executive communications staffer and co-author of “How Google Works” with Eric Schmidt, on choosing a low-tech school for his children. New York Times

Screens and AI in Amherst's elementary classrooms

A new tech policy is on the agenda for Amherst in 2027!

Review existing policy to ensure that it is **current**, **responsible** and **effective**.

Our tech policy should protect **student privacy and safety**, reflect **best practices**, support **meaningful learning experiences** and align with our district-wide commitment to **hands-on**, **multimodal**, and **experiential learning** as key components of the curriculum.

Amherst's current policy is outdated and outpaced

Technology is rapidly evolving and Amherst families and students have been expressing concerns about the use of technology in our schools.

Our existing policy is from 2014 (IJNDB and regulation 17) and predates 1:1 devices, adaptive apps, and AI.

The APA and Fairplay's Screen Time Action Network urge districts to adopt comprehensive EdTech policies before tools arrive.

AI is on student devices now

On August 10, 2026 Google turned Gemini in Classroom on by default for all ages unless a district administrator disabled it. Common Sense Media rates the under-13 version High Risk.

Canva, on the district's vendor list, turns on two image generators for student accounts by default with blanket content restrictions for all students, regardless of age. Its 2026 policy extends AI tools to students under 13, enabled at the discretion of administrators.

Exposure risks are acute

Young students have been exposed to pornography and other disturbing content on school devices. YouTube is available on Chromebooks. Effectiveness of content blockers is variable. Kids are finding workarounds.

The Research: Five key findings

Screen reading costs comprehension

Small but reliable deficits compared with print, largest for young children and informational text.

App features distract and undermine motivation

Tangible rewards, the coins and streaks in many classroom apps, reduce children's intrinsic motivation. Attractive but irrelevant details interfere with learning.

Passive screen use negatively impacts our learners

Using screens to settle children predicts higher emotional reactivity later. Solo and engagement-driven use is linked to poorer sleep, language and social-emotional outcomes.

Opportunity costs: what screens replace

Every minute on a screen displaces what the evidence proves works best for learning and development: hands-on learning, discussion and peer interaction.

No evidence generative AI in K-5 benefits learning; growing body of evidence it harms

A global review found no compelling evidence of added value from digital technology and sets age 13 as the floor for generative AI. No randomized trial shows a K-5 benefit.

*Assistive technology under an IEP or 504 plan is a separate question. Every 2026 policy we reviewed protects it, and so would we.

What other districts and states did this year

Who	What they did	When
Cambridge, MA	Committee ordered a usage audit after parent concerns. Median Chromebook use was 17 minutes a day in K and 25 in grades 1-2. Screens already barred as a behavioral reward and disallowed during recess and lunch.	2026
Arlington, MA	Shared devices through grade 2. Devices stay at school through grade 5.	2026
Acton-Boxborough, MA	Established an AI working group to assess readiness and tools for integration.	May 2026
New York City	One-year moratorium on student-facing generative AI, pre-K to 8. School-issued devices restricted in K-2. Recommended 30 minutes a day in grades 3-5.	Sept 2, 2026
Los Angeles	K-12 moratorium on student generative AI, added to a June policy removing district devices from preschool through grade 1.	Sept 3, 2026
Seattle	Daily screen limit of 30 minutes for K-2.	Fall 2026
Iowa and Utah	Statewide K-5 screen limits by law.	July 1, 2026
San Francisco	Signed an AI contract before board review and put an AI reading tutor into K-5 without consulting teachers. A teachers' strike, a thousand-signature parent petition, and no policy vote until March 2027.	2025-27

Policy first, then tools!

Four action items

1 Create a Subcommittee

Appoint an advisory subcommittee to establish community values around technology use, develop edtech evaluation criteria and present recommendations for a comprehensive district technology policy update.

2 Establish a baseline before writing the policy

Gather educator perceptions through anonymous survey. Information Systems reports use by grade and application from the management console, as Cambridge did. Request device access to test for inappropriate content exposure opportunities.

3 Get answers from Information Systems

Examples of questions to be answered now: Is Gemini in Classroom disabled for the elementary units, and since when? Are Canva's Magic Media and Dream Lab off for student accounts? Has the district obtained parental consent to enable services such as YouTube and Google search engines?

4 Collaborate with all stakeholders

Ensure that all stakeholders are represented in policy discussions by inviting caregivers and school staff to join the subcommittee. Include the Amherst-Pelham Education Association in drafting policy and have the Assistive Technology Coordinator write the IEP and 504 provisions.

Evidence-based policy recommendations: Examples

1. An evidence standard for every application on the elementary list, reviewed annually by an EdTech advisory committee of parents and school officials
2. No screens as behavioral rewards, calming tools, or transition filler (*Cambridge*)
3. Explicit IEP and 504 carve-outs
4. Paper as the default for reading and writing in K-3 (*Cambridge*)
5. No videos in place of read-alouds (*Croton-Harmony*)
6. No student-facing generative AI in K-5, pending policy (*Los Angeles* , *New York City*)
7. Devices stay at school through grade 5 (*Cambridge*,*Seattle*, *Utah*)
8. A grade-band minutes guideline (*Seattle* , *Iowa* , *Utah* , *Cambridge*)
9. Parent notification of the tools in use, with opt-out
10. Educator training and resource provisions (*Virginia* , *Maryland*, *Utah*)