



To: Westport Board of Education

From: Anna Mahon, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning, and Natalie Carignan, Director of Technology

Date: June 4, 2026

Re: District Screen Time Audit: Current-State Findings and Implications for AI Policy Development

This memo summarizes the findings of Westport Public Schools' district screen time audit and to synthesize what the results suggest about current student screen time usage, instructional practices regarding the use of technology, and establish a baseline understanding of student screen time usage during school hours. For this audit, we defined screen time as any instance of a student using a device rather than shared classroom displays, specifically school-day screen activity and required school-related screen use outside of class. This allowed us to measure direct, individual engagement across all grade levels.

The audit included three complementary sources of evidence: a perception survey administered to students in grades 3–12, parents across the district, and district staff; a quantitative analysis of actual student device and network activity during the school day; and a curriculum-based review completed by coordinators and teachers to identify where screen use is required within written curriculum during school or for homework. Together, these sources provide a more complete picture than any one measure could provide on its own. The survey captures stakeholder experience and concern; the usage analysis provides an objective baseline of observed screen activity; and the curriculum review identifies where screen use is intentionally embedded in instruction.

Summary of Survey Findings

The screen time survey included 4,404 respondents. Overall, respondents generally reported that the amount of technology used for school-related purposes is appropriate, particularly when technology is used for completing classwork, completing homework, accessing class materials, communicating with teachers, and supporting learning. However, students and staff responded more favorably than parents. For example, 80% of students, 75% of staff, and 61% of parents reported that the amount of technology used during school to complete classwork was “about right.”

At the same time, the survey indicates a clear distinction between perceptions of **school-related screen use** and concerns about **overall screen use**. A slight majority of staff (53%) and parents (52%) reported that students spend too much time using technology overall, with concern most pronounced at the middle school (70%) and high school (73%) levels. This suggests that the community does not reject instructional technology categorically, but does want assurance that screen time is purposeful, developmentally appropriate, and balanced with non-screen learning, social interaction, and student wellbeing.

The survey also shows that perceptions of technology become more favorable as students move through the grades. High school respondents were more likely than elementary and middle school respondents to report that technology supports collaboration, communication with peers, and communication with teachers.

One of the most frequently selected areas—especially among staff—was understanding how to use AI tools responsibly and effectively. Respondents also identified the need for support with staying focused when using technology, developing healthy technology-use habits, managing time, and integrating technology with traditional learning methods. These findings point directly to the need for a systematic and intentional approach to AI integration. The District should not leave responsible AI use to individual interpretation or uneven classroom practice.

Summary of Quantitative Usage Findings

The quantitative usage analysis was designed to establish a baseline of actual student screen activity and to inform future monitoring as the District considers more intentional AI integration. The analysis used two different data sources: selected K–8 Chromebook usage data and high school IP network data. The K-8 data was collected during full weeks of school in December and January, while the high school data was collected during the start of the second semester over the course of two full weeks at the end of January and the beginning of February. Because the high school data captured network pings, browsing, trackers, ad-links, and application activity, those data had to be interpreted as indicators of relative activity rather than precise measures of time spent or instructional engagement.

Among K–8 students, average daily screen time generally increased as students moved into higher grades. For example, across all students in the sample, kindergarten students averaged 2.2 minutes per day, grade 3 students averaged 14.6 minutes per day, grade 6 students averaged 58.7 minutes per day, and grade 8 students averaged 69.4 minutes per day. When the analysis was limited only to students who used their device on a given day, average use was higher, but the same overall developmental pattern remained.

The K–8 data also show that instructional use is concentrated in a relatively small set of academic platforms, especially Google tools and research platforms. Over the two-week audit period, students initiated an average of 1.4 Google Docs sessions and 0.72 Google Classroom sessions per student per day. After these core instructional tools, the next most commonly used platform was ClassLink. This suggests that much of the measurable K–8 screen activity is tied to instructional access, content creation, classroom workflow, and student information systems rather than broad or unmanaged device use.

Patterns of use during the day also matter. The audit found that most K–8 internet activity occurred during the morning instructional block, with activity generally beginning to rise around 8:30–9:00 a.m., remaining high through approximately 11:30 a.m., declining around lunch, and rising again later in the afternoon before dismissal. These patterns provide helpful direction for follow-up review because they can help the District distinguish between necessary instructional usage and discretionary or avoidable usage, such as use during indoor recess or as a filler during dismissal.

At the high school level, identifiable school-network activity was dominated by academic and creative tools, especially Adobe and Google Docs, along with some social and AI-related platforms including Grammarly, Instagram and ChatGPT. The presence of the blocked social media site (Instagram) suggests the need for further exploration regarding student access. The presence of

ChatGPT in the high school activity data reinforces the importance of a systemic approach and formal curriculum development. AI use is not theoretical; students are already encountering and using AI tools on their own. Through a systemic approach, the District will be able to define expectations, approved uses, developmental boundaries, academic integrity norms, privacy safeguards, and instructional purposes.

Summary of Curriculum Review Findings

To complete the curriculum review, each coordinator examined (with the help of the Google application NotebookLM) written curriculum units for required in-school or homework-based digital tasks, estimated the amount and type of screen time involved, and applied the SAMR model—Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition—to distinguish basic replacement or enhancement from more active, redesigned, or transformational uses of technology. The completed curriculum reviews show that screen time is not evenly distributed across grade levels or disciplines. In some areas, screen use is minimal or optional; in others, it is required because the task itself depends on digital access, creation, research, simulation, data analysis, or specialized software.

At the elementary level, the K–5 review indicates that the math curriculum does not require students to use a one-to-one device, though some teachers and schools use online tools for math fact practice and some progress-monitoring assessments are administered online. In literacy, grades 2–5 include research units in which students use digital resources, often alongside print resources, and students in grades 4 and 5 may type research papers, with some schools offering handwritten options. Intervention tools such as Lexia and Read Live are also used in some settings for targeted support.

In secondary mathematics, screen use is primarily associated with online practice, graphing tools, Delta Math, calculators, Desmos, and technology-supported modeling. Much of this use falls within substitution or augmentation because technology improves speed, feedback, precision, or access to practice, but does not always fundamentally redesign the learning task. In some courses and units, however, students engage in more active production through graphing, modeling, regression, and geometric representation.

ELA screen use in grades 6–10 is concentrated around drafting, revising, typing, digital assessments, research, digital reading resources, and multimedia projects. The review identifies higher screen time in grade 8, driven by digital writing, formal essays, multimedia assessments, and project-based tasks. Importantly, much ELA screen time is tied to student production: students are composing, revising, formatting, researching, and creating, rather than only consuming content.

Science uses screens primarily for simulations, digital models, data analysis, research, and interactive tools such as Gizmos, PhET, HHMI resources, Vernier, and other modeling platforms. In many cases, technology allows students to observe or manipulate phenomena that would otherwise be difficult, unsafe, invisible, or impractical to study directly. This represents some of the strongest instructional justification for screen use because the screen is not simply replacing paper; it is expanding what students can investigate.

World Languages shows a mixed but generally purposeful pattern. Early FLES instruction has a low digital footprint and remains strongly grounded in interpersonal communication, singing, role play, and classroom interaction. As students progress, digital tools are increasingly used for language

production, including recordings, podcasts, presentations, videos, webquests, and multimedia projects.

Social Studies uses technology for digital research, primary source analysis, map practice, current events, media analysis, presentation design, National History Day, and civic inquiry. This area includes many examples of active production and authentic inquiry, and it also includes explicit early examples of AI-related activity, such as an AI chatbot activity in grade 6.

Health and Physical Education reviews indicate that health courses use screens for online research, source evaluation, digital reflection, webquests, public service announcements, and student-created advocacy materials. Physical education courses remain largely centered on physical skill development and include little to no required screen time in many units.

The Information Technology and Library curriculum appropriately contains intentional screen use because digital literacy, research, coding, productivity, design, and digital citizenship are core parts of the curriculum itself. These targeted experiences ensure that students are not merely passive consumers of technology, but active, capable creators.

The Visual and Performing Arts departments do not have specific screen time requirements written into the curriculum, with the exception of high school digital arts courses, which are predominantly completed using computers and specialized programs.

Perhaps one of the most important outcomes of the curriculum review was what we learned through completing the process. By using the structured prompt and SAMR model, coordinators were able to have very targeted conversations about technology use with teachers. This provided the structure for future curriculum review conversations that can be repurposed to other areas of curriculum, including inquiry tasks, authentic learning experiences, etc. For the purposes of this audit, the review helped flag some areas of heavier digital load, particularly online practice platforms, which should continue to be examined for instructional value and efficiency.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Taken together, the audit shows Westport Public Schools has a nuanced current state of digital integration: screen time increases by grade level, is more common in secondary settings, and is frequently tied to legitimate instructional purposes such as research, writing, simulation, design, production, assessment, communication, and access to materials.

The audit also shows that **the quality of screen time matters as much as the quantity**. Some screen use is passive or substitutive, such as watching videos, completing digital worksheets, or using online tools in ways that closely mirror paper-based tasks. Other screen use is active, creative, collaborative, or transformational, such as creating multimedia products, analyzing data, conducting research, producing language recordings, using simulations, coding, designing, or engaging in civic and scientific inquiry. Future decision-making should therefore avoid treating all screen time as equal. The District's goal should be to reduce unnecessary or low-value screen time while preserving and strengthening uses that deepen learning.

Students are already encountering AI tools; stakeholders have identified responsible AI use as an area where students need support; and the District now has a baseline process for monitoring whether AI integration affects screen time. As we move forward with the work outlined in the 2025 WPS

Strategic Plan, we will work to ensure that AI is used to enhance instruction, support student thinking, preserve human interaction, and maintain healthy boundaries rather than becoming an additional, unexamined layer of digital activity.

The District is working toward establishing age-appropriate expectations and guardrails for technology and AI use. These expectations emphasize instructional purpose, student agency, human interaction, academic integrity, privacy, and healthy boundaries, with more teacher-directed use in elementary grades, structured responsible-use routines in middle school, and more independent, purposeful use in high school.

At the same time, the District will reduce unnecessary or low-value screen use while preserving technology that deepens learning. Follow-up will focus on areas such as indoor recess, dismissal and transition periods, and recurring online practice tasks to ensure screen use is developmentally appropriate, efficient, and instructionally valuable.

The District will also strengthen family communication around technology and AI use. Because the audit shows both purposeful instructional use and continued family concern about overall screen time, families will benefit from clear explanations and classroom examples that show when, why, and how technology and AI support learning.

Finally, the District will refine and reuse the audit process on a regular cycle. As AI tools are introduced or expanded, Westport will continue monitoring student screen time, distinguishing between required and discretionary use, instructional and non-instructional use, passive consumption and active production, and general technology use versus AI-specific use.