

# Children, Teens, and Entertainment Media: The View From The Classroom

A National Survey of Teachers About the Role of Entertainment Media in Students' Academic and Social Development



A Common Sense Media Research Study

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# Introduction

**We often note that children and teens spend more time with media than they do in any other activity except — possibly — sleeping.**

In fact, the average time spent with screen media among 8- to 18-year-olds is more than twice the average amount of time spent in school each year (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007–2008).

On average, American children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend more than 7½ hours a day using media for fun: everything from watching TV to listening to music, playing video games, and using social networking sites. And for a lot of that time, they are juggling more than one medium at once — sending tweets while watching TV, or listening to music while posting a Facebook update. Given that media use is something that happens seven days a week instead of five, this is more than the equivalent of a full-time job, dwarfing the amount of time spent in school (an average of 6 hours and 42 minutes a day, 180 days a year). Even the youngest schoolchildren — those in the 5- to 8-year-old age range — spend 168 hours more with media than they do in school each year (Common Sense Media, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007-2008; Education Commission of the States).

Over the past 10 years, the media environment that children grow up in has changed dramatically, and the amount of time they spend consuming media has exploded. Childhood and adolescence have been inundated with — and possibly transformed by — reality TV, smartphones, iPads, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, *World of Warcraft*, *Angry Birds*, and texting, to name just a few. In 1999, 8- to 18-year-olds averaged 4 hours and 40 minutes a day with screen media. In 2009, it was 7 hours and 11 minutes a day.

This survey explores the question of how the TV shows, video games, texting, social networking, music, and other media that are so much a part of young people's lives affect the *other* big part of their lives — their academic and social development at school. We examine this issue through one important lens: the views and experiences of classroom teachers.

There have been several important surveys of teachers about using media and technology as learning tools in the classroom, a vital topic that is outside the scope of this survey (e.g., PBS, 2009 and 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Fred Rogers Center, 2010; Joan Ganz Cooney Center, 2012). But there has been no national study we are aware of to explore what teachers think about the impact of at-home media use on their students' academic skills and social development.

Besides parents, teachers are the adults who spend the greatest amount of time with children and adolescents. They are in one of the best positions to observe influences on and changes in young people's school work and social skills. Some of them are new to the classroom, while others have been working hand-in-hand with young people for decades. This survey taps into their experiences to try to understand their perspective on whether and how entertainment media use outside the classroom may be affecting children's academic and social development.

This is not a study that quantifies academic achievement and correlates results with children's patterns of media use. It cannot prove or disprove any hypotheses about the relationship between media use and academic performance or social development. Likewise, it cannot substantiate any of teachers' observations about changes in students' skills over time. Instead, it offers a unique and important perspective on this topic by documenting and quantifying teachers' observations and experiences. These insights can be a valuable resource for students, parents, children's advocates, and other educators.





# Key Findings

## 1.

### Many teachers think their students' use of entertainment media has hurt their academic performance.

When asked about a range of specific academic skills, teachers are much more likely to say entertainment media have hurt rather than helped those skills. (Entertainment media was defined as the TV shows, music, video games, texting, iPods, cell phone games, social networking sites, apps, computer programs, online videos, and websites students use for fun.)

The biggest problem area for teachers is students' **attention span**, with 71% saying saying entertainment media use has hurt students either "a lot" (34%) or "somewhat" (37%) in that area.

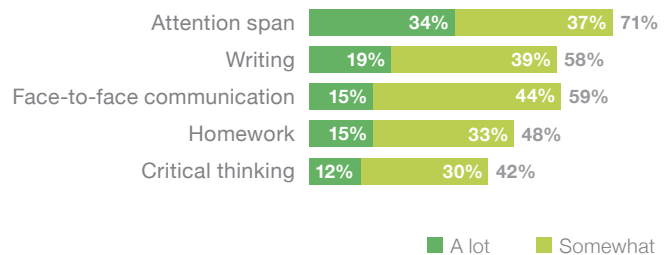
Another key problem area for teachers is students' **writing** skills. Nearly six in 10 (58%) teachers say their students' use of entertainment media (including texting) has hurt their writing skills "a lot" (19%) or "somewhat" (39%).

Many teachers think students spend so much time with media that they neglect their **homework** and aren't prepared in class. Just under half (48%) say entertainment media use has hurt the quality of students' homework "a lot" (15%) or "somewhat" (33%).

Teachers also say that entertainment media has hurt students "a lot" or "somewhat" in their ability to **communicate face to face** (59%) and their **critical thinking** (42%).

There were no statistically significant differences between veteran teachers (more than 15 years of experience) and those who are new to the job (less than 5 years). Nor were there differences between teachers who describe themselves as "tech savvy" and those who admit to being "uncomfortable" with new technologies.

Percent of teachers who say students' media use has hurt their:



*"Attention spans seem to be decreasing, as does students' abilities to persist through difficult tasks. (They'd rather just push restart and start over.)"*

Elementary school teacher

*"I'm a technology teacher, but I see the quality of work they do in their other classes. It is shameful. All of their writing is text message language."*

Middle school technology teacher

*"Students have been both helped and hurt by the instant access to information. Being able to 'Google' answers to questions provides much quicker access, but it also makes students less comfortable wrestling with uncertainty or curiosity."*

Elementary school teacher

## 2.

**Among teachers who say their students' academic skills have been hurt by entertainment media use, the media most often cited as problematic are texting, social networking, video games, and television, depending on the students' age.**

For elementary school students, teachers consider video games (75%), television (61%), and computer games (60%) most problematic. For middle and high school students, teachers pointed most often to texting (81% of middle and 75% of high school teachers) and social networking (73% of middle and 69% of high school teachers).

**Among teachers who say media use has a negative effect on academic skills, percent citing each medium as among the most harmful:**

	Among All	Elementary school	Middle school	High school
Video games	68%	75%	57%	59%
Texting	66%	52%	81%	75%
Television	57%	61%	54%	46%
Computer games	56%	60%	60%	53%
Social networking	56%	38%	73%	69%

*"The instant rewards of video games have made activities that require depth of commitment much harder for the kids."*

Middle school math teacher

## 3.

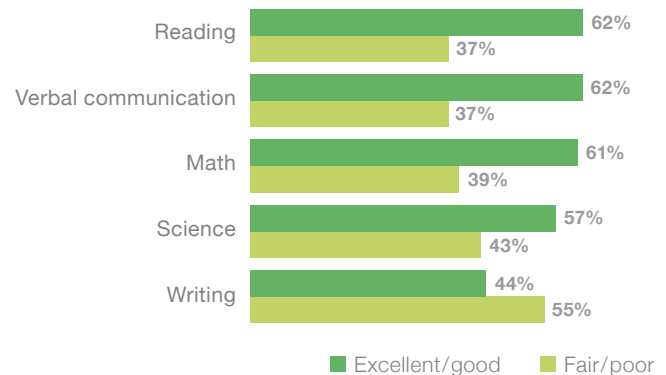
**The biggest problem area teachers see in terms of their students' skills is in writing.**

Independent of any discussion about the role of media, writing is the main subject area in which a majority of teachers rank their students as only "fair" or "poor." Across schools from all socio-economic levels, writing skills ranked at the bottom of students' skills, in teachers' assessments.

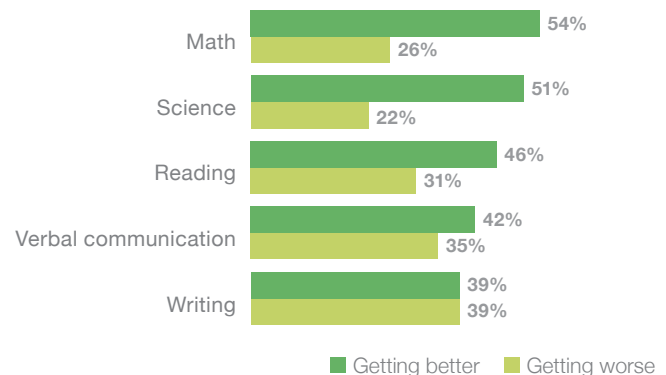
More than half (55%) of all teachers rank their students as fair (40%) or poor (15%) at writing.

For all subjects except writing, teachers are more likely to say students have been getting better rather than worse over the years they've been teaching; when it came to writing skills, teachers were evenly split as to which direction their students' skills were heading.

**How teachers rank their students' abilities at:**



**Percent of teachers who say students' skills have been getting better or worse at:**



## 4.

### In some areas, teachers are more likely to say that entertainment media have helped rather than hurt students academically.

Nearly two-thirds of teachers (63%) say their students' media use has helped their ability to **find information** quickly and efficiently, either a lot (21%) or somewhat (41%).

A third (34%) of teachers say using entertainment media has helped their students' ability to **multi-task effectively** (3% say "a lot," 33% "somewhat"), compared to 25% who say it has hurt them.

Teachers who describe themselves as "tech savvy" are more likely than other teachers to see a benefit to students' creativity from their use of entertainment media. Four in 10 (40%) tech-savvy teachers say media use has helped their students' creativity, compared to 25% of teachers who are "uncomfortable" with technology. There were no other statistically significant differences between these teachers, nor were there differences between long-term (more than 15 years) and new (less than 5 years) teachers.

*"I think media has helped students gain knowledge, learn how to search for information, collaborate with others. Students also communicate with their peers a lot through texting, plan events and generally are more engaged with the world."*

High school science teacher

*"[My students] are exposed way beyond their years to sexually explicit materials."*

Second grade teacher

## 5.

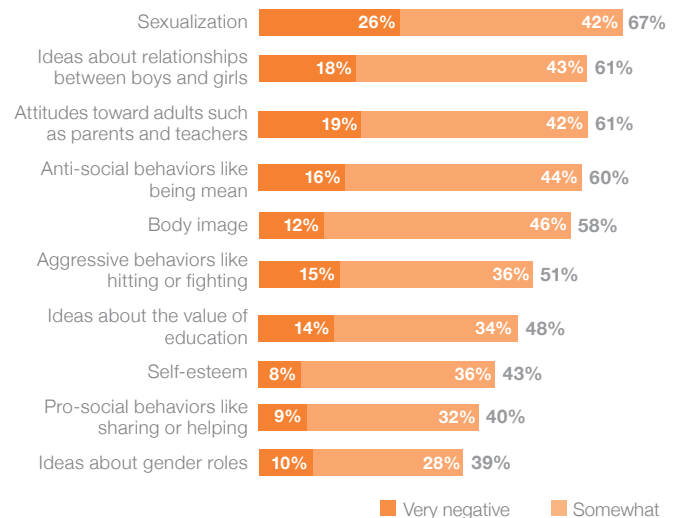
### Many teachers think their students' use of entertainment media has had a negative effect on key aspects of their social development.

The biggest problem teachers identified in the survey is media's impact on students' **sexualization**. Two-thirds (67%) of teachers say entertainment media use has had a negative effect on students in this regard, including 26% who say "very negative" and 42% who say "somewhat."

Other aspects of students' social development that teachers think entertainment media are negatively affecting include their ideas about relationships between boys and girls (61%), their attitudes toward adults such as parents and teachers (61%), engaging in anti-social behaviors like being mean (60%), their body image (58%), and encouraging aggressive behaviors like hitting or fighting (51%).

Teachers who say they are "uncomfortable" with new technologies are more likely to see negative effects of students' media use on their social development: 61% say media have a negative effect on aggression, and 51% say the same for the impact on pro-social behaviors (compared to 43% and 30% among "tech savvy" teachers, respectively).

#### Percent of teachers who say students' media use has had a harmful effect on their:



## 6.

**Among teachers who say their students' social development has been negatively affected by media, the media most often cited as problematic are television, movies, music, social networking, and video games.**

Among teachers who say media use has a negative effect on social development, percent citing each medium as among the most harmful:



*"They are listening to music with highly sexualized content at an early age, and viewing the videos made for this music."*

Elementary school teacher

*"I am very concerned about the violent games that are available to the age group that I teach. There is definitely a social change, especially among the boys."*

Fifth grade teacher

## 7.

**Some teachers see a positive effect of media on children's social development.**

For every type of social development that was asked about in this survey, teachers were more likely to say that entertainment media have had a negative rather than a positive effect on their students. But 17% do say that their students' media use has a positive effect on their pro-social behaviors. Several teachers commented on how their students' use of media has broadened their horizons by exposing them to diverse viewpoints and experiences.

*"The TV shows they watch teach them about others and how to work together."*

Elementary school teacher

*"Social awareness flourishes with students being aware of worldwide issues through YouTube and Facebook."*

Seventh grade history & social studies teacher

# Methodology

**This report is based on a survey of 685 K-12 teachers in the United States. It was conducted for Common Sense Media by Knowledge Networks (now part of the GfK Group), from May 5-17, 2012.**

Knowledge Networks has recruited the first online research panel (the KnowledgePanel) that is representative of the entire U.S. population. Unlike Internet “convenience” panels that include only individuals with Internet access who volunteer through word-of-mouth or other means to be part of research, KnowledgePanel members are randomly recruited through probability-based sampling (address-based sampling

and random-digit dial telephone surveys), and households are provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed. For this study, all respondents had been classroom teachers in grades K-12 during the previous year. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of error attributable to sampling is +/- 5 percentage points. In tables where statistical significance has been calculated, the results are noted through a series of superscripts (a, b, or c). Items that share a common superscript do not differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ). In this survey, “entertainment media” was defined as the TV shows, music, video games, texting, iPods, cell phone games, social networking sites, apps, computer programs, online videos, and websites that students use outside of school for fun.



# Detailed Findings

## Entertainment Media and Students' Academic Performance

### Many teachers think their students' use of entertainment media has hurt their academic performance.

Four in 10 teachers (42%) believe that their students' use of entertainment media has hurt their overall academic performance. When asked about a range of specific academic skills, teachers are much more likely to say entertainment media has hurt rather than helped those skills (some, usually about a quarter to a third of teachers, say media haven't made much difference). Among teachers who say their students' academic skills have mainly been hurt by entertainment media use, the top offenders are video games (68%) and texting (66%). Elementary school teachers are more likely to cite TV and video games as problematic, while middle and high school teachers point to texting and social networking.

There were no statistically significant differences between veteran teachers (more than 15 years of experience) and those who are new to the job (less than 5 years). Nor were there differences between teachers who describe themselves as "tech savvy" and those who admit to being "uncomfortable" with new technologies.

### Attention span.

The biggest problem area for teachers is students' attention spans. A total of 71% of teachers say that students' media use is hurting their attention spans, ranging from 63% of elementary school teachers to 80% of high school teachers. One of the strongest indicators of how significant an issue this is to teachers is the relatively high percentage who say students' media use has hurt their attention spans "a lot" — fully a third of teachers (34%).

In their open-ended comments provided throughout the survey, many teachers wrote about the constant stimulation of entertainment media and said they felt that was contributing

**Table 1: Percent of teachers who say students' entertainment media use has mainly helped or hurt their:**

	Mainly hurt	Mainly helped	Hasn't made difference
Attention span	71%	9%	17%
Ability to communicate face to face	59%	7%	29%
Writing	58%	7%	28%
Homework	48%	13%	29%
Engagement with the subject matter	44%	19%	30%
Critical thinking	42%	19%	33%
Overall academic performance	42%	17%	35%
Ability to collaborate and problem-solve	40%	18%	36%
Creativity	37%	28%	30%

**Table 2: Among teachers who say their students' skills have been hurt by their media use, the media cited as most harmful are:**

	All	Elementary school	Middle school	High school
Video games	68%	75% <sup>a</sup>	57% <sup>b</sup>	59% <sup>b</sup>
Texting	66%	52% <sup>a</sup>	81% <sup>b</sup>	75% <sup>b</sup>
Television	57%	61% <sup>a</sup>	54% <sup>ab</sup>	46% <sup>b</sup>
Computer games	56%	60%	59%	53%
Social networking	56%	38% <sup>a</sup>	73% <sup>b</sup>	69% <sup>b</sup>
Movies	27%	30%	26%	22%
Music	23%	20%	21%	29%
Online videos	24%	24%	26%	26%

to students' short attention spans, and a tendency not to want to stick with a task and work hard toward their goals. For example, one elementary school social studies teacher wrote that "The use of media has made students think in short bites ... They cannot sustain their thinking or attention for longer than 10 minutes." Another elementary school teacher noted that her students "have a difficult time sustaining a non-stimulating task (homework, writing, reading) relative to the amount of time they spend on fast-paced media."

Part of teachers' frustration is that students aren't able to persist in a tough assignment, working through a challenging task to achieve a goal. For example, a middle school math teacher noted that the "instant rewards of video games has made activities that require depth of commitment much harder for the kids." He continued, "They don't want to put effort into areas that don't give them instant gratification." And another commented "If they cannot get what they need quickly then they will give up."

## Writing.

Another area of concern for teachers is the impact of entertainment media on students' writing skills. The quality of students' writing is an issue for teachers in general, independent of their concerns about the impact of media use. Writing is the one major subject area that a majority of teachers rank their students poorly on (55% rank their students as only "fair" or "poor" at writing), and it is the one major subject at which teachers are just as likely to say students are getting worse as are getting better. When results are analyzed by the school's socio-economic status (based on percent of students receiving free or reduced-price meals), writing ranks last among all the major subject areas at all SES levels. Writing is also the skill that is least likely to be improving, whether at a high or a low SES school. However, teachers at low SES schools are more likely to say entertainment media use is hurting their students' writing (65%, vs. 50% at high SES schools).

Overall, nearly six in 10 teachers (58%) believe that students' use of entertainment media is negatively affecting their writing, including 19% who say they think it has hurt "a lot." The problem is especially acute in middle school, where 69% of teachers think media use is hurting students' writing. According to teachers' comments throughout the survey, the main culprit is texting. As one teacher wrote, "Texting has hurt their writing skills. Students now write papers like they are texting and do not really consider grammar and

**Table 3: How teachers rank their students' abilities at:**

	Excellent/good	Fair/poor
Reading	62%	37%
Verbal communication	62%	37%
Math	61%	39%
Science	57%	43%
Writing	44%	55%

**Table 4: Percent of teachers who say students' skills have been getting better or worse at:**

	Getting better	Getting worse
Math	54%	26%
Science	51%	22%
Reading	46%	31%
Verbal communication	42%	35%
Writing	39%	39%



spelling before turning in compositions.” A sixth grade teacher wrote that his students’ “constant texting and use of social network sites are detrimental to their spelling, grammar, and verbal communication.” Another pointed out that her high school students “don’t even realize when they are using ‘text speech’ in formal classroom settings.”

## Face-to-face communication.

A majority of teachers (59%) believe entertainment media use has hurt students’ abilities to communicate face to face, including 15% who say it has hurt “a lot.” Again, the problem is especially evident in the middle school grades, where 70% of teachers say media use has hurt face-to-face communication at least somewhat. As one eighth grade math teacher commented, “students get so into video games and texting that they have no idea how to talk to people face to face.” A high school math teacher said that his students “have a hard time having conversations with others to collaborate on group assignments” because social media has reduced their face-to-face contact. Even one kindergarten teacher said her students “lack in social/play skills because they are so busy with media use that they do not know how to interact face to face with others or think on their own.”

## Homework.

Just under half (48%) of all teachers feel that their students’ use of entertainment media is interfering with their homework; middle school teachers are the most likely to find this to be a problem (58%). Some teachers feel that students are so drawn to media that they rush through their homework so they can get to their video games or social networking; others point to how tired students are when they get to school the next day from staying up late playing games.

For example, a fifth-grade teacher said she thinks students “rush through their work, especially their writing, in order to get to other fun activities like watching TV, texting with friends, and playing video games.” A middle school teacher had a similar point of view, noting that some of her students “are so involved with their social networking that they do not do their homework or do a slap-dab job.” In fact, one third grade teacher said he “heard many students talk about games they have played (many that are rated M) the night before and yet they did not turn in their homework.”

Several teachers commented on how tired students are at school after staying up late playing games. One wrote: “Some students come to school with bloodshot eyes due to playing video games til all hours of the night without parental supervision or knowledge,” while another said “They tell of staying up to the wee hours playing video games, then are too tired to stay awake in class.”

## Critical thinking.

Four in 10 teachers (42%) say their students’ critical thinking skills have been hurt somewhat or a lot by their use of entertainment media. A long-time high school teacher said he felt that students are “getting less and less able to go beyond the information they are getting and think for themselves.” Another pointed out both the positives and negatives, saying he thought new media “has given them more access to information. But it has hurt them when it comes to digesting this information and knowing what to do with it when they do get it.” And a long-time eighth grade teacher said his students “have gotten used to pushing a button and getting information that is of moderate value, and then going no further, no deeper into the subject.”

## The need to be entertained.

One of the most common issues raised by teachers in their comments is that students have become accustomed to being entertained at all times and that they bring that expectation into the classroom. Part of the challenge is that teachers feel a lot of pressure to keep their lessons entertaining; another part is that students are less willing to work hard at something if it isn’t all fun and games. One teacher said “They think education is ‘boring’ because they are used to lots of action in video games.” Another said “Students expect the classroom to be like a video game all of the time. They want to be entertained.” As one 24-year teaching veteran said, “Students need to be entertained. ‘Work’ is boring if they have to think to do it.” Many teachers find this need to “entertain” students in class very challenging. A fifth grade teacher who has been teaching for eight years said “Students now need constant attention grabbers to keep them focused on their studies.” And a middle school teacher who has been in the classroom for 26 years said “In my experience, many students are unengaged at school because they are not being ‘entertained’ by the teacher or subject matter.”

## Many teachers think their students' use of entertainment media has helped them multitask and find information quickly.

When it comes to finding information and multitasking, teachers are more likely to say their students' use of entertainment media has helped rather than hurt them. Nearly two-thirds (63%) say media have helped their students find information quickly and efficiently. And one-third (34%) say students' use of entertainment media has helped them multitask effectively (compared to 25% who say it has hurt their multitasking skills). Among teachers who say their students' academic skills have mainly been helped by entertainment media use, the most-cited media are websites (78%) and computer programs and tools (65%).

Teachers who describe themselves as “tech savvy” are more likely than other teachers to see a benefit to students' creativity from their use of entertainment media. Four in 10 (40%) tech-savvy teachers say media use has helped their students' creativity, compared to 25% of teachers who are “uncomfortable” with technology. There were no other statistically significant differences between these teachers, nor were there differences between long-term (more than 15 years) and new (less than 5 years) teachers.

Elementary school teachers are more likely than those in the higher grades to see a positive influence of media on their students. For example, 32% say entertainment media have helped their students' creativity, 23% say the same about their critical thinking skills, and 22% say media have helped their students' engagement with the subjects they are studying (this compares to 21% for high school teachers on creativity, 10% on critical thinking, and 12% on engagement). Elementary school teachers are more likely to cite computer games as helpful to their students (40%, vs. 17% for high school students), while high school teachers are more likely to cite social networking and texting (30% of high school teachers who say media has helped their students academically cite social networking positively, compared to 7% of elementary school teachers).

**Table 5: Percent of teachers who say students' entertainment media use has mainly helped or hurt their:**

	Mainly hurt	Mainly helped	Hasn't made difference
Ability to find information quickly and efficiently	63%	10%	19%
Ability to multitask effectively	34%	25%	33%

**Table 6: Among teachers who say their students' skills have mainly been helped by their media use, the media cited as most helpful are:**

	All	Elementary school	Middle school	High school
Websites	78%	73% <sup>a</sup>	81% <sup>b</sup>	80% <sup>ab</sup>
Computer programs/tools	65%	70% <sup>a</sup>	71% <sup>a</sup>	53% <sup>b</sup>
Computer games	33%	40% <sup>a</sup>	34% <sup>a</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>
Online videos	29%	22% <sup>a</sup>	36% <sup>b</sup>	29% <sup>ab</sup>
Mobile applications	27%	24%	26%	32%
Texting	17%	10% <sup>a</sup>	24% <sup>b</sup>	25% <sup>b</sup>
Social networking	19%	7% <sup>a</sup>	21% <sup>b</sup>	30% <sup>b</sup>
Video games	19%	21%	21%	13%

## Finding information.

Thanks to the wealth of information available on the Internet, teachers note that students can find information for class assignments more easily now than in the past. They also note that students sometimes stumble across information in online videos or on websites that sparks their curiosity or turns out to be useful in classroom discussions. And, finally, teachers also point out that the Web offers students a chance to experience social and cultural issues from a variety of perspectives, giving them access to a whole new level of “information” for their studies. A “tech-savvy” sixth grade teacher with 10 years in the field said that “informational websites are a tremendous plus in regards to student learning. It helps build their knowledge and sometimes, for a lot of students, encourages them to learn more about other topics.” Another tech-savvy teacher, this one with 18 years in the classroom, said, “The biggest gains my students have shown is in their abilities to absorb textual information and to multi-task.” A high school teacher with 17 years of experience said she found that “websites and online videos give students instant access to information that is useful in classroom assignments and discussion.” And an elementary school teacher with 37 years in the classroom said, “Entertainment media does give opportunities for children to experience visually stimulating learning and to find information very quickly.” Finally, a seventh grade history and social studies teacher noted that “social awareness flourishes with students being aware of worldwide issues through YouTube and Facebook.”

## Multitasking.

Teachers are more likely to say that media use has helped rather than hurt their students’ ability to multitask effectively. For example, one new elementary school teacher noted that entertainment media have “helped [students’] multitasking abilities because they do their homework while texting, listening to music, watching TV, and surfing the Internet all at the same time!” And a high school teacher who has been in the classroom for six years said “So much media availability has made my students good at multitasking.”

# Entertainment Media and Students' Social Development

## Many teachers think their students' use of entertainment media has had a negative effect on key aspects of their social development.

A majority of teachers say they believe their students' use of entertainment media has had a mostly negative effect on certain key behaviors and attitudes, including aggressive behaviors like hitting or fighting (51%), anti-social behaviors like being mean (60%), and issues like students' self-esteem (43%) and body image (58%). But the biggest problem area for teachers is media's impact on their students' sexualization, where 67% feel there is a negative effect (including 26% who say "very" negative). Sixty-one percent also say their students' ideas about relationships between boys and girls have been negatively impacted, and 39% say the same for students' ideas about gender roles. Among teachers who say their students' social development has been negatively affected by media, the most frequently cited media are television (71%), movies (61%), music (56%), and social networking (55%). TV is most problematic for elementary school teachers (80% v. 59% among high school teachers); movies and video games are also more likely to be cited negatively among the lower grade teachers than high school teachers.

Teachers who say they are "uncomfortable" with new technologies are more likely to see negative effects of students' media use on their social development: 61% say media have a negative effect on aggression, and 51% say the same for the impact on pro-social behaviors (compared to 43% and 30% among "tech savvy" teachers, respectively).

## Sexualization, relationships, and gender roles.

A number of teachers commented on the sexual content in the media their students are exposed to. One long-time second grade teacher said her students are "exposed way beyond their years to sexually explicit materials." Another elementary school teacher said her students are "listening to music with highly sexualized content and context at an early age and viewing the videos made for this music." A new middle school teacher said many of her students "see and imitate" a disrespectful attitude toward girls. And a high school English teacher said, "The boys see a lot of images where women are treated as sexual objects, subservient to men."

**Table 7: Percent of teachers who say students' entertainment media use has had a positive or negative effect on:**

	Negative	Positive	Hasn't made difference
Sexualization	67%	3%	28%
Ideas about relationships between boys and girls	61%	4%	34%
Attitudes toward adults such as parents and teachers	61%	2%	34%
Anti-social behaviors like being mean	60%	7%	30%
Body image	58%	3%	38%
Aggressive behaviors like hitting and fighting	51%	6%	42%
Ideas about the value of education	48%	6%	44%
Self-esteem	43%	6%	49%
Pro-social behaviors like sharing or helping	40%	17%	41%
Ideas about gender roles	39%	9%	50%

**Table 8: Among teachers who say their students' social development has been negatively affected by their entertainment media use, the media most frequently cited as harmful are:**

	All	Elementary school	Middle school	High school
Television	71%	80% <sup>a</sup>	69% <sup>b</sup>	59% <sup>c</sup>
Movies	61%	72% <sup>a</sup>	57% <sup>b</sup>	47% <sup>c</sup>
Music	56%	54%	53%	58%
Social networking	55%	42% <sup>a</sup>	69% <sup>b</sup>	69% <sup>b</sup>
Video games	43%	55% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>
Computer games	39%	43%	36%	37%
Online videos	39%	41%	36%	36%
Texting	37%	29% <sup>a</sup>	47% <sup>b</sup>	47% <sup>b</sup>

**Table 9: Among teachers who say entertainment media have a positive effect students' social development, the media most likely to be cited as helpful are:**

Television	45%
Websites	39%
Movies	34%
Computer programs/tools	27%
Social networking sites	24%

Note: Number of respondents saying media had a positive effect was too small for analyzing by grade taught.

## Aggression.

Another area where many teachers notice a negative impact of entertainment media is in their students' aggressive behaviors. One young elementary school teacher said, "I have *first* graders who play rated M games. It affects how they interact with others in a harmful way. They are aggressive and defiant." Another teacher said, "There are several violent video games that my *second* graders play." A fifth grade teacher who has been in the classroom for 23 years said she was "very concerned about the violent games that are available to the age group that I teach. There is definitely a social change, especially among the boys who tend to play the video games most." And another elementary school teacher noted that her third through sixth grade students "have a high tolerance for violence and view it as entertaining, rather than disturbing. I think this is caused in large part by the bombardment of violent images they see on TV and in movies, and by violent games."

## Face-to-face communication.

Some teachers perceive that their students' media use has had a negative effect on their social skills, in particular on their ability to communicate with each other in person. Some teachers see this problem developing at an early age. For example, one eighth grade math teacher said "I think students get so into video games and texting that they have no idea how to talk to people face to face." A fourth grade teacher said her students "no longer have face-to-face interactions. Everything is done through social media and texting. Their social skills are dwindling." Even one kindergarten teacher said she had observed that her students "lack in social/play skills because they are so busy with media use that they do not know how to interact face to face with others."

## Some teachers see a positive effect of media on children's pro-social behaviors.

For every type of social development asked about in this survey, teachers were more likely to say that entertainment media have had a negative rather than a positive effect on their students. However, 17% do say their students' media use has a positive effect on their pro-social behaviors. For example, one elementary school math and science teacher with 10 years in the classroom noted that "the programs geared for the students today have more of a positive effect on their attitudes. The TV shows that they watch teach them about others and how to work together."

## Social engagement and diversity.

Several teachers commented on how their students' use of media has broadened their horizons by exposing them to diverse viewpoints and experiences. For example, one long-time kindergarten teacher wrote, "Since I deal with the younger students, the use of media entertainment has enhanced their knowledge and awareness of the world around them." Another elementary school teacher said, "Pupils have a more broadened viewpoint by seeing things that would not be in their current environment." Likewise, a high school English teacher with 20 years in the classroom wrote that some websites engage her students "with the world. They like to discuss and debate these [issues]," she noted, "and they are much better informed than students years ago." A high school theology teacher said "There is more diversity on TV and in movies and that is good to see." And a long-time high school theater teacher wrote that "Most shows include diversity (race, sexuality, etc). Students can see people like themselves in situations. This is a big improvement over 30 years ago."

# Background Data on Teachers and Technology

## **Fewer than one in five teachers consider themselves to be “tech savvy,” but most say they are “comfortable” with technology.**

Eighteen percent of teachers describe themselves as “tech savvy,” while a similar proportion (16%) admit that they are “not very comfortable” using many new technologies and applications. The remaining two-thirds (66%) say they are “comfortable” with technologies like computers and smart phones, but aren’t usually the first to try new technologies or tools. Just over half (56%) of all teachers own a smart phone, while 44% do not.

Older teachers and those who have been teaching for longer are more likely to say they feel uncomfortable with technology. One in four (28%) teachers who are 50 years old or older say they are not very comfortable with technologies, compared to 8% of those under age 35. Similarly, 26% of teachers who have been in the classroom for 21 or more years describe themselves as not very comfortable with technology, compared to 11% of those who have been teaching for less than 5 years.

## **Nearly 8 in 10 teachers say they use media and technology as a teaching tool in the classroom.**

Eight in ten (79%) teachers use media and technology somewhat (43%) or a lot (36%) as a teaching tool. Eighteen percent say they use media and technology “not too much,” and only 3% say not at all. Fifteen percent of teachers use social media for communicating with students and parents. Younger teachers (under age 35) are more likely to use media and technology in their classrooms “a lot” (49%) than older teachers (34% of 36- to 49-year-olds, and 29% of those aged 50 or older). Self-described “tech savvy” teachers are more likely to use media and technology in the classroom “a lot” (65%) than those who describe themselves as either just “comfortable” with technology (33%) or “uncomfortable” with it (12%).

## **Teachers support the use of tablet computers in the classroom.**

Nearly a third of teachers (31%) say their school already provides tablet computers to students (13%) or has plans to do so in the near future (18%). Seventy percent of teachers say their school doesn’t use tablets and has no plans to. Teachers are overwhelmingly positive about the prospects of incorporating computer tablets into the classroom: 74% say such a move would be helpful to their students’ learning, while 26% say it would mainly be a distraction to learning.

# Conclusion

In the last 10 years, the media environments of children and youth have been revolutionized. There are more ways to use media and more types of media to use than ever before, all of it instantly accessible at any place and any time.

The multitude of media options clearly offer young people both benefits and challenges. When used as educational tools in classrooms or for homework, media and technology offer exciting and important possibilities. Educational and pro-social media for the home, whether on TV, in video games, or online, offer stimulation and engagement for countless youth. And social media allow young people to build connections and become content creators as well as consumers.

But this report raises significant concerns as well. For the first time, we have solicited and quantified the views of America's teachers about the impact of entertainment media on their students, and the results raise important red flags. America's teachers — whether they are long-time classroom veterans or young, tech-savvy ones, at wealthy schools or low-income schools, public or private, elementary or high school — surface relatively consistent concerns: Students are having issues with their attention span, writing, and face-to-face communication, and, in the experience of teachers, children's media use is contributing to the problem. On the plus side, teachers find that young people's facility with media is helping them find information quickly and multitask more effectively.

This is not a study that can document whether teachers' perceptions about media's influence are accurate. It does not include any objective measures of attention span, writing, or face-to-face communication, nor any way to link outcomes to individual children's media use patterns. However, it does surface some important and broadly held concerns of the nation's teachers.

**Hopefully, this report will help focus our attention on several key areas: nurturing young people's ability to concentrate, focus, and work hard on a task; developing and polishing their writing skills; strengthening face-to-face communication; and making sure homework is sufficiently prioritized over the ever-present media temptations. Socially, priorities include paying attention to the sexual content that children and teens are exposed to in media and to the prevalence of messages on related issues like gender roles and relationships between boys and girls.**

Seeking out high-quality media content for young people and setting limits on how much time is spent with media are two good places to start addressing all of these issues.

*"It is great when you hear a student say they went home and did more research on something we talked about in class. It is dismaying when they come to school and brag that they spent five hours playing a video game."*

Fourth grade teacher





## Common Sense Media Survey of Teachers

Conducted by Knowledge Networks: A Gfk Company, May 5-17, 2012

N = 685

Margin of sampling error = +/-5 percentage points

*Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding, refused/don't know responses, or because multiple responses were allowed. An asterisk (\*) indicates a value of less than 0.5%.*

---

### 1. This past school year, were you employed as a classroom teacher?

a. Yes	100%
b. No	0%

### 2. Is the school in which you currently work a public or private school?

a. Public – not including charter schools	83%
b. Public charter school	3%
c. Private, nonsectarian – not religiously affiliated	5%
d. Private, religious – affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church	4%
e. Private, religious – affiliated with some other religious organization	4%

### 3. What grade or grades do you teach?

a. Kindergarten – 5th grade	53%
b. 6th – 8th grade	33%
c. 9th – 12th grade	33%

### 4. What subject or subjects do you teach?

a. Social Sciences	53%
b. Science, Technology, Math	56%
c. Humanities	14%
d. Other	42%

**5. How many years have you taught, either full-time or part-time, at the elementary or secondary level?**

**Do not include time spent as a student teacher.**

1-2 years	6%
3-9 years	30%
10-14 years	20%
15-19 years	14%
20-24 years	10%
25 years or more	20%

**6. How many students in grades K-12 were enrolled in this school?**

Less than 100	5%
100-199	9%
200-499	20%
500-749	26%
750-999	15%
1,000 or more	25%

**7. How would you describe the area in which this school is located?**

a. Central city	19%
b. Urban fringe/large town	50%
c. Rural/small town	31%

**8. Do you own a smart phone — in other words, a cell phone you can use to send and receive email, download apps, or connect to the Internet?**

a. Yes	56%
b. No	44%

**9. Which of the following statements best describes you:**

a. I'm tech savvy and I love new gadgets	18%
b. I'm comfortable with computers and smart phones, but I'm not usually the first to try new technology or tools	66%
c. I'm not very comfortable using many of the newer technologies and applications	16%

**10. Approximately what percent of students at your school receive free or reduced-price meals?**

a. Less than 10%	17%
b. 10-25%	19%
c. 26-50%	20%
d. 51-75%	18%
e. More than 75%	26%

**11. In terms of academic achievement, where does your school rank among all the schools in your state?**

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| a. In the top third of schools in my state    | 42% |
| b. In the middle third of schools in my state | 41% |
| c. In the bottom third of schools in my state | 16% |

**12. Does your school provide tablet computers such as iPads to your students?**

- |        |     |
|--------|-----|
| a. Yes | 13% |
| b. No  | 87% |

[Show if Q12 = b]

**13. As far as you know, does your school have plans to provide tablet computers such as iPads to your students in the near future?**

*Among those whose school does not currently provide tablet computers to students (n=600)*

- |        |     |
|--------|-----|
| a. Yes | 20% |
| b. No  | 80% |

**14. Which comes closer to how you feel about the use of tablet computers like iPads for classroom work?**

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| a. It will mainly help students learn                    | 74% |
| b. It will mainly be a distraction to students' learning | 26% |

**15. How much do you personally use media and technology as a teaching tool in your classroom?**

- |                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| a. A lot        | 36% |
| b. Somewhat     | 43% |
| c. Not too much | 18% |
| d. Not at all   | 3%  |

**16. Do you use social media (such as Facebook or a school-based social networking site) to connect with students and parents?**

- |        |     |
|--------|-----|
| a. Yes | 15% |
| b. No  | 85% |

**17. In general how would you rate your students' abilities at:**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Reading	16%	46%	28%	8%
b. Writing	10%	34%	40%	15%
c. Math	15%	46%	30%	9%
d. Science	10%	46%	34%	8%
e. Verbal communication	16%	46%	30%	7%

**[If Q5= 3 or more years]**

**18. We are interested in how you think students' skills in each of these areas have changed since you've been a teacher. In general, would you say students' skills in each area have gotten much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse, or much worse, or have their skills not changed much since you have been a teacher?**

*Among those who have been classroom teachers for 3 or more years (n=629)*

	Much better	Somewhat better	Somewhat worse	Much worse	Haven't changed much
a. Reading	12%	34%	23%	8%	22%
b. Writing	8%	30%	27%	12%	21%
c. Math	10%	44%	17%	8%	20%
d. Science	8%	43%	15%	7%	26%
e. Verbal communication	8%	34%	27%	8%	22%

**19. For this question, we want to know your opinion about the impact that your students' use of entertainment media has had on them, if any. We are interested in their use of media for fun, outside of school work: the TV shows, music, video games, texting, iPods, cell phone games, social networking sites, apps, computer programs, online videos, and websites they use for fun. First of all, how much do you think you know about your students' use of entertainment media outside the classroom?**

- a. A lot 28%
- b. Some 46%
- c. Only a little 22%
- d. Nothing 5%

[If Q19=a-c]

**20. Still thinking about the TV shows, music video games, texting, iPods, cell phone games, social networking sites, apps, computer programs, online videos, and websites your students use for fun, outside of schoolwork: For each of the following, please let me know whether, in your experience, your students' entertainment media use has mainly helped their academic performance, mainly hurt their academic performance, or hasn't made much difference one way or the other.**

*Among those who know at least a little about their students' use of entertainment media outside of schoolwork (n=650)*

	Helped a lot	Helped somewhat	Hurt somewhat	Hurt a lot	Hasn't made much difference
a. Their overall academic performance	1%	15%	34%	7%	35%
b. How well they do on their homework	1%	12%	33%	15%	29%
c. The quality of their writing	1%	6%	39%	19%	28%
d. Their ability to communicate face to face	1%	7%	44%	15%	29%
e. Their critical thinking skills	2%	17%	30%	12%	33%
f. Their attention span	1%	8%	37%	34%	17%
g. How engaged they are with the subject matter they're studying	3%	17%	32%	12%	30%
h. Their creativity	4%	25%	26%	11%	30%
i. Their ability to multitask effectively	3%	31%	20%	5%	33%
j. Their ability to solve problems by working collaboratively	3%	15%	30%	11%	36%
k. Their ability to find information quickly and efficiently	21%	41%	7%	4%	19%

[Ask if any item in Q20 = 1 or 2]

**21. Please mark the types of media use that you think have been most helpful to your students on this/these issue[s]:**

*Among those who say media have been helpful (n=482)*

a. Television	12%
b. Movies	10%
c. Music	12%
d. Computer games	33%
e. Video or handheld games	19%
f. Social networking sites like Facebook	19%
g. Computer programs or tools	65%
h. Online videos	29%
i. Websites	78%
j. Texting	17%
k. Apps	27%
l. Other (specify)	1%

**[Ask if any item in Q20 = 4 or 5]**

**22. Please mark the types of media use that you think have been most harmful to your students on this/these issue[s]:**

*Among those who say media have been harmful (n=544)*

a. Television	57%
b. Movies	27%
c. Music	23%
d. Computer games	56%
e. Video or handheld games	68%
f. Social networking sites like Facebook	56%
g. Computer programs or tools	6%
h. Online videos	24%
i. Websites	11%
j. Texting	66%
k. Apps	15%
l. Other (specify)	1%

**[If Q19 = a-c]**

**23. Please take a minute to share your thoughts about how your students' entertainment media use has helped or hurt their academic performance, or to give us some examples. Remember, we are interested in their use of media for fun, outside of school work: the TV shows, music, video games, texting, iPods, cell phone games, social networking sites, apps, computer programs, online videos, and websites they use for fun.**

**24. Based on what you have seen, do you think your students' use of entertainment media has had a positive effect, a negative effect, or hasn't made much difference regarding their:**

	Very positive	Somewhat positive	Somewhat negative	Very negative	Hasn't made much difference
a. Ideas about relationships between boys and girls	*	3%	43%	18%	34%
b. Attitudes towards adults such as parents and teachers	*	2%	42%	19%	34%
c. Pro-social behaviors (like sharing, helping, or tolerance)	1%	16%	32%	9%	41%
d. Anti-social behaviors (like being mean)	*	7%	44%	16%	30%
e. Aggressive behaviors (like hitting or fighting)	*	6%	36%	15%	42%
f. Self-esteem	*	6%	36%	8%	49%
g. Body image	*	3%	46%	12%	38%
h. Ideas about gender roles	1%	9%	28%	10%	50%
i. Sexualization	0%	3%	42%	26%	28%
j. Ideas about the value of education	1%	5%	34%	14%	44%

**[Ask if any item in Q24 = 1 or 2]**

**25. Please mark the types of media use that you think have had the biggest positive effect to your students on this/these issue[s]:**

*Among those who think entertainment media has had any positive effect on their students (n=220)*

a. Television	45%
b. Movies	34%
c. Music	15%
d. Computer games	11%
e. Video or handheld games	7%
f. Social networking sites like Facebook	24%
g. Computer programs or tools	27%
h. Online videos	13%
i. Websites	39%
j. Texting	11%
k. Apps	6%
l. Other (specify)	3%

**[Ask if any item in Q24 = 4 or 5]**

**26. Please mark the types of media use that you think have had the biggest negative effect to your students on this/these issue[s]:**

*Among those who think entertainment media has had any negative effect on their students (n=589)*

a. Television	71%
b. Movies	61%
c. Music	56%
d. Computer games	39%
e. Video or handheld games	43%
f. Social networking sites like Facebook	55%
g. Computer programs or tools	6%
h. Online videos	39%
i. Websites	27%
j. Texting	37%
k. Apps	5%
l. Other (specify)	2%

**[If any item in Q24 = 1-2 or 4-5]**

**27. What are some examples of media having a positive or negative effect on your students' attitudes or behaviors?**

**[OPEN END]**





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# Children, Teens, and Entertainment Media: The View From the Classroom

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A National Survey of Teachers About the Role of Entertainment  
Media in Students' Academic and Social Development

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## Common Sense Media's *Program for the Study of Children and Media*

The mission of Common Sense Media's *Program for the Study of Children and Media* is to provide parents, educators, health organizations, and policymakers with reliable, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact it has on their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. For more information about the program and to read reports on these studies, visit [www.commonsense.org/research](http://www.commonsense.org/research).

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