

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

January 13, 2015

Mr. Sundar Pichai, CEO
Google, Inc.
1600 Amphitheatre Pkwy
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

I am writing to request information about Google for Education products and services and Google's privacy policies related to the education sector of its business. While I commend Google's foray into education technology ("EdTech"), I am concerned about the extent to which Google may be collecting K-12 students' personal data and using that information for non-educational purposes without parents' knowledge or consent. I believe Americans have a fundamental right to privacy, and that right includes a student or parent's access to information about what data are being collected about them and how the data are being used. To achieve greater transparency in the EdTech industry, I ask that you provide more information on Google for Education products and services and how the company is addressing issues of student privacy and security.

EdTech has had a major impact on K-12 education in recent years, providing teachers and students with new tools to enhance the learning process. As a global leader in technology, Google is transforming the classroom and increasing students' access to global information through affordable services and devices. However, as schools increasingly rely on technology in the classroom, students and their families have raised legitimate concerns about the privacy and security of students' data. There have been an increasing number of stories of the misuse of student data or poor security practices in schools using EdTech tools. When used appropriately, technology is a valuable tool for teachers and students alike, but we must ensure that students' very sensitive data are protected.

Most recently, reports have suggested that Google is collecting and using student data for non-educational purposes in a manner that may not be detectable by school administrators, students and their parents, or other users of Google's EdTech products and services. Specifically, I understand that there may be a discrepancy in how Google treats student data obtained through its core Google Apps for Education (GAFE) services – products that are deemed educational – versus how Google treats student data obtained through other Google services that are not deemed educational, such as Google Search, Google Maps, or YouTube. As a result, Google may be tracking and storing students' Internet browsing activity, passwords, and video viewing behavior when a student is logged in to their GAFE account or using a Google Chromebook but isn't actually using GAFE services. I am concerned that this collection of data may enable Google to create detailed profiles of the students and ultimately target advertising to them or use the profiles for other non-educational purposes without the students' knowledge. Furthermore, I understand that unless a school administrator bars students from accessing non-GAFE services, users may have limited ability to consent to this collection of data or its possible use for non-educational purposes.

Given the sensitive nature of student data, all parties involved, including the school administrators, teachers, parents, and the students, should have a clear understanding about what data are shared by schools with EdTech vendors, what data are collected by those vendors, how long the data are stored, and how they use the data. Students and their families should be empowered to make informed decisions about whether and with whom they share such sensitive information, and they must be assured that when the information is retained it will receive the utmost protection.

In light of these uncertainties, I respectfully request that you respond to the following questions by February 12, 2016:

1. When a student is signed in to their GAFE account but is not using one of the GAFE services, what kind of data does Google collect on an individual student?
2. When a student is using a Chromebook but is not using one of the GAFE services, what kind of data does Google collect on an individual student?
3. If Google does collect any individualized data on a student, such as browsing information or viewing habits, when a student is using a Chromebook or is logged in to their GAFE account but is not using one of GAFE services, please address the following questions:
 - a. For what purposes does Google collect this information?
 - b. Is it necessary to collect all of this information for the provision of GAFE services or to deliver other valuable features that may be relevant for educational purposes?
 - c. Has Google ever used this kind of data to target ads to students in Google services, either in the GAFE services or other Google services, such as Google Search, Google News, Google Books, Google Maps, Blogger, or YouTube?
 - d. Has Google ever used this kind of data for its own business purposes, unrelated to the provision of Google's educational offerings?
 - e. Is it possible to make this data collection opt-in?
 - f. Does Google share this information with additional parties?
4. Google has indicated that it compiles data aggregated from student users of Chrome Sync, anonymizes the data, and uses it to improve its services. Can you expand on how the aggregated information is treated? For example, does this include sharing the aggregated data with third parties for research purposes or otherwise?
5. Can you describe Google's relationship with school districts and administrators that choose to use Google for Education products and services? Apart from publicly available privacy policies, does Google offer any explanation to parents, teachers, and education officials about how student information is collected and used?

6. Can you describe all the contexts and ways in which both school administrators and parents of students using Google for Education products and services have control over what data is being collected and how the data are being used?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter, and please do not hesitate to contact me, or Leslie Hylton on my staff, at (202) 224-5641.

Sincerely,



Al Franken
U.S. Senator