PARENT COALITION FOR
STUDENT PRIVACY

What is Summit Learning and why should parents and students be concerned about its use?

Summit is a chain of charter schools in California which uses an online platform to collect student data and deliver instruction and assessments. Since the 2015-2016 school year, the use of the Summit Learning platform has expanded into more than 300 public schools, with funding and support from the Gates Foundation, Facebook, the Silicon Valley Foundation, and now the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Mark Zuckerberg's for-profit LLC. Together, these organizations have spent more than $200 million on developing the online platform, promoting its use, and paying for teachers and administrators to attend training sessions. CZI has also bought laptops for some schools to encourage the platform's use.[1] Yet the actual figure of schools using Summit Learning is unknown, since Summit refuses to disclose which schools are currently using it and has offered inconsistent figures over time about the extent of its reach.

Starting next fall, the Summit Learning platform will run by a new non-profit corporation, called T.L.P., for Teachers, Learners, and Partners, with a board consisting of three members, chaired by Dr. Priscilla Chan, Mark Zuckerberg's wife.[2]

Experiences of parents and students

In at least 16 states, parents have pushed back because of the excessive screen time that Summit Learning entails, with some students reporting that they are spending as much as three hours each day on computers. Parents have also observed that much of the curriculum is of poor quality, that their children are suffering from health problems and anxiety as a result, and that they are concerned about the voluminous amount of personal student data flowing to private, corporate hands through the platform, including to Facebook and now CZI, especially Zuckerberg has been a repeat offender when it comes to consumer privacy.

Though Summit claims that each student receives at least ten-minutes a week with a teacher "mentor," many students say that they do not receive even that much individual time with their teachers. Parents have observed their children have become so bored and unhappy that they want to drop out of school, and in some cases, families have transferred their children to private schools, decided to homeschool them, or move out of the district as a result.[3]

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[1] https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/connecticut/articles/2017-12-20/school-online-learning-program-rejected-over-parent-backlash

[2] https://www.summitlearning.org/about-tlp

[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/21/technology/silicon-valley-kansas-schools.html

Students at Summit have rebelled against Summit Learning in [Boone County](#) Kentucky; [Fairview Park City School District](#) in Ohio; [Clearwater County in Idaho](#) ; [McPherson and Wellington in Kansas](#) and elsewhere. [4] [Brooklyn high school students](#) in New York and middle school students in [McPherson, Kansas](#) have walked out of their schools to protest the program. The Brooklyn students at the School of Secondary Journalism [wrote a letter to Zuckerberg](#) , saying "*We refuse to allow ourselves to be experimented on in this way.*"

Because of parent and student discontent, some districts have eliminated the use of the Summit platform altogether, including in [Cheshire, Connecticut](#) and [Indiana Area School District PA](#); several others have made it optional for students and parents, including in Kettle Moraine, Wisconsin. [5]

Many parents at Summit schools say that their children receive insufficient feedback and support from their teachers and have fallen far behind in their coursework and required assessments as a result. By the end of the year, some students are forced to catch up by taking many multiple-choice exams in a row to receive credit for their courses and advance to the next grade. Others simply skip the reading assignments, and take their assessments by guessing, as they can do repeatedly without any penalty. Some say they simply open new tabs on their computers and look up the answers while taking tests.

Parents have also observed that the curriculum that Summit assigns is substandard, linking to articles in newspaper tabloids, Wikipedia, SparkNotes or YouTube videos. Some of the educators who originally developed the platform have admitted in interviews that the curriculum materials are "shoddy" and they had been "throwing things in there, that, at least from a Google search, looked reputable." An educator who worked with Summit early on said that "near the end of the year … 70 percent of students hadn't advanced far enough to pass."[6]

Though Summit administers its own surveys to students using the platform, they have so far refused to release the results. According to a survey independently carried out by [Indiana University of Pennsylvania,](#) 70 percent of Indiana Area students said Summit should be dropped or made optional, and most said that they "did not feel that SLP [Summit Learning Platform] helps students be creative, prepares them for future education or future careers, helps them think critically or problem solve, helps them socialize or prepare them for future social situations, or strengthens the school community." Parents of Summit students were even more critical; 72 percent opposed the use of the Summit platform and "generally agreed that SLP does not encourage or helps students learn." [7] A survey carried out by [McPherson KS school district](#) found that 63 percent of parents at the district's elementary school and 78 percent at the middle school agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "*If given the choice, I would prefer that my child not be in a classroom utilizing the Summit Learning curriculum.*"[8]

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[4] [https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2017/03/06/facebook-program-school-causes-controversy/97711414/](#) ; [https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/remove-the-summit-personalized-learning-program](#) ; [https://www.indianagazette.com/news/directors-vote-to-scale-back-summit-learning-program/article_b3bc086a-e4d1-11e7-8c95-57ffb928e16e.html](#) ; [http://www.hutchnews.com/news/20180926/parents-question-new-learning-program-in-mcpherson-schools-redesign](#) ; [http://www.clearwatertribune.com/news/top_stories/summit-learning-under-fire-gains-attention-and-lots-of-criticism/article_da14721a-74b2-11e8-8a35-33a44ea23f1d.html](#) ; [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/21/technology/silicon-valley-kansas-schools.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share](#)

[5] [https://www.jsonline.com/story/communities/lake-country/news/delafield/2018/07/19/kettle-moraine-school-district-allow-opt-out-summit-learning-program/792209002/](#)

[6] [http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/10/the-connecticut-resistance-to-zucks-summit-learning-program.html](#)

[7] [https://4.files.edl.io/bfae/10/01/18/214825-4e140c9a-de36-40d2-9aed-7ba06a813b5b.pdf](#)

[8][https://go.boarddocs.com/ks/usd418/Board.nsf/files/BAU37H7A4692/$file/USD%20418%20Parent%20Survey%20Results%203.22.pdf](#)

Student data collection and privacy concerns

Summit claims the right to collect an extraordinary amount of personal student information.   Among the data collected include student and parent names and email addresses; student ID numbers, attendance, suspension and expulsion records, disabilities, gender, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, date of birth, teacher observations, students communications with teachers, grade promotion or retention, test scores, college admissions, survey responses, homework assignments, and the extracurricular activities they engage in. Summit plans to track students even after they graduate from high school, including their college attendance and eventual careers.[9]

Summit shares this data to as many as 24 corporate "partners" including the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative, to help them run services, provide content, and improve their "product." In addition, several of the websites that students are assigned to via the Summit platform track student data for marketing and advertising purposes. There is no independent oversight of Summit or its partner companies to ensure that they are using the data appropriately or securing it from breaches.

Summit has revised their privacy policies at least three times. Currently, their Privacy Center page links to seven different documents, some of confusingly written and at times contradictory,: a Program Agreement with schools and districts, a different User Agreement which contains broken links, a Partner School Terms of Service, a Privacy Policy, a Data Privacy Addendum , Privacy FAQs, and a Security White Paper.

While a separate CZI Statement of Privacy Principles promises to allow parents or students to have "*access to, correction, and deletion of student personal information*," parents who have so far tried to have their child's data deleted have met with a brick wall.   The Summit Data Privacy Addendum similarly states that parents have the right to opt out of data collection, and that "*Partner School represents, warrants, and covenants to Summit Learning that it shall not provide information to Summit Learning from any student or parent/legal guardian that has opted out of the disclosure of Directory Information*." Yet again, parents who have asked their schools to opt out of this disclosure have had their requests ignored. Though the Data Privacy Addendum says that personal student data will not be sold, Summit says this does "*not include or apply to the purchase, merger or other type of acquisition of a company by another entity*."

So many data breaches of student information have occurred in recent years that the FBI recently released a Public Service Announcement, warning parents that the "widespread collection of sensitive information by EdTech could present unique exploitation opportunities for criminals." [10] Mark Zuckerberg himself has faced multiple lawsuits and legal complaints about Facebook's repeated privacy violations. In September, nearly 50 million Facebook users had their accounts hacked. [11] In early November, hackers claimed they had successfully stolen the private messages of some 120 million Facebook users, and the messages from at least 80,000 users have already been published.[12] In a recent report by the British Parliament, Facebook was accused of "intentionally and knowingly" violating data privacy laws and was called a "digital gangster."[13] The NY Times has

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[9] https://cdn.summitlearning.org/marketing/privacy_center/privacy_policy.pdf
[10] https://www.ic3.gov/media/2018/180913.aspx
[11] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/28/technology/facebook-hack-data-breach.html
[12] https://thinkprogress.org/facebook-security-private-message-hack-88c0d39b1105/
[13] https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/18/facebook-is-a-digital-gangster-that-needs-more-regulation-uk-report.html

reported that Facebook is currently under criminal investigation by the US Attorney's office for the Eastern District of New York.[14]

No evidence or empirical data to show that Summit works

There is no independent peer-reviewed research to show that Summit works to improve learning, and in fact though Summit paid Harvard to undertake such an evaluation , it ultimately refused to allow this study to go forward. Tom Kane of Harvard was quoted in the NY Times as saying "he was wary of speaking out against Summit because many education projects receive funding" from CZI. Since 2016, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative has committed $99.1 million in grants to Summit, while the Gates Foundation has contributed another $37 million. The Silicon Valley Community Foundation has given Summit another $71 million, without divulging the original donors.

These donations have increased in recent years, despite the growing evidence that online learning does not help develop the creative and critical thinking or social skills essential to students' academic and real-world success, and instead too often leads to their boredom and alienation.

Questions parents and students should ask

Here are some questions parents and students should ask their school or district if it is considering or has already adopted the Summit system:

- Where is the independent peer-reviewed research that Summit helps students learn?
- How many hours are students going to spend at computers and how much teacher feedback will they receive?   How much opportunity will students have to ask questions and engage in classroom discussion and debate?
- Was any analysis done to see if the Summit curriculum is aligned with the state's learning standards, and if so, where is this analysis? [Summit admits that it not yet aligned with the Common Core standards in English and math; and that they are working to align their social studies curriculum with the California History Standards; so it is unlikely it is aligned with your state's standards.]
- Was the program adopted with the full knowledge and consent of parents, teachers and/or district leadership?
- Does the school have a written contract with Summit, and if so, does the contract fully comply with state and federal student privacy laws?
- Will parents be allowed to opt out of their children's Directory Information (name, email address, etc.) being disclosed to Summit, and/or delete the data once it has been, in accordance to the CZI and Summit privacy policies?
- What oversight is being employed by the school or district to ensure that student data will not be breached or abused, as much of the personal information on Facebook has been?

Please share this fact sheet with other parents and join with them to press for the Summit program to be eliminated from your school. Our Parent Toolkit for Student Privacy has advocacy tips at https://bitly.com/ParentToolkitStudentPrivacy.

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[14] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/13/technology/facebook-data-deals-investigation.html

Selected references on Summit:

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Facebook-backed school software shows promise and raises privacy concerns, WA Post, Oct. 11, 2016

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Parents cite student privacy concerns with popular online education platform, WA Post, Sept. 5, 2017:

Update on Summit Schools including my visit to a Summit school, Student Privacy Matters, Dec. 6, 2017

Connecticut School District Suspends Use of Summit Learning Platform, Edsurge, Dec 20, 2017

Two Districts Roll Back Summit Personalized Learning Program, Ed Week, Dec. 22, 2017

Zuckerberg and the parent pushback vs Summit schools; Student Privacy Matters, Feb. 2, 2018

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Why parents and students are protesting an online learning program backed by Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook, Washington Post, Dec. 20, 2018

Summit Learning declined to be studied, then cited collaboration with Harvard researchers anyway, Chalkbeat, January 17, 2019

School board pulls plug on Summit Learning, Indiana Gazette, April 9, 2019

Silicon Valley Came to Kansas Schools. That Started a Rebellion. NY Times, April 21, 2019

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