

In my school we use the G-Suite. All students receive their school Gmail at the beginning of their 9th grade, and most classes require them to use Google Classroom; some, particularly now, require Google Meet, and the use of Google Calendar is encouraged.

The EULA for the G-Suite was difficult to navigate and not too informative. I looked specifically for data usage and availability for the student's data; Google specifies they do not "sell" it and, at any time a user can "export" their data. As far as I can tell, the data is kept in the Cloud. They were clear that these norms do not apply to products not in G-Suite, like, for example, YouTube, which we use regularly in school. Dangerous.

Google claims that there are transparent about what data they collect, that the user "owns" their data and that they keep users' data "secured". They say they meet all the industry's security standards, which, to my understanding does not say much, since our industry is generally not too invested in privacy or data "respect". Regardless of their transparency claim, I had trouble finding out what data they collect exactly. I finally it. They collect everything you enter, your name, age and location, email, texts and anything else you type in; they also admit to collecting information about your searches and other behaviors to better "serve" you.

The most troubling information I found about data was the fact that domain owners and resellers can access and store your information. It did not specify what privacy restrictions, if any, are placed on those people. I do not even know who they are for my school's account. The data is also shared with service providers. Google further admits to sharing what they call "non-identifiable" information publicly and with other partners. They specify that you can export and/or delete your information from Google at any time, to me that means that if you do not, they still have access, forever? I did try to export my data and, while I didn't complete the task, it does seems that I do have access to all my data, including my searches.

If I indeed own my data and I can delete it, it does give me some peace of mind. I guess if I wanted to, I could delete it to make sure no one (else) accesses it; the problem is, I will likely never bother to actually go through doing it, and my guess is neither would most people. Even more relevant, if not for this research, I would not even know I could do that, and therefore, probably neither do most people.

They do repeat, over and over, that G-Suite does not use ads, so that data is not sold to companies for advertisement. That sounds nice, but Google still has it and can use it themselves.

It is hard for me to make a judgement on whether I would let my child use it, or if I would be comfortable with it. The reality today is that it is hard to exist outside these services and I am not sure I would bother. What I would try to do is make sure my child understands that nothing they do is totally private; unfortunately, young people lack the maturity to understand what that means or how it can affect them.

This was research was annoying but surprisingly informative.