

MANIFESTO

Free children from the digital stranglehold!

We are greatly concerned about the increasing influence of tech giants on our education.

The digital infrastructure of Dutch education is almost entirely in the hands of foreign tech giants such as Google and Microsoft, from the mail service to the processing and storage of educational projects, and from the online notepad to the video tool. The convenience of this allowed homeschooling to be realized quickly during the pandemic. However, these providers do not adhere to privacy guidelines and do not disclose what happens to data. Our children start losing control of their own data as early as kindergarten because schools cannot guarantee digital security. Moreover, they are only offered limited and one-sided product knowledge, instead of being taught digital skills and critical thinking.

We therefore argue for an alternative digital learning system, in which fundamental rights such as privacy and sovereignty of our children are guaranteed. It must and it can be done differently!

This manifesto is a private initiative by a group of concerned parents, teachers citizens and privacy advocates in the ICT. We ask you to support this initiative so that we can work on restoring the digital sovereignty of the Dutch education system.

MANIFESTO

- **In education, the privacy of children/pupils/students should be protected.**

Privacy is a fundamental right. This means that everyone has control over his/her own personal data. Protection of privacy is particularly important in education. The Personal Data Authority explains this as follows: "*Educational institutions fulfill a social task and have a duty of care for the quality of education. This requires schools to handle the personal data of pupils, students and parents who are entrusted to their care in a correct and careful manner. Moreover, the vulnerable position of children requires extra protection, so that they can develop in a free and safe (school) environment. This makes the protection of personal data in the education sector essential.*"

- **Digital security and sovereignty in education has come under increasing pressure, partly due to the impact of the pandemic.**

As with everything else in society, education is also rapidly digitizing. This development has been exacerbated by the corona pandemic. The necessary introduction of home schooling required schools to have software systems and applications available quickly (and cheaply). Thus, the seemingly free services of Google and Microsoft provided a convenient way to do so. However, at the time schools were not given the opportunity to assess the privacy aspects of these services. Even now, due to the lack of transparency, it is not easy to assess how the products used are structured, which parties have access to the data and which algorithms are used.

- **We see educational institutions struggling with their task of ensuring the privacy of students, parents and employees.**

Educational institutions are supposed to have their privacy policies in order and ensure their implementation, but the knowledge about digital privacy and the awareness of the risks are often still below par. Assessing the privacy risks of, for example, a new software program or a new application is then an impossible task.

This is also a result of the fact that the government has left digital support in education to the private market, although this really is a public task. There is a lack of direction - or "system responsibility" as the Personal Data Authority calls it - and of additional support to enable the education sector to fulfil its responsibility.

- **It is undesirable that the digital infrastructure of Dutch education is completely in the hands of (foreign) tech giants.**

The digital learning environment in education has become increasingly dependent on the services of Big Tech. As a result, they have a lot of data on the behaviour and development of students and it is unclear what happens to this data. The risk of abuse of this data, such as through profiling and targeting, cannot be assessed - let alone avoided. The Personal Data Authority observes, "The power of these major providers, their lack of transparency and the lack of knowledge especially among small educational institutions make it difficult to determine the appropriate data protection safeguards and, if necessary, to enforce them on the provider."

Equally important is the fact that instead of real digital skills, children are only taught how to use specific products. For example, children are taught a specific word processing program, not the principles and methods of word processing. As a result, critical thinking is lost and children are turned into consumers, which further strengthens the power of tech giants.

- **We see the EU taking steps to curb the power of the tech giants. But that's a long road and we don't want to wait for it.**

In the meantime, we are working hard to find (legal) ways to curb the power of Big Tech. Governments, both in Europe and America, are concerned not only about market

monopoly and how these companies abuse it, but also about the risk of social disruption: influencing the economy and democracy. These kinds of legal measures are necessary, but they involve extensive and lengthy processes over which we have little influence. However, we do see opportunities to address the situation in Dutch education.

- **We believe it is necessary to restore digital sovereignty in Dutch education. We therefore advocate the development of an (education-wide) alternative.**

Initiatives have already been taken in various places in the education sector for the development of an own learning system, including the storage of data under own management. By using open-source software and applying 'privacy-by-design', the protection of personal data is taken into account at an early stage. Children start to discover that there are also safe digital options that are not controlled by Big Tech.

Schools in Germany have had good experiences with alternative systems, but considerable steps in this direction have also been made at schools in Amsterdam.

It is now important to join forces and work on our own digital learning system, in order to reclaim sovereignty in education. Government support and facilitation is absolutely necessary for this.

- **The main principles for this alternative digital learning system are: open source software, privacy-by-design, (local) data processing in the Netherlands or the EEA.**

The use of open source or free software allows users to check the technology. It gives everyone the right to use, understand, modify and share software. This is in contrast to the closed-source packages of the tech giants, whose source code is not public and therefore make it impossible for risks and privacy-invading features to be assessed. Open source software provides insight into how applications work and allows students to learn how to deal with privacy risks. The promotion of "digital literacy" and "media literacy" thus becomes part of education. Then pupils are also able to make the choice for further use of that free software, outside the school context and in their later careers.

The only way to truly guarantee public values such as privacy is to include them in the design from the very beginning. Software developed according to the principle of privacy-by-design stands in sharp contrast to the software of tech giants, which is aimed precisely at personal profiling and targeting.

The processing of data should be such that the risk of abuse is as low as possible. Decentralized and local data processing is preferable, at least within the Netherlands or the EEA. Moreover, data processing by companies that - also in the Netherlands - are bound by less strict foreign legislation and thereby putting privacy at risk should be avoided.

SUPPORT OUR INITIATIVE AND SIGN THE PETITION

1) Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens; Trends, risico's en aanbevelingen over de bescherming van persoonsgegevens bij digitalisering in het onderwijs. Bijdrage ten behoeve van het commissiedebat Digitalisering in het onderwijs, 11 november 2021.

2) See the petition <https://eerlijkdigitaalonderwijs.petities.nl/> for the latest overview of our constituency and supporting organisations.

3) From: Trends, risico's en aanbevelingen over de bescherming van persoonsgegevens bij digitalisering in het onderwijs. Bijdrage ten behoeve van het commissiedebat Digitalisering in het onderwijs, 11 november 2021, pg 3.

4) *“De bedrijven houden hun dominantie in stand door zelfgemaakte diensten nadrukkelijker te promoten op hun eigen platformen dan die van rivaliserende bedrijven, concurrenten op te kopen (...), te plagiëren of als proefkonijn te gebruiken, ongunstige contracten op te stellen voor mensen die afhankelijk zijn van het platform, en waardevolle gegevens te oogsten van mensen en firma's die niet zonder hun producten kunnen.”* De Correspondent, De macht van bedrijven als Google en Apple is gigantisch. Zo trekken Europa en de VS de teugels aan; 3 november 2020.

5) See for example: <https://nextcloud.com/blog/bavarian-school-experience-with-nextcloud-the-benefits-for-schools-are-immense/>, en <https://lanki.cloud>.

6) <https://publicspaces.net/2021/09/02/een-goede-digitale-start-in-het-basisonderwijs/>

7) <https://fsfe.org/freesoftware>: “Software is sterk verweven met alle aspecten van onze levens. Het is belangrijk dat deze technologie ons tot iets in staat stelt in plaats van ons te beperken. Vrije Software geeft iedereen het recht om software te gebruiken, te begrijpen, aan te passen en te delen. Deze rechten helpen het ondersteunen van andere fundamentele vrijheden zoals de vrijheid van meningsuiting, pers en privacy. (...) Vrije Software verwijst naar vrijheid, niet naar prijs. Het garandeert zijn gebruikers de essentiële vier vrijheden:

- Gebruik: Vrije Software kan voor elk doel worden gebruikt en is vrij van geografische en andere beperkingen zoals het aflopen van de licentie of geografische beperkingen.
- Bestudeer: Vrije Software en zijn code kan door iedereen bestudeerd worden, zonder geheimhoudingsovereenkomsten of vergelijkbare beperkingen.
- Deel: Vrije Software kan vrijwel gratis worden gedeeld en gekopieerd.
- Verbeter: Vrije Software kan door iedereen worden aangepast en deze verbeteringen kunnen publiekelijk worden gedeeld. “

8) See also: <https://www.privacycompany.eu/services-nl/privacy-by-design>

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