



Information and Privacy  
Commissioner of Ontario

Commissaire à l'information et à la  
protection de la vie privée de l'Ontario

## **Keynote: Safer Internet Day Future of Privacy Forum Webinar: Encryption and Young People February 11, 2025**

### **Introduction**

- Good morning, everyone.
- Thank you to Jules Polonetsky and the Future of Privacy Forum (FPF) for organizing this important discussion and inviting me to be a part of it.
- It's an honour to join you on Safer Internet Day to talk about the digital privacy and security of young people — one of the most important responsibilities we have as caretakers of the next generation.
- Today's young people have lived their entire lives in the age of the internet, social media, electronic records, and internet-connected devices. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the brilliant [infographic](#) just issued by FPF this morning.
- Every aspect of young peoples' lives is shaped by digital interactions — whether they're learning in virtual classrooms, socializing on platforms, playing videogames or accessing critical services.
- Encryption is one of the best ways to ensure that their personal communications, transactions, and devices stay safe and secure.
- This webinar brings together leading experts to explore how encryption protects young people.
- From safeguarding private conversations to preventing malicious actors from accessing online devices, encryption plays a fundamental role in protecting personal data and ensuring young people can navigate the digital world safely and with confidence.

### **Children and Youth in a Digital World**

- In carrying out its statutory mandate, my office is guided by four strategic priorities that address some of the key challenges to Ontarians' privacy and access rights in a data-driven world.
- These strategic priorities assist us in directing our energies and allocating our resources in focused areas where we are likely to have the most significant and positive impact.



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- One of these strategic priorities is [Children and Youth in a Digital World](#).
- Our goal in this priority area is to champion the access and privacy rights of Ontario's children and youth by promoting their digital literacy and digital rights, while holding institutions accountable for protecting the children and youth they serve.
- So as you can see, our goal has **both** an empowerment and a protection dimension to it.
- On the one hand, we want to equip our youth with the information and tools they need to learn, grow, and develop in the digital world with a sense of autonomy, dignity, and wonderment.
- On the other hand, as adults, we should not be downloading *on to them* the responsibilities we have to keep them safe and protect them from online harms.

### **Bill 194: Enhancing Digital Safety for Young People**

- One of the most significant developments in Ontario recently is the adoption of Bill 194, the [Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act](#).
- This new law addresses critical areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and the handling of young people's digital information by public sector organizations, including school boards and children's aid societies.
- As the bill was going through the legislative process, the IPC supported the bill's objectives but identified key gaps and missed opportunities.
- Among other things, we [recommended](#) that the law should deem personal information of children to be sensitive, attracting a higher level of protection.
- We recommended that the law should codify explicit safeguards to protect the digital information of minors and that such protections should not be left to future regulations.
- We also stressed the need for clear and independent oversight to ensure compliance and enforcement of children's privacy rights.
- Our recommendations unfortunately did not come to pass, but our strong advocacy work continues to inform eventual regulations governing digital technologies aimed at children and help ensure robust protections for young people.

## Addressing the PowerSchool Data Breach

- Recently, a significant data breach occurred at [PowerSchool](#), an education technology software company that provides services to school boards and schools.
- This incident has potentially compromised the personal information of millions of students and staff in school boards across Canada, the United States and globally.
- We are currently collaborating with our Canadian federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts to address this issue in a coordinated way.
- My office is actively investigating the breach from the perspective of the provincial ministry and the more than 20 Ontario school boards affected, while the federal commissioner, who has jurisdiction over private sector organizations, is looking into the company itself.
- From a regulator's perspective, this breach highlights the critical importance of enforcement collaboration among different jurisdictions on issues that affect Canadians nationwide.
- Under Bill 194, the Ontario legislature has recognized this importance and has vested me with authority to share information with my FPT and other counterparts to more effectively address large-scale incidents that cross jurisdictional lines.

## The Digital Privacy Charter for Ontario Schools

- As the fallout of the PowerSchool breach reminds us so starkly, students place a great deal of trust in their schools.
- And that trust *must* be met with a commitment to protecting their privacy.
- Last year, my office launched the [Digital Privacy Charter for Ontario Schools](#), a framework of commitments designed to help schools and school boards safeguard student privacy (including through their service providers), while also empowering students and encouraging responsible digital citizenship.
- This initiative was very much inspired by the Future of Privacy Forum's Student Privacy Pledge, which encourages service providers to safeguard student data.
- By adopting the digital charter, Ontario schools and school boards can demonstrate true leadership by building a privacy-respecting educational environment that their students, parents *and* communities can trust.

## Advancing Digital Literacy in Ontario's Schools

- Another milestone in our efforts to empower and protect young people's privacy rights is the integration of digital literacy into Ontario's newly revised education curriculum for grades one through nine.
- The updated curriculum, which features privacy education and digital citizenship, aligns with our [Privacy Pursuit! lesson plans](#), which we developed in 2023, as well as the [Global Privacy Assembly's International Personal Data Competency Framework for Students](#).
- Our partnership with [MediaSmarts](#), Canada's Centre for Media Literacy, has taken this work even further.
- Their soon-to-be-released digital textbooks incorporate IPC's Privacy Pursuit! lesson plans, providing students with practical guidance on privacy and online safety.
- This collaboration ensures young people develop the critical privacy skills they need as part of their formal education.

## Empowering Future Privacy Leaders

- But beyond laws, policies and programs, empowering young people *themselves* to become privacy leaders and advocates is just as essential.
- Young people are not just passive participants in the digital world — they are *shaping* it.
- That's why the IPC created a [Youth Advisory Council](#) a couple of years ago to give young people the opportunity to express their views and provide us with relevant advice from *their* perspective on how we can best advance our strategic goal related to Children and Youth in a Digital World.
- Working closely with our Youth Council, we developed a [Youth Ambassador Toolkit](#), an initiative that provides young people with tools and resources to become privacy champions in their schools and communities.
- The toolkit includes educational materials, PowerPoint presentations, social media posts, presentation tips, and FAQs, to equip our young people with the information they need to lead important conversations about digital literacy and privacy among their peers.
- At our annual [federal, provincial, and territorial meeting](#) that our office had the pleasure of hosting in Toronto last October, we invited several members of our

Youth Council to speak directly with Canada's information and privacy commissioners about their experiences in the digital world.

- My colleagues and I were really moved by what they had to say.
- They strongly — and quite directly — reinforced the urgent need for strong policies, legislation, and education programs to not only protect young people in an increasingly digital world but empower them with the knowledge and skills and agency they need to exercise their own privacy rights.
- Their passion certainly strengthened my resolve to ensure that children's privacy remains at the forefront of our advocacy work.
- And the many conversations I've had with various guests on our [Info Matters podcast](#), including with teens, young adults and educators, further confirm the need to carry on these efforts.

### **Looking Ahead to the UNICEF Event on EdTech**

- Looking ahead, in March, I plan to participate in a UNICEF Data Governance Workshop.
- This event will focus on exploring rights-based, multistakeholder models for governing data processing by educational technologies, or *EdTech*.
- This global workshop brings together data protection authorities, ministries of education, schools, private sector, civil society, *and* children to discuss existing data governance practices across different regions and sectors.
- By engaging in this workshop, we aim to contribute to the global discourse on data governance and collaborate with international partners to create a safer digital environment for children worldwide.

### **The Role of Encryption in Youth Privacy**

- Before closing, I want to circle back to the critical role that encryption plays in keeping young people safe online.
- Strong encryption enables young people to engage with technology safely, , without fear of surveillance, predatory practices, exploitation, ID theft, or data breaches.
- As we explore privacy and security solutions for the next generation, we must ensure that encryption remains a cornerstone of digital safety.

- And as we mark Safer Internet Day, I want to congratulate the Future of Privacy Forum for organizing today's event as an important step in that direction.
- With the insights from this panel of experts, we can continue to explore how encryption protects young people in their daily lives — online and beyond.
- Whether through legislation, education, or technological safeguards like encryption, we must continue working together on all these different and interrelated facets.
- The IPC remains dedicated to this mission, and I look forward to continuing our work alongside educators, policymakers, and advocates like you.
- Thank you, and I look forward to today's discussions.