

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana R. Patel, Chair
AB 2071 (Hoover) – As Introduced February 18, 2026

SUBJECT: Pupil instruction: digital wellness

SUMMARY: Requires local education agencies (LEAs) to include specified digital wellness instruction as part of existing health classes, and requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines the following:
 - a) Artificial intelligence (AI): computers systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence including gleaning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and natural language processing;
 - b) Digital wellness: a state of well-being in which an individual uses technology in ways that support physical health, mental health, social connections, and overall quality of life, while minimizing potential harms; and
 - c) Media literacy: the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication, including understanding how media messages are constructed, for what purposes, and with what effects.
- 2) Makes findings and declarations related to the omnipresence of digital technology and AI in everyday life, the risks that these technologies pose to youth mental health, and the importance of digital wellness education.
- 3) Requires LEAs that offer courses in health to students in middle school or high school to include digital wellness instruction, which shall include, but not be limited to:
 - a) Instruction on the themes and core principles of digital wellness; and
 - b) An introduction to the relationship between digital technology and mental health.
- 4) Specifies that digital wellness instruction may include, at the discretion of the teacher and as appropriate to grade level, all of the following:
 - a) The effects of excessive screen time and signs of unhealthy technology use;
 - b) Strategies for building healthy digital habits and managing technology use;
 - c) Online safety, including recognizing cyberbullying, protecting personal information, and understanding the lasting consequences of digital actions;
 - d) Evaluating digital content credibility and recognizing misleading or manipulative information;

- e) Awareness of AI, including recognizing AI-generated content and understanding that AI can reflect biases;
 - f) Positive uses of technology to support well being, connection, and learning; and
 - g) School and community resources for addressing digital wellness concerns.
- 5) Requires the CDE to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction in California public schools, on or before January 1, 2028. The plan shall include all of the following:
- a) Recommendations for age-appropriate curriculum frameworks for middle schools and high schools;
 - b) Strategies for keeping curriculum current rapidly evolving digital and AI technology;
 - c) Guidance for schools with limited technology resources;
 - d) Family engagement and education components;
 - e) Assessment methods of reevaluating program effectiveness; and
 - f) Collaboration with professional development opportunities with technology companies, mental health organizations, and media literacy experts.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Defines AI as an engineered or machine-based system that varies in its level of autonomy and that can, for explicit or implicit objectives, infer, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs that can influence physical or virtual environments. (Education Code (EC) 33328.5)
- 2) Defines media literacy as the ability to access, evaluate, analyze, and use media and information, and encompasses the foundational skills that lead to digital citizenship. (EC 180101)
- 3) Requires the State Board of Education (SBE) Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to consider including media literacy content into the mathematics, science, and history-social science curriculum frameworks when they are next revised. (EC 33548)
- 4) Requires the CDE to maintain on its website a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy, including media literacy professional development programs for teachers. (EC 51206.4)
- 5) Establishes the California Public Schools AI Working Group, and requires it to assess and release guidance on the safe use of AI in public schools. (EC 33328.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has been keyed as a possible state mandated local program by the Office of Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “In today’s digital landscape, you cannot consider mental health concerns without considering the impact of digital media. Digital literacy is directly contributing to our ongoing mental health crisis, and students deserve access to the tools and education needed to prepare them for safe digital citizenship. As a state, we are failing to meet students at this critical moment in their development. With the right skills, students are empowered to navigate digital spaces with confidence and discernment.”

Existing digital wellness resources. Digital wellness has not previously been defined by the CDE or in California statute. However, many of the key concepts and skills identified by the author as digital wellness also fall under existing definitions of media literacy and digital citizenship. The CDE maintains several resources on both.

Related to media literacy, the CDE provides several resources for LEAs and educators on its website. These include:

- Three online library databases available free of cost: the Encyclopedia Britannica, ProQuest, and TeachingBooks.net. Some of these, such as the *Fight the Fake with Britannica School Insights* Chrome extension, can be directly used to support digital wellness;
- Examples of media literacy education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels;
- Ready-made curricula from 12 different organizations, including national programs and California standards;
- A variety of resources, including lessons, units, videos, and other supporting materials, on topics relating to distance learning, media literacy, digital citizenship, and information literacy. Many of the provided collections are searchable by grade or topic;
- Resources related to education through media production, such as *Radio Rookies: The basics of audio journalism curriculum*, and information related to the California Student Media Festival; and
- Professional development organizations and opportunities related to media literacy training for educators, such as the International Society for Technology in Education and the PBS Media Literacy Educator certification.

Related to digital citizenship, the CDE provides the following resources on its website:

- Links to digital citizenship curricula and ready-made lesson plans for students in grades kindergarten through twelve;
- A discussion of the relationship between digital citizenship and mental health;
- Events that support digital citizenship;
- Informational resources hosted by partner organizations; and

- Information related to the CDE’s annual Digital Citizenship Week.

Many of the above resources are intended for use by educators, who have become increasingly responsible for teaching digital wellness content, and for identifying and responding to students struggling with digital wellness-related issues. As such, it is important that educators are provided with tools and trainings needed to best utilize these resources and keep up with this rapidly expanding field. ***The Committee may wish to consider amending the bill to*** clarify that the SPI shall include recommendations for professional development opportunities for educators in the digital wellness plan.

How California changes school curricula. The Legislature has vested the IQC and the SBE with the authority to develop and adopt state curriculum and instructional materials. The IQC develops curriculum frameworks in each subject by convening expert panels, developing drafts, and holding public hearings to solicit input. Changes are frequently made in response to public comment. The SBE then adopts the frameworks in a public meeting. The SBE also adopts, in a public process, instructional materials aligned to those frameworks for grades K-8. School district governing boards and charter schools then adopt instructional materials aligned to these standards and frameworks. This process has traditionally occurred on a regular schedule, giving schools a predictable timetable to plan and budget for changes to the curriculum. Local adoption of new curricula involves significant local costs, including resources for professional development.

These existing processes involve practitioners and experts who have an in-depth understanding of curriculum and instruction, including the full scope and sequence of the curriculum in each subject and at each grade level, constraints on instructional time and resources, and the relationship of curriculum to state assessments and other measures of student progress.

A study of the California curriculum development and adoption process is underway. The 2025-26 budget, through AB 121 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 8, Statutes of 2025, included \$1 million for a study on the processes by which other states develop curriculum guidance, and to make recommendations about how to improve and streamline California’s processes. This report is to be completed by January 1, 2027.

The report is required to include, among other topics:

- The roles and responsibilities of the CDE, the IQC, the SBE, the Legislature, LEAs, educators, parents and guardians, and the public; and
- The processes and cycles for developing, revising, and adopting content standards, curriculum frameworks, and other instructional guidance, and how available instructional time in elementary and secondary schools is considered.

Veto message states that changes to curriculum should wait until the study is complete and recommendations are adopted. In 2025, the Governor vetoed AB 86 (Boerner), which would have required the SBE to adopt instructional materials for health education for kindergarten through 8th grade, on or before July 1, 2028, with the following message:

The Budget Act of 2025 authorized a Curriculum Guidance Study to evaluate and improve the current state-level curriculum guidance adoption process to improve efficiency and

consistency across all content areas. Proposals like AB 86 should only be considered after this study is complete and changes to the process are adopted. In the meantime, local governing boards continue to have the authority to evaluate and select a range of materials that align with the state standards and the associated curriculum framework.

Given that curricula changes in California are currently managed by the IQC, in a process that is under review, ***staff recommends the bill be amended*** to remove the requirement that digital wellness be integrated into existing health curricula.

Arguments in support. According to the organization GenUp, “California's young people are navigating an increasingly complex digital landscape characterized by social media algorithms, AI-generated content, cyberbullying, online misinformation, and smartphone overuse — often with little formal guidance from their schools. Research increasingly links unhealthy or excessive technology use with anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and other mental health challenges among adolescents.

California schools already require mental health instruction in health education courses, but that mandate does not consistently address the digital environments where many of today's mental health challenges originate. AB 2071 helps close this gap by ensuring students learn practical skills for navigating technology safely, critically, and mindfully. We believe digital wellness is vital for students' health and academic success.”

Recommend Committee Amendments. Staff recommends that the bill be amended as follows:

- 1) Remove the provisions that would require digital wellness instruction be incorporated into health curriculum.
- 2) Clarify that the plan developed by the SPI shall include recommendations to ensure adequate support and professional development opportunities for teachers regarding digital wellness topics.

Related legislation.

AB 1644 (Muratsuchi) of the 2025-26 Session requires a bell-to-bell ban on student cell phone use.

AB 1700 (Lowenthal) of the 2025-26 Session establishes an eSafety commission that is responsible for online safety.

AB 2159 (Garcia) of the 2025-26 Session requires the CDE to develop cyberbullying education, counseling, or trainings that a local educational agency may access. It would further require a student who engages in repeated acts of cyberbullying or is suspended for cyberbullying, along with their parent or guardian, to participate in a program of rehabilitative cyberbullying education, counseling, or training.

SB 1288 (Becker), Chapter 893 of the Statutes of 2024, requires the CDE to convene a working AI, and requires that working group to develop expanded guidance and a model policy on AI for use by LEAs and charter schools.

AB 873 (Berman), Chapter 815, Statutes of 2023, requires that, when the English Language Arts/English Language Development curriculum framework is next revised, the IQC consider incorporating the Model Library Standards, and consider media literacy standards at each grade level; and requires the IQC to consider incorporating media literacy content into the mathematics, science, and history-social science curriculum frameworks when those frameworks are next revised.

AB 787 (Gabriel) of the 2023-24 Session would have required the SPI, in consultation with the SBE and an advisory committee, to identify best practices and recommendations for instruction in digital citizenship and media literacy and to report these recommendations to the Legislature, and to conduct a survey on the ways in which digital citizenship and media literacy education is being integrated into the curriculum. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 2284 (Gabriel) of the 2021-22 Session would have required the state Superintendent of Public Instruction to allocate funding to school districts, county offices of education, charter schools, and the state special schools, for the purchase of standards-aligned instructional materials in media literacy and digital literacy and for professional development in that content. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 2064 (Irwin) of the 2021-22 Session would have established the Media Literacy Through Critical Thinking Program in the California State Library for purposes of supporting media literacy across multiple languages for individuals and developing media literacy skills for individuals to help navigate issues of public health and representation. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB 830 (Dodd), Chapter 448, Statutes of 2018, requires the CDE to make available to school districts on its website a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy, including media literacy professional development programs for teachers.

SB 135 (Dodd) of the 2017-18 Session would have required the IQC to develop, and the SBE to adopt, reject, or modify, a model curriculum in media literacy. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB 155 (Gomez) of the 2017-18 Session would have required the IQC to develop a model curriculum in media literacy, and would have required the CDE to develop an online professional development module to support the model curriculum. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Alameda County Office of Education
California Alliance for Media Literacy
California Association of Student Councils
California Catholic Conference
California Student Media Festival
Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research (CLEAR)

California Federation of Teachers
Children Now
Critical Media Project
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Family Online Safety Institute
GenUp
Jeff Share (UCLA)
Media Education Lab
Media Literacy Now
Merek Chang (hacienda LA Puente Unified)
National Ai Youth Council
National Association for Media Arts Education
Scaling Student Success
Student Wellness Education and Resources
Technet
Youth and Media Insights Lab
Youth Power Project

Opposition

None on file.

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