

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 2071 (Hoover)
As Amended April 13, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction in public schools on or before January 1, 2028.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires the CDE to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction in California public schools, on or before January 1, 2028. Requires the plan to include:
 - a) Recommendations for age-appropriate curriculum frameworks for middle schools and high schools;
 - b) Strategies for keeping curriculum current with evolving digital and AI technology;
 - c) Guidance for schools with limited technology resources;
 - d) Family engagement and education components;
 - e) Assessment methods for evaluating program effectiveness; and
 - f) Strategies for ensuring adequate support and professional development for educators regarding digital wellness, including collaboration with technology companies, mental health organizations, and media literacy experts, as appropriate.
- 2) 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.

COMMENTS

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 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 local education agencies (LEAs) and educators on its website. These include:

- 1) Three online library databases available for free: the Encyclopedia Britannica, ProQuest, and TeachingBooks.net. These databases include resources that can be directly used to support digital wellness, such as the *Fight the Fake with Britannica School Insights* Chrome extension.
- 2) Examples of media literacy education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels;
- 3) Ready-made curricula from 12 different organizations, including national programs and California standards;
- 4) Resources such as 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;
- 5) 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
- 6) Professional development organizations and opportunities related to educator media literacy training, 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:

- 1) Links to digital citizenship curricula and ready-made lesson plans for students in grades kindergarten through twelve;
- 2) A discussion of the relationship between digital citizenship and mental health;
- 3) Events that support digital citizenship;
- 4) Informational resources hosted by partner organizations; and
- 5) Information related to the CDE's annual Digital Citizenship Week.

Many of the above resources, which are already provided by the CDE to LEAs and educators, could be used to support digital wellness instruction.

A study of the California curriculum development and adoption process is underway. This bill would require the CDE to make recommendations for digital wellness curriculum frameworks.

The Legislature has vested the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) and the State Board of Education (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.

The 2025-26 budget, through AB 121 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 8, Statutes of 2025, included \$1 million to study the processes by which other states develop curriculum guidance and make recommendations about how to improve California's processes.

According to the Author

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."

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."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to Assembly Appropriations Committee, "Minor and absorbable costs to the CDE."

VOTES

ASM EDUCATION: 9-0-0

YES: Patel, Hoover, Alvarez, Bonta, Castillo, Garcia, Lowenthal, Pellerin, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Arambula

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