
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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| Bill No: | AB 2071 | Hearing Date: | July 1, 2026 |
| Author: | Hoover | | |
| Version: | June 22, 2026 | | |
| Urgency: | No | Fiscal: | Yes |
| Consultant: | Therresa Austin | | |

Subject: Pupil instruction: digital wellness.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction in California public schools.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Defines “artificial intelligence (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 in 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)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires the CDE, on or before January 1, 2028, to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction in California public schools. Requires that the plan include all of the following:

- a) Recommendations for age-appropriate instructional resources for elementary, middle school, and high schools.
 - b) Strategies for keeping curriculum current with rapidly evolving digital and AI technology.
 - c) Guidance for schools with limited technology resources.
 - d) Family engagement and education components
 - e) Assessment methods for evaluating instruction effectiveness.
 - f) Strategies for ensuring adequate support and professional development opportunities for educators regarding digital wellness topics, including collaborating with technology companies, mental health organizations, and media literacy experts, as appropriate.
- 2) Establishes several definitions for the purposes of this bill:
- a) “Artificial intelligence,” pursuant to existing statute, means 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.
 - b) “Digital wellness” means 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.
 - c) “Media literacy” means 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.
- 3) Makes a series of legislative findings and declarations related to the importance of comprehensive digital wellness education and the challenges students face due to the increasing presence of digital technology and AI in a student’s daily life.
- 4) Establishes the Legislature’s intent to ensure that pupils in elementary school, middle school, and high school can benefit from comprehensive education on digital wellness, media literacy, and the responsible use of emerging technologies, including AI.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***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.”

- 2) ***The IQC and the SBE.*** This bill requires the CDE to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction in California public schools. 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 through a process involving 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. Changes are frequently made in response to public comment. The frameworks are then adopted by the SBE in a public meeting.

The resulting curriculum framework is intended to serve as a guidance document for educators and administrators on how to plan for and provide quality, skills-based, standards-aligned instruction on the various content areas.

This bill does not require schools to provide any particular instruction. Further, recent author amendments clarified that the bill would not require any changes or additions to existing curriculum frameworks.

- 3) ***Digital wellness-related content in the Health Framework.*** This bill requires the CDE to develop a plan to expand digital wellness instruction in California public schools. It further defines digital wellness as 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.

While digital wellness is not currently referenced in Education Code or elsewhere in California statute, many related concepts and skills contained within this bill's proposed definition can be found in the 2019 Health Education Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (the Framework). Such examples include the following:

- a) In the Transitional Kindergarten (TK) through 3rd grade span, teachers begin facilitating conversations on internet safety, “netiquette”, and the importance of using the internet for good purposes, and how their actions online may impact others. When discussing bullying and encouraging students to promote a positive and respectful school environment, teachers explain that this also applies to internet usage and behavior online and through social media.
- b) In the 4th to 6th grade span, students examine television, radio, online, social media, and billboard ads to learn about the past and present strategies and tactics advertisers use to influence people. They also build on their foundational knowledge of internet safety to better understand the dangers of cyberbullying, cyberstalking, grooming, as well as the importance of seeking the help of a trusted adult when feeling personally

threatened or unsafe. Students also learn strategies to support whole family health by sharing screen-time tracking charts with their parents or creating activity plans such as walking after dinner or bicycling together to reduce screen time.

- c) In the 7th to 8th grade span, students learn about responsible decision-making to balance the greater levels of independence and responsibility that they may be experiencing. This includes establishing a healthy balance between technology and social media use and peer dynamics. Students may also build on their knowledge of how media influences people by analyzing online advertisements and photos from popular teen websites to understand how such images can impact one's body image, and realistic perception of beauty.
- a) In the 9th to 12th grade span, students learn about coping mechanisms for stress management from research, their peers, and their teacher and are encouraged to identify goals for handling stress in healthy ways such as meditation, mindfulness, taking a break from social media or technology, talking about your problems or worries to a trusted adult, decreasing negative self-talk, or breaking seemingly large tasks into small tasks. Students also learn more about forms of abuse that can be carried out through technology, including cyber stalking, the sharing of explicit photographs and/or video with others or posting online, possession or distribution of child pornography, demanding email or social media passwords, and taking photographs of someone without their knowledge.

Health education content is required for students in all grade levels; however, *how* the content is delivered is the decision of LEAs. LEAs have the authority to determine whether to provide a standalone health education course, the length of that course, and whether it is a graduation requirement.

- 4) ***Existing resources for digital citizenship.*** Digital citizenship is the safe and responsible use of technology and online behavior modeled by students and adults. The CDE maintains an information page on digital citizenship and its nexus to mental health. As noted on its page, the CDE aims to support the efforts of adults such as educators and caregivers to model and provide safe and responsible online learning environments for students. The CDE's goal is to offer guidance by sharing and curating vetted resources for students, families, and educators to leverage in daily practices so that students feel supported, respected, and valued. These resources include:
 - a) Links to digital citizenship curricula and ready-made lesson plans for students in grades kindergarten through twelve;
 - b) A discussion of the relationship between digital citizenship and mental health;
 - c) Events that support digital citizenship;
 - d) Informational resources hosted by partner organizations; and

- e) Information related to the CDE's annual Digital Citizenship Week.
- 5) ***Existing resources for AI and media literacy.*** Media literacy, as defined in this bill and existing statute, is 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. In recent years, the Legislature has advanced several pieces of legislation to enhance media literacy instruction.
- a) SB 830 (Dodd, Chapter 448, Statutes of 2018) required the CDE to create a resource page on its website with a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy and related professional development programs for teachers. These resources are intended to ensure that young adults are prepared with media literacy skills necessary to safely, responsibly, and critically consume and use social media and other forms of media.
- b) AB 873 (Berman, Chapter 815, Statutes of 2023) requires the IQC to consider incorporating the Model School Library Standards (MSLS) and media literacy content at each grade level when the English language arts/English language development (ELA/ELD) curriculum framework is next revised and media literacy content into the mathematics, science, and history-social science curriculum frameworks when those frameworks are next revised after January 1, 2024.
- c) AB 2876 (Berman, Chapter 927, Statutes of 2024) requires the IQC to consider AI literacy, as defined, to be included in the mathematics, science, and history-social science curriculum frameworks and instructional materials, as specified.
- d) SB 1288 (Becker, Chapter 893, Statutes of 2024) requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to convene the California Public Schools: AI Working Group to develop guidance and model policy for the safe, equitable, and effective use of AI in schools. The AI Work Group includes educators, students, administrators, classified staff, higher education representatives, and industry experts. Members meet publicly to develop statewide guidance and a model policy, addressing topics such as data privacy, academic integrity, professional development, equitable access, and effective classroom integration. The final guidance and model policy report is due to the Legislature on or before January 1, 2027.

Pursuant to these bills, the CDE maintains various resource pages with guidance; sample learning goals, activities, and prompts; examples of standards aligned instruction; links to free online databases and tools for student research; and contacts for organizations that offer professional development opportunities.

6) ***Prior and related legislation.***

SB 1133 (Strickland, 2026) would require the IQC to consider including information on evidence-based preventative health instruction, including digital

balance, at the next regularly scheduled revision of the Health Education Framework. *SB 1133 is currently in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.*

AB 1644 (Muratsuchi, 2026) would require the governing board or body of an LEA to adopt a policy to prohibit pupil smartphone use for pupils in TK kindergarten, and grades 1 to 8, inclusive, and requires the CDE to conduct a statewide study and report on LEA smartphone policies. *AB 1644 is set for the same hearing as AB 2071 in this Committee.*

SB 1128 (Stern, 2026) would prohibit LEAs from requiring a pupil in kindergarten to take home a school issued electronic device. The bill also requires the CDE to develop and post on its internet website, model policies for the age-appropriate use of school-issued electronic devices in schools, as specified. *SB 1128 is pending a hearing in the Assembly Education Committee.*

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

AB 2876 (Berman, Chapter 927, Statutes of 2024) requires the IQC to consider AI literacy, as defined, to be included in the mathematics, science, and history-social science curriculum frameworks and instructional materials, as specified.

SB 830 (Dodd, Chapter 448, Statutes of 2018) requires CDE to make available to school districts on its internet website, by July 1, 2019, a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy, including media literacy professional development programs for teachers.

SUPPORT

End Chronic Disease (co-sponsor)
GenUp (co-sponsor)
Alameda County Office of Education
Association of California School Administrators
California Alliance for Media Literacy
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Catholic Conference
California State PTA
California Student Media Festival
Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research
CFT – A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
Critical Media Project
Digital4Good
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Media Literacy Now
National AI Youth Council
National Association for Media Arts Education
TechNet
Youth and Media Insights Lab

OPPOSITION

None received

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