

SENATE PRIVACY, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION COMMITTEE
Senator Christopher Cabaldon, Chair
2025-2026 Regular Session

AB 302 (Bauer-Kahan)
Version: June 11, 2026
Hearing Date: June 29, 2026
Fiscal: No
Urgency: No
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SUBJECT

Pupil and parental communication: extracurricular activities: addictive feeds

DIGEST

This bill prohibits local educational agencies (LEAs) from excluding pupils from activities based on not having or using “addictive feeds” and from using such feeds as the only means of communicating with pupils and their families.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People around the world use social media to connect with like-minded others, find various resources, and entertain themselves. However, these benefits did not come without a heavy price: a price that is felt the most by children. Youth mental health problems are skyrocketing, while digital consumption only increases. Social media use has been linked to increasing depression, anxiety, suicidality, eating disorders, and countless other harmful effects. Concerns have arisen that schools and school activities are increasingly relying on social media as the core tool for communication and participation.

This bill ensures that LEAs are not forcing children and their families into “addictive feeds” found on social media platforms and other websites in order to take part in a school community. Specifically, the bill prohibits LEAs from excluding a pupil from participating in any extracurricular activity, including sports and clubs, due to the pupil not having or using addictive feeds and from using addictive feeds as the only means of contacting pupils or pupils’ parents or guardians.

The bill is author-sponsored. It is supported by several advocacy groups, including Common Sense Media. No timely opposition was received by the Committee. The bill passed out of the Senate Education Committee on a vote of 6 to 0.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAW

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Protecting Our Kids from Social Media Addiction Act, prohibits an operator of an addictive internet-based service or application, including a social media platform, from providing an addictive feed, as defined, to a minor user. (Health & Saf. Code § 27000 et seq.)
- 2) Defines “addictive feed” as an internet website, online service, online application, or mobile application, or a portion thereof, in which multiple pieces of media generated or shared by users are, either concurrently or sequentially, recommended, selected, or prioritized for display to a user based, in whole or in part, on information provided by the user, or otherwise associated with the user or the user’s device, unless any of the following conditions are met, alone or in combination with one another:
 - a) The information is not persistently associated with the user or user’s device and does not concern the user’s previous interactions with media generated or shared by others.
 - b) The information consists of search terms that are not persistently associated with the user or user’s device.
 - c) The information consists of user-selected privacy or accessibility settings, technical information concerning the user’s device, or device communications or signals concerning whether the user is a minor.
 - d) The user expressly and unambiguously requested the specific media or media by the author, creator, or poster of the media, or the blocking, prioritization, or deprioritization of such media, provided that the media is not recommended, selected, or prioritized for display based, in whole or in part, on other information associated with the user or the user’s device, except as otherwise permitted by this chapter and, in the case of audio or video content, is not automatically played.
 - e) The media consists of direct, private communications between users.
 - f) The media recommended, selected, or prioritized for display is exclusively the next media in a preexisting sequence from the same author, creator, poster, or source and, in the case of audio or video content, is not automatically played.
 - g) The recommendation, selection, or prioritization of the media is necessary to comply with the act. (Health & Saf. Code § 27000.5(a).)
- 3) Requires, for purposes of the Protecting Our Kids from Social Media Addiction Act, the Attorney General to adopt regulations regarding age assurance by January 1, 2027. (Health & Saf. Code § 27006(b).)

- 4) Requires the governing board of a school district that maintains one or more schools containing any of grades 7 to 12, inclusive, to establish a school district policy regarding participation in extracurricular and cocurricular activities by pupils in grades 7 to 12, inclusive. (Educ. Code § 35160.5(a).)
- 5) Defines “extracurricular activity” as a program that has all of the following characteristics:
 - a) The program is supervised or financed by the school district.
 - b) Pupils participating in the program represent the school district.
 - c) Pupils exercise some degree of freedom in either the selection, planning, or control of the program.
 - d) The program includes both preparation for performance and performance before an audience or spectators. (Educ. Code § 35160.5(a)(1).)

This bill:

- 1) Prohibits, commencing with the 2027–28 school year, an LEA from excluding a pupil from participating in any extracurricular activity, including sports and clubs, due to the pupil not having or using addictive feeds.
- 2) Prohibits, commencing with the 2027–28 school year, an LEA from using addictive feeds as the only means of contacting pupils or pupils’ parents or guardians.
- 3) Defines “addictive feed” in line with existing law. “Local educational agency” means a school district, county office of education, or charter school.

COMMENTS

1. Addictive feeds and their effects

In 2023, the Office of the Surgeon General published an advisory on social media and youth mental health. As it relates to problematic use, the Surgeon General’s advisory notes:

Excessive and problematic social media use, such as compulsive or uncontrollable use, has been linked to sleep problems, attention problems, and feelings of exclusion among adolescents. Sleep is essential for the healthy development of adolescents. A systematic review of 42 studies on the effects of excessive social media use found a consistent relationship between social media use and poor sleep quality, reduced sleep duration, sleep difficulties, and depression among youth. Poor sleep has been linked to altered neurological development in adolescent brains, depressive symptoms, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. On a typical weekday,

nearly 1-in-3 adolescents report using screen media until midnight or later. While screen media use encompasses various digital activities, social media applications are the most commonly used applications by adolescents.

In a recent narrative review of multiple studies, problematic social media use has also been linked to both self-reported and diagnosed attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in adolescents, although more research is necessary to understand whether one causes the other. A longitudinal prospective study of adolescents without ADHD symptoms at the beginning of the study found that, over a 2-year follow-up, high-frequency use of digital media, with social media as one of the most common activities, was associated with a modest yet statistically significant increased odds of developing ADHD symptoms (OR 1.10; 95% CI, 1.05-1.15). Additionally, social media-induced fear of missing out, or “the pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent,” has been associated with depression, anxiety, and neuroticism.¹

A New York Times article exposed how leadership at Facebook designed its platforms to achieve these outcomes :

To achieve its record-setting growth, [Facebook] had continued building on its core technology, making business decisions based on how many hours of the day people spent on Facebook and how many times a day they returned. Facebook’s algorithms didn’t measure if the magnetic force pulling them back to Facebook was the habit of wishing a friend happy birthday, or a rabbit hole of conspiracies and misinformation.

Facebook’s problems were features, not bugs.²

Released documents from Instagram make clear that “Facebook is acutely aware that the products and systems central to its business success routinely fail”:

The features that Instagram identifies as most harmful to teens appear to be at the platform’s core.

The tendency to share only the best moments, a pressure to look perfect and an addictive product can send teens spiraling toward eating

¹ *Social Media and Youth Mental Health* (2023) Office of the Surgeon General, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK594759/>. All internet citations are current as of June 23, 2026.

² Sheera Frenkel & Cecilia Kang, *Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg’s Partnership Did Not Survive Trump* (July 8, 2021) *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/08/business/mark-zuckerberg-sheryl-sandberg-facebook.html>.

disorders, an unhealthy sense of their own bodies and depression, March 2020 internal research states. It warns that the Explore page, which serves users photos and videos curated by an algorithm, can send users deep into content that can be harmful.

“Aspects of Instagram exacerbate each other to create a perfect storm,” the research states.³

The referenced documents revealed that Facebook’s own internal research found “1 in 8 of its users reported compulsive social media use that interfered with their sleep, work, and relationships — what the social media platform calls ‘problematic use’ but is more commonly known as ‘internet addiction.’”⁴

There are various features of social media that are believed to contribute to excessive social media use and preoccupation and attendant mental health issues in children, and that are repeatedly highlighted as the most problematic for users, especially children. They are pinpointed by academic research,⁵ and lawsuits brought by most states’ Attorneys General,⁶ as the core of the problem. These include the display of “likes” and other feedback on posted media that drive minors’ unhealthy comparisons to others and their obsessive usage. In addition, the constant notifications that are sent to users nudge them back onto a platform throughout the day and night to seek the next hit of dopamine. The biggest and most central of them all is the algorithmic feeds that are fueled by a user’s own information and inferences drawn from their past behavior and data collected from other sources. While these features can effectively serve up content curated for a user’s personal tastes and create social connections among users, it is these types of features that are most concerning to advocates for reform. The addictive features of online sites and services are the target of this bill.

2. Addressing addictive feeds

The Legislature has responded to the addictive nature of these websites, applications, and services. SB 976 (Skinner, Ch. 321, Stats. 2024) prohibited operators of “internet-based services or applications” from providing “addictive feeds” to minors without parental consent and from sending notifications to minors at night and during school

³ Georgia Wells et al., *Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show* (September 14, 2021) The Wall Street Journal, https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=article_inline.

⁴ Kim Lyons, *Facebook reportedly is aware of the level of ‘problematic use’ among its users* (November 6, 2021) The Verge, www.theverge.com/2021/11/6/22766935/facebook-meta-aware-problematic-use-addiction-wellbeing.

⁵ Kirsten Weir, *Social media brings benefits and risks to teens. Here’s how psychology can help identify a path forward* (September 1, 2023) American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/09/protecting-teens-on-social-media>.

⁶ Matt Richtel, *Is Social Media Addictive? Here’s What the Science Says* (October 25, 2023) The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/25/health/social-media-addiction.html>.

hours without parental consent, as provided. SB 976 required operators to make available to parents a series of protective measures for controlling access to and features of the platform for their children. It also required reporting on data regarding children on their platforms, as specified. The law remains in effect despite ongoing litigation.⁷

This bill, using the definition provided in SB 976, seeks to ensure that LEAs are not driving children to the very feeds the Legislature is seeking to protect children from. The bill prohibits LEAs from excluding pupils from participating in any extracurricular activity, including sports and clubs, due to the pupil not having or using addictive feeds. It also prohibits LEAs from using addictive feeds as the only method of contacting pupils or pupils' parents or guardians.

According to the author:

Schools are increasingly reliant on social media and addictive feeds for communication and networking with students and families. Children are forced to join addictive platforms in order to participate in school clubs and activities that enrich their school experience. By forcing teens onto platforms which prey on them, schools are feeding into the increasing mental health crisis largely caused by social media usage. AB 302 prohibits schools from using addictive feeds as the sole form of communication with students or parents/guardians and ensures that students have access to after school clubs and activities without having to join potentially dangerous platforms.

Writing in support, a coalition of advocacy groups, including Distraction-Free Schools California, argues:

Students and families who choose to avoid social media should have equal access to educational opportunities, athletics, clubs, and school communications. By requiring schools to provide alternative methods of communication and participation, AB 302 protects parental choice, promotes inclusion, and helps ensure that no student is disadvantaged because their family has concerns about the effects of social media on youth wellbeing.

3. Amendments

Amendments were agreed to by the author in the Senate Education Committee. Due to timing, those amendments will be taken in this Committee. Those amendments simply encourage LEAs to inform pupils and pupils' parents or guardians about the pupils'

⁷ *NetChoice, LLC v. Bonta* (9th Cir. 2025) 152 F.4th 1002, 1025.

rights provided by the bill in their pupil handbook or a similar document made generally available to pupils and their parents or guardians.

SUPPORT

Common Sense Media
Distraction-Free Schools California
Healthier-TECH
Parent Collective
Schools Beyond Screens
ScreenSense
SMUSD Parents for Intentional Tech

OPPOSITION

None received

RELATED LEGISLATION

AB 2 (Lowenthal, 2025) increases the penalties that can be sought against a social media platform, as defined, if the platform fails to exercise ordinary care or skill and injures a child. AB 2 is currently in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

SB 976 (Skinner, Ch. 321, Stats. 2024) *See* Comment 2.

AB 3216 (Hoover, Ch. 500, Stats. 2024) required a governing board of an LEA to develop, adopt, and update every five years a policy, as specified, to limit or prohibit the use by its pupils of smartphones while the pupils are at a schoolsite or while the pupils are under the supervision and control of an employee of that LEA.

AB 2273 (Wicks, Ch. 320, Stats. 2022) established the California Age-Appropriate Design Code Act, placing a series of obligations and restrictions on businesses that provide online services, products, or features likely to be accessed by children. This includes a prohibition on using the personal information of any child in a way that the business knows or has reason to know is materially detrimental to the physical health, mental health, or well-being of a child. It also requires these businesses to “[e]stimate the age of child users with a reasonable level of certainty appropriate to the risks that arise from the data management practices of the business or apply the privacy and data protections afforded to children to all consumers.”

AB 2408 (Cunningham, 2022) would have prohibited a social media platform from using a design, feature, or affordance that the platform knew, or which by the exercise of reasonable care it should have known, causes child users to become addicted to the platform. AB 2408 died in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

PRIOR VOTES:

Senate Education Committee (Ayes 6, Noes 0)

Additional votes irrelevant to the current version of the bill
