



U.S.
MEDIA LITERACY
POLICY
REPORT 2023

A State-by-State Status of
Media Literacy Education Laws
for K–12 Schools

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Media Literacy Now is a nonprofit advocacy organization that leverages the passion and resources of the media literacy community to inform and drive policy change at local, state, and national levels in the U.S. to ensure all K-12 students are taught media literacy so that they become healthy, confident, and competent media consumers and creators.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With quickly advancing technology, the stakes are going up for media literacy education. Without media literacy skills, anyone can be subject to manipulation and exploitation. The experience of young people online, where anyone can reach them at any time, is becoming more risky. AI and the ability to artificially generate realistic audio and video is a huge new challenge. However, awareness of the media literacy solution is also growing rapidly. This was the year that media literacy reached critical mass. There is far more widespread acceptance today than ever that media literacy instruction is essential to K–12 education. This report shows the significant progress of state-level policymakers as well as other organizations and key institutions and individuals to recognize an urgent and serious need for education and to take action.

The policymakers who set the direction for education nationwide are stepping up. Legislatures in more than half the states have held hearings or votes on media literacy education in committees or debated on the floor of statehouses. Eighteen state governors have signed bills concerning K–12 media literacy or digital citizenship education, and one legislature has passed two resolutions. We're now counting 19 state legislatures that have taken action.

The headline for 2023 is that California, with the largest K–12 school population in the country, has taken a significant step. California passed a comprehensive media literacy law that will redirect priorities and funding to media literacy curriculum and professional development. That is a major advancement that will reverberate across the country.

Meanwhile, there are more and more calls for state policymakers to take action: The U.S. Surgeon General, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, and the American Psychological Association have issued calls in 2023 for K–12 media literacy education policy to address a growing problem of student health and wellness related to internet and social media use.

State education agencies are also taking action: 75% of states acknowledge the importance of media literacy in social studies and civics education, according to a CivXNow survey.

We have evaluated legislative action in 2023 to identify states where lawmakers have taken steps that show they are taking media literacy education for all students seriously.

Here are the changes we have seen this year:

California, with its 6.7 million public school students and \$130 billion education budget, has passed a comprehensive media literacy law.

Connecticut became the latest state with a media literacy education mandate, in social studies. Connecticut also directed funding.

Florida's new law on social media will provide essential learning for media literacy for the state's nearly three million public school students.

New Mexico, one of the earliest states to pass media literacy legislation, is now requiring professional development.

Please note that we've re-evaluated some of our former decisions. We've added Virginia's internet safety law as a media literacy law. When considering that Virginia's House and Senate passed a more comprehensive approach on a wide bipartisan vote that the governor rejected, Virginia's legislature deserves credit for elevating media literacy as a priority. We have changed the Texas evaluation: Texas has a mandate for school districts but does not explicitly state that it has a requirement for every grade level. The Hawaii House and Senate issued a concurrent resolution on media literacy in 2022 and reissued a resolution in 2023. Therefore, we consider this the stated policy of the Hawaii state legislature, although they are not statutory laws.

Here are the states that MLN considers to have taken significant steps toward comprehensive media literacy education through the legislative process:

- CALIFORNIA
- DELAWARE
- FLORIDA
- NEW JERSEY
- OHIO
- TEXAS
- WASHINGTON

These are the other states that have advanced media literacy education through the legislative process:

- COLORADO
- CONNECTICUT
- HAWAII
- ILLINOIS
- MASSACHUSETTS
- MINNESOTA
- NEBRASKA
- NEW MEXICO
- RHODE ISLAND
- TENNESSEE
- UTAH
- VIRGINIA

The following states have legislation pending:

- ARIZONA
- INDIANA
- MASSACHUSETTS
- MISSOURI
- NEW HAMPSHIRE
- NEW YORK
- OKLAHOMA
- PENNSYLVANIA
- RHODE ISLAND

This report also includes case studies of implementation in Washington, Illinois, Delaware, and New Jersey.

Another area that needs attention is student-teacher preparation and continuing professional development for teachers. It's important to highlight those that are already acting in that direction. Our analysis of state regulations found four states with substantial media literacy requirements for teacher credentialing or preparation programs:

- GEORGIA
- MINNESOTA
- NEW HAMPSHIRE
- VIRGINIA

This report highlights the need for research and evaluation of policies and implementation. To continue advancing effective media literacy policies, we need research on how media literacy statutory guidance is being implemented, and we need student skills testing. These steps will allow us to give a true picture of what media literacy education looks like across the country and enable comparison between states.

We have also provided a definitions section to parse related terms to help advocates, educators, journalists, and policymakers navigate the terrain of literacy in the 21st century. We have included our thinking around terms that are closely interrelated.

There is much more to be done. The report also highlights the steps that a range of people can take, including parents, students, teachers, administrators, policymakers, journalists, and concerned citizens.



INTRODUCTION

Media messages have powerful shaping effects on individuals and society, influencing how we think, feel, and behave. These effects are further exaggerated by our constant inundation with media messages. With so many sources of information, we need the skills to find reliable and credible information to help make decisions for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

The barriers to media access and production have lessened, so people of all ages, geographies, and economic status are producing and distributing media. Social media, in particular, has benefited us with more opportunities for social connection, education, entertainment, and exchange of ideas. It has also given content creators a direct and often unmoderated link to our youth, putting their physical and mental well-being at risk.

Media literacy is modern-day literacy. Simply teaching students to read is insufficient in a world where they can read, view, and listen to content produced by anyone, including AI. An Education Week Research Center **survey** in 2023 found that 77% of K-12 educators surveyed said they are not prepared to teach students “the skills they need to be successful in an AI-powered world.” Media literacy is an essential life skill that, once learned, can be applied to any content, including AI-generated content.

Media literacy education continues to be a nonpartisan, nonpolitical issue with champions across the political spectrum. Legislation has been sponsored by members of both parties, and most legislation that passes earns votes from both parties. Our elected leaders recognize that, regardless of political persuasion or background, anyone can be vulnerable to manipulative information in all its forms.

This report documents state progress and informs and inspires advocates—national, state, and local policymakers, educators, parents, and other concerned citizens—to continue to push for policy and implementation.

METHODOLOGY AND PARAMETERS

This report looks at states that have taken steps toward media literacy education reform through the legislative process. The report findings are based on the tracking and monitoring that Media Literacy Now does throughout the year. We rely on our state advocacy leaders to identify upcoming legislative action, follow its progress, and communicate with lawmakers and staff. We also monitor using a wide number of search terms that enable us to cast a wide net and find bills and other legislative action that would incorporate media literacy—even if the typical terms are not used—and to identify trends.

After the end of the year, we conduct a final sweep of key search terms via Westlaw and LexisNexis to ensure we have captured all relevant legislative action. MLN now has a significant database of legislative action over the decade, including bills introduced, sponsors, and votes.

This report focuses only on statutes. We do not evaluate how state departments of education have integrated media literacy mandates into standards or implemented the laws we reviewed—except for the four case studies in the Implementation section of this report. However, we recognize that once a bill is passed, the work for advocates is not done. Implementation must be both monitored and nudged forward. Follow-up steps such as teacher training must be encouraged. Journalists help by checking in on implementation, and legislators can call for agency reports or briefings.

Many states are making substantial progress toward incorporating media literacy into K–12 education, but there is more to be done.

“Given the role digital media has to shape society ... there is an urgent need for more explicit attention to digital media competency in the school system.”

– NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING AND MEDICINE



FINDINGS

State lawmakers are responsible for setting the priorities and direction for the public schools. State legislators in more than half the states have recognized that this responsibility includes elevating media literacy education as an essential part of K–12 education. Although not all bills have been successfully passed, the act of introducing a bill and shepherding it through the process of committee hearings, debates, and votes will elevate awareness of media literacy as a subject of increasing importance on the public policy agenda.

This report looks at states that have taken steps toward media literacy education reform through the legislative process and documents progress on a state-by-state basis. The goal is to inform and inspire other states to consider media literacy legislation and to encourage the use of our advocacy tools and policymaker educational tools.

Our analysis found four states that have taken new action in 2023. A comprehensive new law in **California**, in particular, is important because of the size of the state’s public school population. **Connecticut** has set a new requirement and has also provided funding. **New Mexico** is requiring professional development. And a new **Florida** law will ensure that students understand key information needed for decoding media messages and the systems in which they exist.

A December 2023 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine [report on Social Media and Adolescent Health](#) called for requirements for digital media literacy education for student teachers. Our analysis of state regulations found four states with substantial media literacy requirements for teacher credentialing or teacher preparation programs: Georgia, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Virginia. Other states’ leaders can examine the four states’ requirements and consider whether they represent an appropriate model policy in their own states.

CivXNow [surveyed](#) state departments of education about media literacy standards. As an indicator of progress within the social studies subject area, CivXNow found most state social studies specialists—about 75%—reported that media literacy instruction is included in their standards in some form. Half of those who answered “yes” in 2023 had answered “no” in 2021, indicating a rapidly increasing emphasis on media literacy.

Ideally, all school districts would incorporate media literacy instruction into all subjects at all grade levels. Advancements can be made at different levels, and incremental actions and steps can and should be taken as we work toward our ultimate goal of seamlessly integrating media literacy into K-12 classrooms.

We recognize progress toward this goal can be made through many approaches, such as:

- **Providing overall policy guidance for departments of education, prioritizing media literacy**
- **Passing statutory laws mandating media literacy instruction in schools**
- **Adding media literacy to education, curricular standards or frameworks for subjects such as social studies, science, math, technology, and health**
- **Providing resource recommendations to schools and teachers**
- **Providing professional development opportunities**
- **Requiring teacher credentials or endorsements**

We are showcasing the incremental steps in this report. We won't be able to rank states until we conduct a more thorough study of statutes in combination with curricular standards or frameworks, other regulations, evaluation of implementation of these policies, and measurement of student skills. We intend to do this research in the coming year.

FINDINGS KEY

Because there are many approaches to advancing media literacy education, our report uses a system of graphic icons to differentiate the actions of each state.



Schools are required to include instruction in K–12 classrooms.



Schools are required to include instruction in a more limited way.



State education agency must create K–12 standards or frameworks.



State education agency must create standards in some subjects or grade levels.



State education agency must identify materials or create a model curriculum.



The state or a state organization has conducted, or will conduct, an advisory council process.



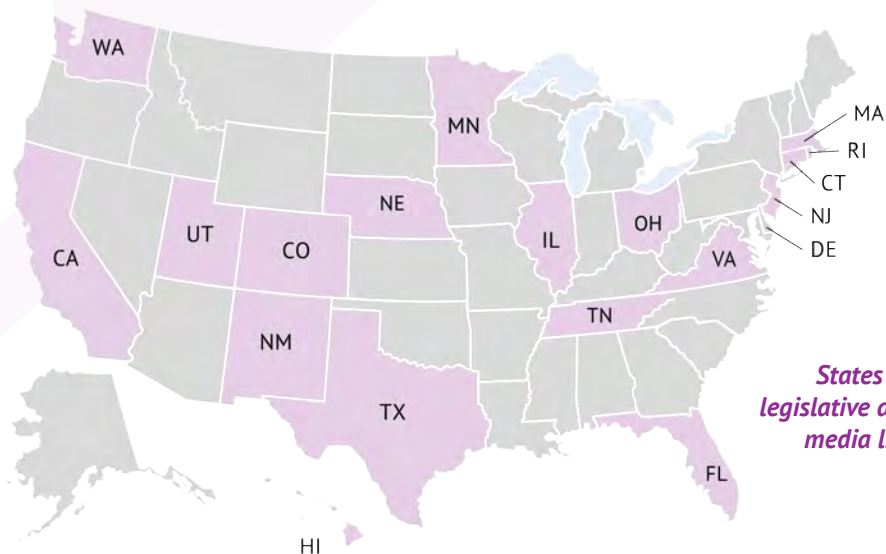
There is a professional development requirement.



The state education agency has or will identify a central coordinator.



The state takes other approaches to prioritize media literacy education (i.e. a resolution, provision of technical assistance, or including media literacy instruction in graduation requirements).



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States that have taken legislative action to elevate K-12 media literacy education

STATE LAWS

CALIFORNIA



K-12



Model

(2023)

California requires the Instructional Quality Commission (within the Department of Education) to consider incorporating the Model Library Standards into the next revision of the English Language Arts/English Language Development curriculum framework after Jan. 1, 2024, and to also consider incorporating media literacy content at each grade level. The law also requires the commission to consider incorporating media literacy content into the mathematics, science, and history-social science curriculum frameworks when those frameworks are next revised after Jan. 1, 2024.

(2018)

California requires the state Department of Education to identify a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy to be available to school districts on its website, including media literacy professional development programs for teachers.

COLORADO



Ltd



Model



Council

(2021)

The Colorado State Department of Education was required to adopt revisions to reading, writing, and civics standards that “identify the knowledge and skills that an elementary through secondary education student should acquire relating to media literacy,” to create an online bank of resources, and to provide technical assistance to school districts that request it.

(2019)

Colorado completed a media literacy advisory council process* and issued a report on best practices and recommendations required by legislators

Years indicate when the law became effective.

STATE LAWS

CONNECTICUT



(2023)

Connecticut requires that, as of July 1, 2025, civics and media literacy shall be included in the social studies program of instruction in the public schools.

Connecticut establishes the Civics Education, Civics Engagement and Media Literacy Task Force* to “study and develop strategies to improve and promote civic engagement and instruction on civics, citizenship, media literacy and American government.” The task force must report to the legislature by Jan. 1, 2025.

(2021)

Connecticut required the state Department of Education to develop a model curriculum for grades K-8 that may be used by local boards of education. The model must include and integrate throughout, among other things, civics and citizenship, to include “instruction in digital citizenship and media literacy that provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to safely, ethically, responsibly and effectively use digital technologies to create and consume digital content, communicate with others and participate in social and civic activities.”

(2017)

Connecticut required a media literacy advisory council process* and accepted a resulting report on best practices and recommendations.

(2015)

Connecticut requires that schools teach safe use of social media.

DELAWARE



(2022)

Delaware requires the state Department of Education to adopt evidence-based media literacy standards that K-12 schools must use. The department must report to the legislature on implementation every three years.

FLORIDA



(2023)

A new Florida law (that also restricts social media and phones in schools) requires instruction in social media safety and the social, emotional, and physical effects of social media. The required instruction for grades 6–12 includes information that students need for media literacy—such as how the social media platforms work. While the law doesn’t mention teaching critical thinking skills, MLN considers this law a positive step forward that will likely provide skills that help young people have greater discernment when consuming media, and dovetails with the 2013 law below. The instruction must include: “The negative effects of social media on mental health, including addiction; the distribution of misinformation on social media; how social media manipulates behavior; the permanency of sharing materials online; [and] how to maintain personal security and identify cyberbullying, predatory behavior, and human trafficking on the Internet.”

(2013)

Florida requires the state Board of Education to ensure that curricular content for all subjects integrates information literacy and media literacy skills.



HAWAII

(2023)

The Hawaii House and Senate passed a resolution requesting the Board of Education to consider media literacy programs and curriculum for implementation (along with civics and other programs).

(2022)

The Hawaii House and Senate passed a resolution requesting the state Department of Education to establish programs and educational opportunities to increase media literacy and promote digital citizenship, and in so doing, to incorporate best practices, resources, and models for grade-appropriate instruction in media literacy, digital citizenship, and internet safety.



ILLINOIS

(2021)

Illinois high schools are required to teach a “unit” of media literacy instruction.

(2009)

Illinois internet safety law requires school districts to incorporate into their curriculum a component on internet safety to be taught at least once each school year to students in third grade or above.

STATE LAWS

MASSACHUSETTS



(2019)

Massachusetts requires the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to include the study of the influence of media messages in personal financial literacy education standards and within civics education standards.

MINNESOTA



(2016)

Minnesota requires the Education Commissioner to embed technology and information literacy standards into the state's academic standards and graduation requirements and review them at least every 10 years.

NEBRASKA



(2022)

Nebraska requires elementary and middle schools to provide instruction in computer science and technology education that includes digital citizenship, and requires high school students to take at least one course.

(2015)

Nebraska approved a law stating that the duty of the state school security director, who is responsible for providing leadership and support for safety and security for the public schools, includes: "recommending curricular and extracurricular materials to assist school districts in preventing and responding to cyberbullying and digital citizenship issues."

NEW JERSEY



(2023)

New Jersey requires that the Board of Education adopt “Student Learning Standards” in information literacy—an important element of media literacy (see Definitions section)—and includes a list of seven minimum content areas. The law requires that each school district incorporate instruction in information literacy in grades K–12 as part of the districts’ implementation of the Student Learning Standards and requires the school library media specialist to be included in the development of the information literacy curriculum “whenever possible.” The bill defines information literacy as including media literacy.

(2014)

New Jersey requires school districts to incorporate instruction on the responsible use of social media for students in grades 6 through 8 as part of the district’s implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards in technology.

NEW MEXICO



(2023)

New Mexico ordered the Department of Education to require school districts to develop and implement plans under the Digital Equity in Education Act to include professional development for teaching digital citizenship.

(2009)

New Mexico allows media literacy to be offered as an elective to fulfill high school graduation requirements.

OHIO



(2009)

Ohio requires the state Board of Education to “ensure that statewide standards include the development of skill sets that promote information, media, and technological literacy.”

RHODE ISLAND



(2017)

Rhode Island requires the state Department of Education to consider incorporating media literacy education into the state’s basic education program regulations.

STATE LAWS

TENNESSEE



(2022)

The position of state library coordinator was established within the Tennessee Department of Education to, among other things, help implement digital citizenship initiatives.

TEXAS



(2021)

Texas requires a civics training program for teachers and administrators that must include training in media literacy.

(2019)

Texas requires each school district to incorporate instruction in digital citizenship. In the Texas definition, that includes media literacy.

UTAH



Utah State Rep. Keven Stratton of Orem receives Media Literacy Now's first Claire D. Beach Award for elevating media literacy education as a priority in his state's K-12 schools.

(2022)

Utah creates a civics education pilot program teaching approaches that are based on proven practices, including teaching media literacy and digital citizenship.

(2020)

Utah established a Digital Wellness, Citizenship, and Safe Technology Commission to “ensure that students are digital media-literate, and able to use technology safely and ethically.”

(2015)

Utah law helps each school establish a digital citizenship program that “empowers a student to make smart media and online choices” by enabling school community councils, which already exist in the state, to access funds to implement digital citizenship education. .



VIRGINIA

(2022)

The legislature established the Internet Safety Advisory Council* for the purpose of “advancing the goal of safe use of media and technology” by students and teachers in public elementary and secondary schools. The council will develop a model policy for local school boards; develop and recommend model instructional practices for the safe use of media and technology by students and teachers; post on the state’s website successful instructional practices, curricula, and other teacher resources for the safe use of media and technology by students and teachers. The governor rejected a more comprehensive, “Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy” advisory council that was passed by both houses on a wide bipartisan vote, and offered the above substitute, which was then passed by both houses. (The council may recommend in its report media literacy and digital citizenship instruction as the most effective means to safe use of media and technology for students.)



Model



Council



CC



WASHINGTON

(2022)

The Washington Legislature provided funding for the “Ambassadors” professional development program.

(2021)

Legislators make 10-year funding commitment for the grant program and to bolster professional development and collaboration (and the media literacy supervisor role is filled—please see Implementation Case Study).

(2020)

Washington established a grant program and created a media literacy supervisor role in the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

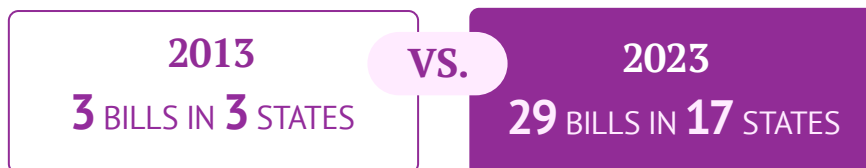
(2016)

Washington was the first to pass the MLN model bill that called for an advisory council* to develop best practices and recommendations for instruction on media literacy. The council completed its report in 2016.

**The advisory council process refers to a provision of a Media Literacy Now model bill that brings together experts to identify best practices in the classroom and recommend next steps for policymakers.*

MEDIA LITERACY POLICY TRENDS

Increase in the number of proposed bills over the decade.



IMPLEMENTATION CASE STUDIES

WASHINGTON

In Washington state, policymakers and educators have been making steady progress since 2016, when Sen. Marko Liias's first bill was passed elevating media literacy education as a priority. The 2016 bill created an advisory committee that made recommendations for next steps. Many of those recommendations have been implemented over time. The effort was boosted in 2019 when funding was first made available for training and resource development.

Here's what we have learned about the resulting changes in Washington from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the state education agency:

In 2021, with the support of the state legislature, Washington took a major step and created a Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship (ML&DC) Program Supervisor position within the OSPI. Establishing this new position allowed for an intentional focus on the ML&DC-related needs of Washington state educators without the many other tasks that EdTech directors have on their plates.

Having a state-level person looking at the bigger picture, fostering networking between people in districts working on similar projects, and offering statewide professional development allows the state to reach many educators across school districts. Lesley James, the program supervisor hired by OSPI, has devoted time and energy to gathering feedback about what educators need to make ML&DC successful in their schools and districts and has sought ways to meet those needs.

Because of her expertise as a former teacher-librarian who taught ML&DC, she arrived with knowledge about the content area and the organizations and resources that support it, and the issues faced by educators.

One of the first changes implemented by the program supervisor was a shift in a grant program from a focus on developing lessons to a focus on integrating existing lessons into school or district curriculum.

"There's always a need for more lessons, but it's important to make sure educators also have time in the school day to teach them," said Ms. James.

To support teacher-librarians and classroom teachers, the program supervisor refined the ML&DC materials hosted on [the agency's online hub](#) and created some original resources, including curated guides to instructional tools and a prototypical scope and sequence for ML&DC instruction.

Seeing the significant need among Washington's youth for media and information literacy, in 2023, State Superintendent Chris Reykdal directed that media and information literacy be integrated into the state's Literacy & Language Arts Learning Standards rather than remaining siloed in the Educational Technology Learning Standards. The Literacy & Language Arts Learning Standards are currently in the process of revision, and OSPI subject matter experts are working collaboratively with educators from across the state on this initiative.

“Mobilizing one teacher-librarian or classroom teacher can make all the difference for a school or district. Those teacher-librarians and classroom teachers are the ones who are transforming the system.”

– LESLEY JAMES, WASHINGTON MEDIA LITERACY AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM SUPERVISOR

Many of them are making that happen on their own, but others have accomplished their goals because they received a grant targeted at integrating ML&DC at the system level, or attended a professional development session with an inspiring, nationally recognized expert, or connected with a like-minded colleague through a community of practice, or used one of the resources made available on the OSPI resource hub. At the state level, OSPI says the goal is to continue to make these opportunities available to as many educators as possible, so all Washington students have access to this essential instruction.

Source: Washington OSPI, and Media Literacy & Digital Citizenship Program Supervisor Lesley James

ILLINOIS

The Illinois law (105 ILCS 5/27-20.08) requiring a “unit” of media literacy in public schools went into effect in the 2022–2023 school year, potentially benefiting the state’s nearly 2 million public high school students. To help high school educators implement the new mandate, Dr. Michael A. Spikes of Northwestern University and MLN State Advocate for Illinois, and Dr. Yonty Friesem of Columbia College Chicago and executive director of the Media Education Lab, founded the [Illinois Media Literacy Coalition](#).

In September 2021, the ILMLC [published a framework](#) of four guiding principles for teachers to integrate media literacy into their own curricula. In September 2022, they followed up with a [crosswalk framework](#), demonstrating how the mandate’s requirements connect with current academic standards. The ILMLC also partnered with the Illinois state Board of Education to inform teachers’ approaches to media literacy. The framework is now featured as a key resource on the ISBE website.

Some of the challenges to implementation include questions about interpretation and which skills should be assessed. Because this is an unfunded mandate, and there has been no clear funding source, Spikes and Friesem have relied on volunteers, which is difficult to sustain, let alone achieve the scale needed to reach schools across the entire state. In addition, local control meant that the ISBE convened an advisory group to recommend curricular resources that complied with the mandate, but [ultimately shifted the task](#) to the ILMLC due to concerns about a state government body overseeing the work.

For the coming year, ILMLC plans include: updating the curricular frameworks, identifying distinct media literacy skills students should learn, partnering with legislators and educational leaders to measure implementation effectiveness, and accessing crucial funding to ensure their volunteer-driven work is sustainable.

Source: [MLN blog](#) informed by interview with Michael A. Spikes, Ph.D.

DELAWARE

The Delaware law enacted in 2022 (14 Del.C. § 4146) requires the state Department of Education to adopt evidence-based media literacy standards that K–12 schools must use.

“We were very intentional in drafting this bill to ensure that districts would maintain local control of the specifics of curriculum but there would be no less than a requirement to incorporate media literacy and digital citizenship within instruction and classroom time.”

— DELAWARE SEN. SARAH MCBRIDE, BILL SPONSOR

After the passage of the bill, Delaware Secretary of Education Mark A. Holodick, Ed.D., said, “As a support agency, DDOE will work collaboratively with districts and charters to aid implementation of the standards across all Delaware schools.”

A task force of Department of Education staff, school librarians and instructional technology specialists, State Librarian Annie Norman, and a Board of Education representative immediately began research to develop proposed standards. The new standards were adopted by the Delaware Board of Education in September 2023.

The **standards** combine standards from two organizations of experts—the International Society for Technology in Education and the American Association of School Librarians—with existing state standards in English Language Arts, history and social studies, science, and technical subjects.

They were assembled after reviewing comparable guidelines from one other nation (Finland) and at least 13 states (Arizona, Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts, California, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington).

Source: Delaware Journalism Collaborative [report](#) by Larry Nagengast, August 2023, Delaware School Board minutes Sept. 21, 2023, and MLN reporting

NEW JERSEY

The 2023 New Jersey law (NJ ST 18A:7F-4.4) that elevates information literacy in schools defines information literacy as including media literacy. MLN defines information literacy as a subset of media literacy.

The law requires the Board of Education to adopt learning standards in information literacy. To arrive at those standards, the law requires the Department of Education to “convene a committee comprised of educators, the majority of which shall include certified school library media specialists, as well as teaching staff members across a broad spectrum of subject areas, to develop New Jersey Student Learning Standards in information literacy.”

The DOE has initiated the work of convening a committee and reviewing existing state standards in each subject area to determine where information literacy is already incorporated. The next step will be to create new standalone standards to cover any gaps. The process is likely to last a year and a half, with a best-case implementation in the fall of 2025.

Each school district is then required to incorporate instruction on information literacy in an “appropriate place” in the K–12 curriculum. The school library media specialist is to be included in the development of the curriculum.

In preparation for implementation, the NJ Association of School Librarians is seeking to work with state-level organizations, including the principals’ and superintendents’ associations, the school boards, and the teachers’ union. NJASL is also creating workshops for librarians and other educators and will focus on the topic at their conference in April.

Notably, and concurrently, State Librarian Jennifer R. Nelson, has an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant to develop K-12 curriculum as well as teacher training, with the help of in-state school librarians, which will be piloted and evaluated in five schools.

Source: Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, Immediate Past President NJ Association of School Librarians, Jennifer R. Nelson, NJ State Librarian, and Olga Polites, MLN State Advocate

POLICY AND ADVOCACY TRENDS

As we reach greater awareness and action, it's important for media literacy advocates to be aware of developments in the policy area. By keeping an eye on trends, advocates can find creative ways to support media literacy education in their local communities

Because of the trends we have observed, Media Literacy Now is focused on coalition development leading to supportive policies: We are seeking ways to collaborate to support educators in implementing media literacy within these three subject areas.

DIGITAL WELLNESS

Elevated attention in the past year on how young people are affected by social media and the constant presence of smartphones is long overdue. There is accumulating evidence that the use of social media and smartphones by children and adolescents is causing mental and physical health problems and distraction from learning while also presenting other serious and even deadly risks. Research, whistleblowers, shocking stories, and statistics tell us there is a problem, and policymakers are seeking solutions.

Recent laws and bills have included references to digital wellness. For example, Delaware's new law (14 Del.C. § 4146) refers to "healthy online behavior," while another leader, New Jersey, has created a [commission](#) to study social media impact on students (S-715/A-1992). A new Florida law (Ch. 2023-36), which also restricts phones in school, requires instruction in social media safety. The law includes information that students need for media literacy, such as how social media platforms work. Such instruction will help young people make better decisions.

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu signed an executive order in June calling for social media curriculum in K–12 health classrooms. The guidelines developed include media literacy and digital citizenship lessons.

MLN's informal 2023 survey of state legislators in states where media literacy has not yet reached debate on the statehouse floor shows that even in those states, there is greater attention to social media's impact on young people. Most legislators who responded were interested in learning more or were ready to explore a media literacy solution. Even so, there is still pushback from some policymakers who say that teachers and schools don't have enough time or resources for "one more thing," even while an American Federation of Teachers' [report](#) in 2023 attributed disruption of teaching and learning directly to social media. Other legislators mentioned that constituents are still not fully aware of the risks internet use poses to young people. There is still a lot of work to be done to raise awareness.

This digital wellness education trend is in addition to increasing interest in regulating tech companies, banning phones or social media platforms in schools or for young people, and pressuring tech companies to change how they operate. A [lawsuit](#) by 42 state Attorneys General alleges that Meta deliberately designed its products to encourage children and teens to use their products for longer periods of time to increase profits. Separately, activists are collecting [research](#) and tracking [regulatory](#) approaches.

As we look for solutions to mitigate the risks that social and digital media pose to children and young people, media literacy education must be incorporated. We're encouraged to see that key agencies and organizations are now calling for media literacy education in schools because of these risks.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [report](#) on “Social Media and Adolescent Health” issued in December recommends that state boards of education set media literacy standards for grades K–12 and that student teachers and veteran teachers have media literacy training. In addition, it calls for the U.S. Department of Education to draw national attention to the importance of comprehensive media literacy.

The U.S. Surgeon General in May [advised](#) that “extreme, inappropriate, and harmful content continues to be easily and widely accessible by children and adolescents, and excessive and problematic use of social media can harm children and adolescents by disrupting important healthy behaviors.” The Surgeon General called on policymakers to “support the development, implementation, and evaluation of digital and media literacy curricula in schools and within academic standards.”

“Digital and media literacy provides children and educators with digital skills to strengthen digital resilience, or the ability to recognize, manage, and recover from online risks (e.g., cyberbullying and other forms of online harassment and abuse, as well as excessive social media use).”

— U.S. SURGEON GENERAL'S ADVISORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

The American Psychological Association advised in a May [report](#) that “adolescents’ social media use should be preceded by training in social media literacy to ensure that users have developed psychologically-informed competencies and skills that will maximize the chances for balanced, safe, and meaningful social media use.”

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

School librarian associations have been playing a leadership role in raising awareness of the need for media and information literacy and driving policy changes. Librarians have been at the forefront of introducing media literacy concepts in schools and providing guidance to teachers. There is an opportunity now for that role to become formalized. Federal funding may also offer opportunities to expand that role.

California's new law (Cal. Educ. Code § 33548) calls on the Instructional Quality Commission to implement Model Library Standards within the English Language Arts K-12 curriculum. These Model Library Standards center information literacy, an important subdomain of media literacy (see Definitions section). From the introductory letter to the standards: “In today's world, [to be information literate] means having the skills to effectively access, evaluate, use, and integrate information ... These standards will help students to learn and work with twenty-first-century skills and apply responsible research practices, be respectful to others when using digital devices, and continue to grow as lifelong learners.”

The 2023 New Jersey law (NJ ST 18A:7F-4.4) was developed and passed with support of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians. It centers information literacy as an overarching term that includes media literacy. Among other provisions, it requires that school library media specialists be included in the development of a curriculum concerning information literacy. (See Implementation sidebar.)

The 2022 Delaware law (14 Del.C. § 4146) notes: the Delaware State Librarian and school districts and charter schools, including certified school librarians, may provide technical expertise to the Department regarding the standards. (See Implementation sidebar.)

A recent Tennessee law (TN ST § 49-1-217) requires the Commissioner of Education to employ a certified school librarian to assist school librarians in implementing digital citizenship initiatives, among other duties.

Congress appropriated \$4 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services to expand an Information Literacy Taskforce, which includes grants to encourage, support, and promote information literacy. (Please see Definitions section.) States can access those grants to develop school library curriculum for information literacy.

A number of states have media literacy standards for the library. However, when there has been widespread cutting of the library role in schools to save money, “Who is going to teach those standards?” asks Arkansas State Rep. Zack Gramlich, a teacher. Some states are considering laws that would require schools to have a librarian or library media specialist.

THE ROLE OF K–12 SCIENCE EDUCATORS

The idea of media literacy in K–12 science education is gaining ground among science education institutions. It’s no surprise that concerns about harmful and inaccurate scientific information—often spread on social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram—are rising. As a result, there is greater attention to the idea that part of the solution is in how science is taught in K–12 schools.

A report from a February 2023 conference at Stanford, which MLN participated in, focused on the need for media literacy in K–12 science classes. A Nobel Prize Summit on science, “Truth, Trust, and Hope,” at the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine in May 2023 in Washington D.C., included an MLN solution session that focused on K–12 education.

In collaboration with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), Media Literacy Now held a workshop in Chevy Chase, Maryland, in 2023, to consider what K-12 students need to learn to better evaluate scientific information. One insight highlighted at the conference is that adults must often evaluate science—and technology—related information about topics they did not explicitly study in school. So, a key life skill for students is to learn the characteristics of trustworthy sources of scientific information.

Media Literacy Now's [report](#) from the Chevy Chase conference responds to two key concepts that influence science education standards in most states: That students can continue to learn science outside school and that they become careful consumers of scientific and technological information related to their everyday lives. These concepts come from the so-called "blueprint" for standards called A Framework for K–12 Science Education, created by the U.S. National Research Council and published in 2012.

"We hear from teachers all the time that the landscape of information is increasingly challenging for their students to navigate, but that navigation is integral to scientific literacy," said Marjee Chmiel, Ph.D., HHMI Director of Evaluation for Science Education, Media, and Journalism. "In a world that increasingly relies on a fluency in science and technology, scientific media literacy is essential to everyone's health, happiness, and well-being."

In a 2019 talk by Helen Quinn, chair of the National Research Council committee that wrote the 2012 Framework for K–12 Science Education, she said, "I can find lots of information on my phone; some of it is good, some of it is not. How do I know? And what do I do to figure out what's reliable and what's not? That's a skill we need to be teaching because it's a critical skill for democracy, too."

In 2023, The National Association of Biology Teachers released a [statement](#) on science media literacy with this introduction: "As scientific misinformation continues to spread at an alarming rate, especially with the increased use of AI using language learning models, NABT is joining a growing community of scientific and education experts calling for science media literacy to become an integral part of the science education curriculum."

And, as noted above in "Digital Wellness," the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine are calling for media literacy standards in K–12 schools and teacher credentials for media literacy.

YOU CAN TAKE ACTION TODAY

Media literacy is an essential element in the U.S. K–12 public education system. This report outlines the progress made so far toward supportive policies, but results are still too slow. We all have a role to play in ensuring a public education system that responds to modern needs. Whether you're a parent, educator, policymaker, or concerned citizen, you can make a change in your community.

[MLN develops advocate tools and an advocate community.](#)

STATE POLICYMAKERS:

Set media literacy as a top priority in schools. Require standards in every core subject and health. Require school districts to use them. Identify appropriate curriculum. Require media literacy certification of teachers. Fund teacher training. Provide grants for programs and curriculum development. Fund policy evaluation via the MLI Index (see below) and student skills evaluation.

PARENTS AND OTHER INDIVIDUALS:

Start the conversation in your local schools and with other parents and community members. Ask teachers, principals, and the school board how media literacy is integrated into classrooms; suggest a district-wide MLI Index survey. Call your state representatives and senators and tell them you support media literacy education policy.

LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS, STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS:

Set policies that support and encourage media literacy education. Conduct a district-wide MLI Index survey.

TEACHERS AND TEACHER-LIBRARIANS:

Find ways to incorporate media literacy skills practice into the current curriculum. Use MLN tools to advocate for media literacy education with school district teachers, administrators, education associations, parents, and state legislators.

ACADEMICS, GRADUATE STUDENTS:

Seek funding to conduct the MLI Index survey or state policy evaluation.

STUDENTS:

Begin the conversation in your school and at home. Call on educators and community leaders to take action. Ask for the education you need and deserve.

JOURNALISTS:

Monitor implementation of laws. Help audiences understand the full breadth of media literacy instruction and the solutions, empowerment, and protection it offers; resist popular but politicizing shorthand terms; and avoid a narrow focus on news media evaluation.

DATA FOR ACTION—MLI INDEX

We seek to gather data on implementing media literacy instructional practices in K–12 schools. By making practices visible, such research promotes the inclusion of media literacy into the curriculum in a more systematic way. Media literacy advocates of all types can answer the call for more data, and we call on education leaders and academics to help us with this work. With the Media Education Lab, we offer the Media Literacy Implementation Index as a state-level tool to evaluate policy and as a local-level tool to identify where schools are succeeding and where more attention is needed.

Visit our [MLI page](#) to learn more.

DEFINITIONS

With our state advocacy leaders, Media Literacy Now has developed definitions to help advocates and policymakers navigate the terrain of literacy in the 21st century. Media and communication technologies are changing quickly, and the terms we use are sometimes not well defined. Our definitions stem from a desire to assist policymakers and advocates in driving policy changes that lead to media literacy education for all K–12 students.

WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY?

Media literacy is the umbrella term for a number of other competencies and concepts.

Media literacy is the ability to: decode media messages, including the systems in which they exist; assess the influence of those messages on our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, perceptions, beliefs, health, and on our society; and use and create media to provide information, send a message, or tell one’s own story in a way that is thoughtful, conscientious, safe, and responsible.

We draw from a shared definition of the field that has endured for the past 30 years. The National Association for Media Literacy Education definition is an evolution of the commonly cited definition developed at a 1992 Aspen Institute conference on media literacy: Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.

The Connecticut definition from House Bill 6762, passed and signed by the governor in 2023, takes the above a step further: Media literacy means the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with media in all forms by understanding the role of media in society, and building skills of inquiry and self-expression essential to participation and collaboration in a democratic society.

WHAT IS DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP?

Digital citizenship refers to the use of media literacy to participate in the public sphere using communications technology. Digital citizenship is an outcome that requires media literacy skills.

We will use the Texas statutory definition:

Digital citizenship refers to applying the standards of appropriate, responsible, and healthy online behavior, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act on all forms of digital communication.

ACCORDING TO ANNE COLLIER, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NET SAFETY COLLABORATIVE, THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IS THIS:

“We can’t fully exercise our citizenship without the literacies that our time (including our media environment) demands—media, social and digital literacies—and without the agency to exercise our human rights and engage as citizens.”

WHAT IS DIGITAL LITERACY?

Digital literacy is applying media literacy skills when using digital technology to create, send, and take in information and messages.

Digital literacy has arisen from the disciplines of the computer sciences and library and information sciences. The term is sometimes connected to learning the basic techniques of using digital devices, including computers, tablets, smartphones, and the internet. We however, borrow more heavily from the library and information sciences in our use of the term. Thus, our definition emphasizes the use of critical thinking skills when engaging in the creation, sharing, and consumption of media and information through digital devices and platforms.

It’s notable that the U.S. Department of Education has a definition for programs it funds: “Digital literacy refers to the skills needed when using digital technology that enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information; and also to develop digital citizenship and the responsible use of technology.” It is essential that policymakers and local education agencies understand the full scope of digital literacy because of the funding at stake.

The UNESCO definition is also helpful here: “Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competences that are variously referred to as computer literacy, [information and communication technologies] literacy, information literacy and media literacy.”

WHAT IS INFORMATION LITERACY?

Information literacy is a subdomain of media literacy that enables individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. We have relied on the definition of the American Library Association.

Information literacy requires questions such as; Is this website legitimate? Is it a good source for the information I need? For example; Is this the U.S. government's official Bureau of Labor statistics website, and is it the best place to get information about how many people work in the farm industry?

WHAT IS NEWS LITERACY?

News literacy is a subdomain of media literacy with an emphasis on knowledge of journalistic practice and the news media industry applied to judging the credibility and reliability of information found in news sources.

For example, when using news literacy skills one asks: What kind of news source is this? How independent is this source? Do the practitioners use the practices of journalism to create news that informs its audience? Are the facts verified and credible? Is the place where I get news a reliable source of factual information that I can use to make decisions or take actions?

For this definition we rely on the work of [Dr. Michael A. Spikes](#) at Northwestern University and also this News Literacy Project definition: News literacy is the ability to determine the credibility of news and other information and to recognize the standards of fact-based journalism to know what to trust, share and act on."

WHAT IS DIGITAL WELLNESS?

Digital wellness education addresses the physical and emotional health impacts of media use, with attention to helping develop the conscious, balanced use of media that aligns with an individuals' goals for their health and well-being.

For this definition we rely on the Harvard Medical School/Childrens Hospital Digital Wellness Lab: Digital wellness is an intentional state of physical, mental, and social health that occurs with mindful engagement with the digital and natural environment.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY?

Social media literacy is media literacy applied when using social media. Since so much of information consumption, creation, and sharing takes place on social media platforms, social media literacy encompasses digital, information, and news literacies.

It is essential that students learn how the rise of social media requires greater responsibilities for the creation and dissemination of news and information via digital platforms.

Social media literacy also encompasses digital citizenship and digital wellness to address physical and mental health implications of social media use, including positive or negative mental and emotional health implications of viewing certain social media content, and all aspects of safety and wellness related to social media use.





Media Literacy Now informs and drives policy change at **local, state, and national levels** in the U.S. to ensure all **K–12 students** are taught media literacy so that they become **healthy, confident, and competent media consumers and creators**.

medialiteracynow.org



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