

Social-Emotional Learning, Digital Citizenship, and Media Literacy

Social-emotional learning (SEL) lays the foundational components of effective digital citizenship and media literacy skills.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many young people are being asked to engage even more in online and digital platforms. Increased internet use while schools are closed presents increased risk for child abuse, sexual exploitation, and cyberbullying.¹ Digital citizenship and media literacy are garnering more attention as means to address these potential risks.

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Digital Citizenship Skills

Legislation commonly defines digital citizenship skills as encompassing ethics and norms for appropriate, responsible, and healthy behavior. (See "How Are States Furthering These Efforts?" on page 2.) Digital citizenship skills:²

- Comprise media literacy and SEL
- Promote safe online behavior with skills necessary for thoughtful and empathetic participation
- Forge positive connections and productive engagement in the digital world

Media Literacy Skills

Legislation commonly defines media literacy as skills for analyzing and evaluating situations and communicating across media platforms. Media literacy:³

- Provides the framework of abilities that enable one to act on digital citizenship, such as being able to analyze, evaluate, and engage with digital platforms and media
- Encompasses the skills of inquiry to identify scams and fake news

SEL and Safe and Healthy Online Behavior⁴

It would be challenging to partake in digital citizenship or develop media literacy without social-emotional skills.⁵ As SEL is the very process by which we understand and regulate our emotions and behaviors, express empathy, engage in positive relationships, and make responsible decisions, SEL is foundational to the development of these internet-related skill sets.⁶

Based on the skills commonly included in state policy definitions, SEL competencies show up in:

- Digital citizenship, realized through responsible decision-making, social awareness, and self-management competencies
- Media literacy, strengthened by the competencies of responsible decision-making and forming and maintaining healthy relationships

Policy Recommendations

To strengthen legislation and policy for digital citizenship and media literacy in schools, we recommend that legislation:

- Align digital citizenship and media literacy with state standards for SEL as available ([Wisconsin](#) provides an example at the state agency level)
- Make the SEL foundation explicit in identification of digital citizenship and media literacy skills
- Cohere online instructional strategies with evidence-based SEL methods

How Are States Furthering These Efforts?

Along with Congress, over half of the states in the US have introduced digital citizenship and media literacy legislation, and often mention an explicit component of SEL. Ten of these states have advanced such legislation, and each state's legislation addresses an SEL component in some way.

Table 1. States That Have Passed Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy Legislation

State and Year	Analyze and Evaluate	Understanding Norms (social and ethical)	Healthy Behavior (inclusive of safety and responsible use of media)	Communication	Cyberbullying Prevention	Sexual Abuse Prevention
Illinois, 2009			✓		✓	✓
New Jersey, 2014		✓	✓		✓	
Utah, 2015		✓	✓			
Washington, 2016		✓	✓			
Rhode Island, 2017	✓			✓		
California, 2018	✓	✓	✓			
Texas, 2019	✓		✓	✓		
Minnesota, 2013	✓			✓		
New Mexico, 2017	✓	✓	✓			
Colorado, 2019	✓	✓	✓		✓	

References

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