

DigCitCommit

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

July 2, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole,

On behalf of the undersigned members of the DigCitCommit Coalition and supporting organizations, we urge you to support federal programs to support students' and educators' digital citizenship skills, as you consider funding for the fiscal year 2022 (FY22) appropriations bill.

In our generation, where technology is integrated into virtually every aspect of public and private life, preserving the American democracy must involve ensuring that digital tools and platforms are employed in service of our communities, facilitating the productive and equitable exchange of information and opportunity, rather than being hijacked to sow misinformation and discord. In the past year, we have observed ample examples of both cases. Young Americans are using technology to raise awareness of ongoing social justice issues, which have led to significant policy shifts. However, at the same time, members of the public shared misleading information about the COVID-19 global pandemic, costing lives and extending economic devastation.

To ensure that upcoming generations can positively leverage online spaces and rise above the ever-present call to division, digital citizenship must be fostered, beginning in our schools where students already engage with technology regularly. Educators agree that digital citizenship is important for helping students make informed decisions online and to build inclusive digital communities.¹ The DigCitCommit Coalition, formed from a group of diverse organizations committed to ensuring that technology becomes a powerful tool for solving problems and empowering young people to become a force for good, comprehensively defines digital citizenship using five distinct competencies:²

- **Inclusive:** I am open to hearing and respectfully recognizing multiple viewpoints, and I engage with others online with respect and empathy.

¹ <https://www.common sense media.org/research/the-common-sense-census-inside-the-21st-century-classroom-2019>

² <https://digcitcommit.org/>

- **Informed:** I evaluate the accuracy, perspective, and validity of digital media and social posts.
- **Engaged:** I use technology and digital channels for civic engagement, to solve problems, and be a force for good in both physical and virtual communities.
- **Balanced:** I make informed decisions about how to prioritize my time and activities online and off.
- **Alert:** I am aware of my online actions and know how to be safe and create safe spaces for others online.

Ensuring all students have the opportunity to build each competency requires substantial support for educators’ knowledge and skills. Therefore, we support the following items in the FY22 appropriations bill:

- **Ensure full funding for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) block grant.** Authorized at \$1.6 billion, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) block grant under Title IV, part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act supports providing educators with professional development opportunities on the effective use of technology, including practices that reinforce digital citizenship skills.
- **Include \$10 million in robust funding for the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education.** These funds would support a National Education Research and Development Center dedicated to researching policies and programs that improve students’ abilities to collaborate with others to create safe and inclusive communities, solve local and global problems, evaluate the perspective, accuracy, and validity of information.
- **Support critical funding in the President’s FY22 Budget Proposal:** The President’s FY22 Budget Proposal includes a number of programs that would support educators’ effective use of technology, including uses that would reinforce digital citizenship skills. This includes the “Answer the Call” grant, which would allow teachers to earn additional certifications, the “Expanding Opportunities for Teacher Leadership and Development” grant, which would allow teachers to provide and receive job-embedded, peer coaching, and the “Teacher Quality Partnership” grant, which would support high-quality educator preparation programs.³

We finally call on federal policymakers to raise the profile of digital citizenship and media literacy at the national level, highlighting how students and educators are modeling this critical competency.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us should you have any questions about the DigCitCommit Coalition, digital citizenship, or our recommendations above. Thank you and we hope to see robust education funding in the FY22 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

DigCitCommit Coalition Members

Caroline County Public Schools (VA)
 Common Sense Media
 Dig Cit Doctors (Dr. Kristen Mattson & Dr. LeeAnn Lindsey)
 EVERFI, Inc.
 #ICANHELP
 International Society for Technology in Education
 Los Angeles Unified School District, Instructional Technology Initiative (CA)
 Newsela

³ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget22/summary/22summary.pdf>

Supporting Organizations

Alaska Society for Technology in Education
Alliance for Excellent Education
Arizona Technology in Education Association
CatchOn
Center for Black Educator Development
Committee for Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
CUE
Digital Promise
EDGE Consulting Partners
EdTech Evidence Exchange
ENA
Illinois Digital Educators Alliance
InnovateEDU
The Learning Accelerator
Learning Ally
Manhattan-Ogden USD 383 (KS)
MassCUE
National Association of School Psychologists
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
National PTA
National Summer Learning Association
New Hampshire Society for Technology in Education
New York State Association for Computers and Technologies in Education
Northwest Council for Computer Education
Project Tomorrow
Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education
SHAPE America
TCEA
Vermont Information Technology Association for the Advancement of Learning
Virginia Society for Technology in Education