

**U.S. MEDIA LITERACY**

**POLICY REPORT**

**2022**

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



Published February 2023

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The U.S. Media Literacy Policy Report is written by Erin McNeill. Research and analysis completed by Erin McNeill and Anderson J. Duff. Additional editing and review by Diolinda Vaz, Theo Dolan, Andy Zucker, Juma Inniss, and Amanda Marsden. Graphic design by Max Tang.

# SPONSORS

Together with our partners, we're working to advance media literacy education so that all K-12 students are given the tools and skills needed to become confident and competent media consumers and creators. This report is made possible by the following organizations:



ad fontes media



***Media Literacy Now is a nonprofit advocacy organization with a mission to drive reform of the U.S. public education system to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn the key 21st-century literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship. All data was collected from public sources, free of political affiliation.***

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Findings</b> .....	3
State Laws	
<i>Delaware</i>	5
<i>New Jersey • Texas</i>	6
<i>Illinois • Florida • Ohio • Colorado</i>	7
<i>Nebraska • Connecticut</i>	8
<i>Minnesota • Massachusetts •</i>	9
<i>Washington</i>	
<i>Utah • New Mexico</i>	10
<i>California • Rhode Island • Hawai'i</i>	11
<i>Tennessee • Virginia</i>	12
Trends	13
<b>Call to Action</b> .....	15
<b>Glossary</b> .....	17

# MEDIA LITERACY IS ESSENTIAL

Media messages shape our ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. In today's media environment, there are huge opportunities, as well as major consequences. Our children and the fabric of our society are at risk. Although the attention to bias in the news and misinformation has grown, it's just a part of the issue. The rapid advancement of communications technology is allowing greater access to sophisticated tools that are cheap and easy to use. For example, the accessibility of artificial intelligence tools allows ordinary people to create so-called deep-fake videos, imitate real voices, and to generate human-like text in any style in seconds. Manipulative messages and information of all kinds, created by individuals, governments, and other groups, represent a great challenge. More than ever, schools must help young people learn to make sound judgments about what they see, hear, or read.

Social media is changing us as individuals and as a society. Research shows the online social media tools we use today can have harmful effects that can be life-changing, and deadly, for children. Cyberbullying, online radicalization through gaming, and sextortion, are among the many online harms. In addition, there are physiological and neurological effects we are only beginning to understand.



**“Disinformation is a serious problem, but it’s only the tip of the iceberg. We have so much more work to do in equipping our young people with media literacy skills to gain more control over how they’re influenced by their experiences with media.”**

– Juma Inniss, Founder & Director, The Message

It's important to continue to raise awareness of the problem, and also to raise awareness of how to respond. Media Literacy Now takes the view that teaching the set of skills we refer to as media literacy – across grade levels and subjects in U.S. schools – is an essential part of the solution for supporting young digital citizens to engage in a global media environment, and for protecting our children against manipulative information.



**Media literacy is the ability to:**

- ◇ Decode media messages and the systems in which they exist;
- ◇ Assess the influence of those messages on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and
- ◇ Create media thoughtfully and conscientiously.

We've heard the argument that teachers and schools are overwhelmed right now, and that this would be "one more thing" on the teachers' plates. That's a backward way of looking at the issue. Now is the time to take a big-picture look at our education system and how we're preparing young people for life. A quality media literacy education teaches students how to think more critically, not what to think. It is not an extra, it is an essential element of education.

Ideally, U.S. public schools prepare individuals for participation in the economic and civic life of the nation. When our young people leave school ready to participate as well-informed, discerning members of society, empowered to engage, that is good for everyone. We have the advantage of the creative and innovative energy of all of our people and we can avoid the worst consequences of groups and individuals acting on bad information. We can create a world that works better for everyone. This is what media literacy offers to students and all of us.

Children, teachers, and schools are reeling from the aftermath of the pandemic. Before 2019 we were already facing great challenges due to social media. We can no longer overlook this essential piece of education. Media literacy is traditional literacy plus the application of critical thinking to media in today's world, with an understanding of how media systems deliver information, and how the messages and the devices affect our behavior, choices, and health, and impact our families, communities, government, and economy. We have an opportunity before us; this is the time to act. We need media literacy now.



# FINDINGS

This report looks at which states have taken steps toward media literacy education reform through the legislative process. State lawmakers are responsible for setting the overall priorities and direction for the public schools. This report is intended to document state progress, and inform and inspire other states to follow suit.

We have evaluated only statutes and have not evaluated how state departments of education have integrated media literacy into standards or otherwise implemented the laws we reviewed. This is research that needs to be done.

Since our last report, we have re-evaluated the rankings and standings as the policy landscape has developed. 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 instead of a ranking system.

Ideally, all school districts would incorporate media literacy into all subjects at all grade levels. However, we recognize that progress can be made through many approaches, whether it's through statutory laws mandating media literacy teaching in schools, adding media literacy to education curricular standards or frameworks for subjects (like social studies, science, health, etc.), or providing resource recommendations to schools and teachers. Advancement can be made at different levels, and incremental actions and steps can and should be taken as we work towards our ultimate goal of seamlessly integrating media literacy into education policy.

Our goal is for all school districts to **incorporate media literacy into all subjects at all grade levels.**

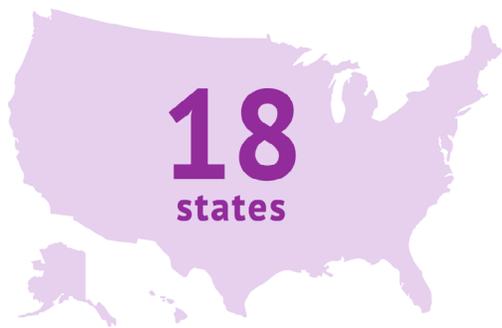
Media literacy is not a partisan issue. Leaders of the movement include Republicans and Democrats. Legislators across the spectrum care about their own children and grandchildren, as well as the needs of their constituents and states. Most of the new legislative actions have been taken in a bipartisan or, in the case of Nebraska, a nonpartisan way.



“

“This law isn’t about teaching kids that any specific idea is true or false, rather it’s about **helping them learn how to research, evaluate, and understand the information they are presented for themselves.**”

– New Jersey State Sen. Michael Testa (R) via press release



have **media literacy education language** on the books today.

## FINDINGS KEY



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.



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



State education agency must create a model curriculum.



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



There is a limited 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).

# DELAWARE



Delaware set a new high bar. The law, passed in 2022 and put into effect in August 2022, requires the state Department of Education to write standards for media literacy for K-12 classrooms that schools must use. Within the bill, the sponsors note that media literacy can be incorporated into existing standards, is supported by teachers, and requires more investment. Media literacy and digital citizenship are defined, but are used somewhat interchangeably.

Statement of Delaware Secretary of Education Mark A. Holodick, Ed. D.:

“Delaware is proud of its achievements in media literacy instruction for all kindergarten through grade 12 students. In August 2022, Senate Bill 195 – known as the Digital Citizenship Education Act – successfully required the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to adopt evidence-based media literacy standards for use by each district and charter school. Districts and charters must align their instructional programs to these adopted standards. SB 195 additionally provides DDOE the authority to support, implement and enforce this regulation.

Clear media literacy standards promote strong digital citizenship and help ensure all students receive thoughtful instruction on how best to navigate media safely with an inquisitive mindset using reliable and trustworthy information and sources. As a support agency, DDOE will work collaboratively with districts and charters to aid implementation of the standards across all Delaware schools. SB 195 also provides an opportunity for local districts and charter schools to promote multi-curricular instruction with direct connections to our state’s other content standards, such as English language arts, social studies and health standards.”



## NEW JERSEY



In 2022, New Jersey passed a bill to explicitly require information literacy instruction (see glossary) – an important element of media literacy – for all kindergarten through twelfth grade students. The widely bipartisan bill was signed into law by Governor Murphy early this year. The bill defines information literacy as including media literacy. New Jersey has been a leader since 2014, when lawmakers required schools to teach safe and ethical use of social media.

## TEXAS



In 2019, the Texas Legislature passed – by a wide margin on a strong bipartisan vote – a law instructing the state Board of Education to require each school district to incorporate instruction in digital citizenship. In the Texas definition, that includes media literacy (see Glossary).

The law requires this instruction to apply to all forms of “digital” communication, which unnecessarily limits the reach of the instruction, but not by much considering that most media today are created or distributed via digital tools.

A 2021 law requires a civics training program for teachers and administrators that must include training in media literacy.

## ILLINOIS



Ltd

In Illinois, a law passed in 2021 requires Illinois high schools to teach a unit of media literacy instruction as of the 2022-2023 school year. [The Illinois Media Literacy Coalition](#) has brought together educators and advocates to implement the new law and support schools.

Illinois also passed an internet safety law in 2009 that 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.

## FLORIDA & OHIO



K-12

Florida and Ohio require that their states' Departments of Education develop standards that integrate media literacy across the curriculum at all grade levels, since 2009 in Ohio and since 2013 in Florida.

## COLORADO



Ltd

Colorado completed an advisory council process\* called for by legislators in 2019. In 2021, the 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.

\* 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.

## NEBRASKA



In 2022, the nonpartisan, unicameral Nebraska legislature passed a bill requiring 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.

## CONNECTICUT



In 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.”

Connecticut completed an advisory council process\* required by the state legislature in 2017.

Connecticut also passed a law in 2015 requiring that schools teach safe use of social media.

## WASHINGTON



Washington developed a model pathway for developing and implementing media literacy policy. In 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. In 2017, the legislature passed additional legislation implementing several key council recommendations, including completing a baseline survey and establishing an online portal to distribute recommended resources. Washington established a grant program in 2020, created a media literacy supervisor role in the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and in 2021 made a 10-year funding commitment for the grant program and to bolster professional development and collaboration.

## MINNESOTA



A Minnesota statute of 2016 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.

## MASSACHUSETTS



Massachusetts passed two bills in 2019 with indirect language requiring the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to include the study of media messages, one within a personal financial literacy education bill and the other within a civics education bill.

## UTAH



Utah has continued to make progress since passing a law in 2015 that helps each school establish a digital citizenship program that “empowers a student to make smart media and online choices.” The law enables school community councils, which already existed in the state, to access funds to implement digital citizenship education. The Utah law became the foundation for the MLN advisory council\* model bill first passed in Washington state.

Utah legislators established a Digital Wellness, Citizenship, and Safe Technology Commission in 2020, to “ensure that students are digital media-literate, and able to use technology safely and ethically.” In 2022, legislators created a civics education pilot program for teaching approaches that are based on proven practices, including teaching media literacy and digital citizenship.

## NEW MEXICO



New Mexico’s law states that media literacy may be offered as an elective to fulfill high school graduation requirements. The law has been in place since 2009, making New Mexico one of the earliest states to address the issue of media literacy education.

## CALIFORNIA



California passed a law in 2018 requiring the state Department of Education to make a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy available to school districts on its website, including media literacy professional development programs for teachers.

## RHODE ISLAND



Rhode Island in 2017 called on the state Department of Education to consider the incorporation of media literacy education into the board of education's basic education program regulations. The MLN Rhode Island chapter developed a report based on this legislation making recommendations.

## HAWAI'I



Both the House and Senate passed a resolution calling on the state Department of Education to establish media literacy educational opportunities. The votes were bipartisan despite coming from a largely Democratic statehouse.

## TENNESSEE



In 2022, the legislature established the position of state library coordinator within the State Department of Education to, among other things, help implement digital citizenship initiatives.

## VIRGINIA

In 2022, Virginia legislators in both houses approved a bill, on a bipartisan vote, that would have moved forward on the the MLN advisory council process\*:

It would have created a “Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy Advisory Council” for the purpose of “advancing the goal of safe, ethical, and responsible use of media and technology by students and teachers in public elementary and secondary schools.”

However, the governor substituted language to create an “Internet Safety Advisory Council\* for the purpose of “advancing the goal of safe use of media and technology.”

House and Senate members accepted the governor’s substitute and the bill was signed. This was a disappointment after the advancement of the original bill. However, advocates can still work with the council to advance media literacy practices, as those skills are needed for safe media and tech use.

# TRENDS

As movement and progress continue to be made in the media literacy space, it's important for media literacy advocates to be aware of developments. Often, legislation is passed that includes funding that can be accessed for media literacy initiatives. By keeping an eye on trends, media literacy advocates can find creative ways to further media literacy education in their local communities and states.

## DIGITAL EQUITY

A number of states are paying attention to “digital equity” for underserved populations and how a lack of “digital literacy” can affect workforce preparation. It's important that media literacy advocates are aware of this trend because of the attention and funding it is getting. The U.S. Digital Equity Act in 2021 included funding for states – generally for improved technology, but also for digital literacy. Often digital literacy is understood as the ability to use internet-connected devices to access the internet, create and share information via modern technology, and perform other technical tasks. However, the definitions that are used by the U.S. and in state laws often include a clear opening for media literacy advocates.

For example, a successful Washington bill calls for digital equity to “broaden access to the internet, the appropriate devices, and the skills to operate online safely and effectively so that all people in Washington can fully participate in our society, democracy, and economy.”

“Digital equity” in the new Washington law means the “condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in society and the economy.” That capacity includes “digital literacy,” defined as the skills associated with using technology to enable users to use information and communications technologies to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information – a definition close to the commonly used media literacy definition, and that arguably incorporates the need for media literacy skills (see Glossary.)



Other state legislation commonly refers to the U.S. Code that states: The term “digital literacy skills” means the skills associated with: using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information; and developing digital citizenship and the responsible use of technology. And “digital citizenship” is sometimes defined to include media literacy. (See Texas definition in glossary.)

There’s a strong case to be made that educators and nonprofits can seek digital equity and digital literacy funding for media literacy training.

## **NATIONAL SECURITY**

In addition, the federal government is paying greater attention to the national security consequences of media illiteracy. The Department of Homeland Security is offering grants to organizations to improve media literacy education in communities across the country. Meanwhile, the Department of Defense is incorporating media literacy into standard troop training, and the State Department is funding media literacy efforts abroad. These trends are important for advocates to be aware of as potential sources of funding as well as for supporting arguments around integrating media literacy into K-12 classrooms.

# CALL TO ACTION

Media literacy is an essential element in the U.S. K-12 public education system. This report outlines the progress that has been made so far, but the action is still too slow compared to the urgent and immediate need.

There is a great need for more research and data. First, data is needed to understand current school district landscapes and identify gaps and needs for media literacy education. Secondly, research needs to be done as states enact new laws and standards and they're being implemented in schools across the country. This research will be vital in informing educators and policymakers on best practices and help identify opportunities for improvement.

Media Literacy Now has partnered with the Media Education Lab to encourage and support the use of the Media Literacy Implementation (MLI) Index, a survey that measures the prevalence of media literacy education in schools and communities. The MLI Index is an important tool to gather the data needed. We urge advocates to look for more opportunities to collect data and promote the use of the MLI Index in their school districts and states.

## A Grassroots Approach to Data Collection

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. In Maynard, Massachusetts, a high school senior, Gracie Gilligan, worked with Media Literacy Now and Media Education Lab to administer the MLI Index survey to students in her school district as part of her senior project. Maynard teachers and administrators supported the effort and as a result of the survey findings, they are now moving forward with a broader study in the school district. We offer the MLI Index as a tool for advocates, school personnel, and even students – in high school or beyond – to utilize in their communities. Visit [medialiteracynow.org/MLIindex](https://medialiteracynow.org/MLIindex) to learn more.



To ensure this progressive momentum continues, we should recognize that we all have a role to play in advocating for changes in the public education system. Whether you're a parent, educator, policymaker, or concerned citizen, you can make change in your community.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

**Legislators:** Sponsor or co-sponsor the model bill, which is gaining bipartisan support across the country. Ask state education officials to report on implementation of existing laws. The Glossary section of this report includes our model bill definition of media literacy.

**Individuals:** Call your representatives and senators at the state level and ask them to support media literacy education policy. Join your state chapter to support ongoing efforts. Use MLN tools to advocate with teachers and administrators in your local schools.

**Teacher-librarians:** Use MLN tools to advocate for media literacy education with school district teachers, administrators, education associations, parents, and state legislators.

**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.

**Education leaders, academics, graduate students:** Seek funding to conduct the MLI Index survey.

### Take Action

Visit our website at [www.medialiteracynow.org](http://www.medialiteracynow.org) to learn more and get involved in your state.

# GLOSSARY

## MEDIA LITERACY

Media Literacy Now’s model bill definition:

“Media literacy shall be considered a broad term that encompasses consumption and production of media and digital products and communication technology of all kinds, and refers to a person’s ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and take action with all forms of media including: news in print, online, and broadcast on TV and radio; content such as images, text, and video posted on social media platforms; movies; music; video games; websites; advertisements; and those using AI, algorithms, virtual reality, augmented reality, and surveillance systems. Media literacy includes an understanding of how media systems work and of digital wellness, and encompasses the foundational skills of information literacy, news literacy, digital citizenship, digital literacy, and internet safety, including: critical thinking and an understanding of how to identify credible information resources; the norms of appropriate, responsible, ethical, healthy behavior; and the ability to recognize the bias in every media message.”

The National Association for Media Literacy Education’s definition, which is commonly referenced: “Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.”

## DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

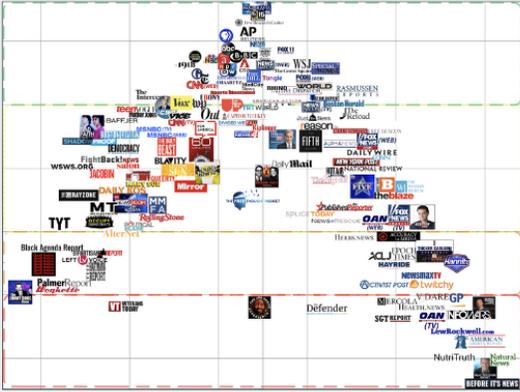
**Digital citizenship** is sometimes used interchangeably with media literacy, or includes media literacy as this Texas definition does: “the standards of appropriate, responsible, and healthy online behavior, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act on all forms of digital communication.” Digital citizenship implies an expected outcome, while media literacy in our usage is outcomes-neutral.

## INFORMATION LITERACY

**Information literacy** as defined by New Jersey law: “A set of skills that enables an individual to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. Information literacy includes, but is not limited to, digital, visual, media, textual, and technological literacy.”



## Home of the Media Bias Chart



## News Literacy Curriculum for Educators

Includes Lessons Plans, Topic of the Week, Instructional Videos, Assessments and More!

[education@adfontesmedia.com](mailto:education@adfontesmedia.com)

@adfontesmedia     

# NAMLE

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) unites a community of educators who provide resources to help people of all ages develop the vital skills of media literacy.



We are proud to support our partners at Media Literacy Now.

**NAMLE**  
CONFERENCE 2023

July 14-15, 2023  
[www.namleconference.net](http://www.namleconference.net)

UNITED STATES  
**MEDIA LITERACY WEEK**  
EST. 2015 | HOSTED BY NAMLE

October 23-27, 2023  
[www.medialiteracyweek.us](http://www.medialiteracyweek.us)

Individual Membership is FREE!

[www.namle.net/join](http://www.namle.net/join)



# Is information literacy important to you?



[outreach.mla.org/infolit/](http://outreach.mla.org/infolit/)

**GROUND**  
News

[www.ground.news](http://www.ground.news)

## Evaluate news as you read it.

Try our comprehensive media literacy platform for the modern world.



## CONTACT US

**Support our work today**  
*Help us equip young people for  
today's digital media world.*



[medialiteracynow.org/give](https://medialiteracynow.org/give)

Media Literacy Now  
15 Main St. Suite 102  
Watertown MA 02472



@medialiteracynow