

LEGISLATOR DRAFT REQUEST

2019 Session

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Legislator: **Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson**

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PROBLEM: Public Schools – Health and Safety Best Practices – Screen/Digital Devices

Even if WiFi radiation was not a problem in public schools, having removed all routers and wired all computer devices, too much screen time would still be harmful to educators and students. (The topic of WiFi radiation is considered in another separately proposed bill.) The adoption of [Common Core State Standards](#) and high stakes standardized testing ([SBAC](#)) has led to the proliferation of computers in public schools. Additionally, the United States Department of Education through programs such as [Future Ready Schools](#) and [Digital Promise](#) has pushed computer technology into classrooms hastily often without parent knowledge or consent and without adequate safety precautions. Without examining the harmful health effects of too much time spent on digital screen devices, the government is placing students, teachers, and school staff at risk. We are not against computer technology in schools but warn against the detrimental physical, mental, and emotional effects that too much screen time has on children. We ask for a balanced, healthy practices by addressing the following problems.

1. In recent years medical doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, parents and other experts in child development have become increasingly concerned about the harmful effects they are witnessing as the result of children's overexposure to digital technology. ⁽¹⁾
2. The use of wireless digital technology has grown rapidly over the past two decades. In a single classroom students may be using laptops, tablets, virtual reality glasses, headsets, smart boards, and cell phones as well as heart/exercise monitors, watches, and other devices. ⁽²⁾
3. Between home and school usage, children are spending an excessive amount of time on screen devices. ⁽³⁾
4. The high-pressure "edtech" movement has brought a mishmash of digital devices and online and other pre-packaged programs into our schools, where they are promoted as "personalized," "competency-based," "student-centered," or "self-directed" learning, without considering the harmful effects these devices and programs have on children. The profit motive is driving the edtech revolution in schools. Teachers, even with their unions, don't stand a chance against the edtech industry behemoth. ⁽⁴⁾
5. There is no information or curriculum at school to provide students, teachers, school staff, and parents with details about manufacturers' safety warnings and ways to use

screen devices such as tablets, laptop computers, cell phones and other devices safely. [\(5\)](#) [\(6\)](#) [\(7\)](#)

6. Teachers, parents, and students may not be aware of the hazards of using computers and personal devices because tech product and software manufacturers are not required to make age recommendations or issue safety warnings. For example, toy, food, alcohol, and cigarette manufacturers are required to warn of the health risks by prominently labeling their products. Age limits prevent children from having access to addictive products. Technology product manufacturers are not required to label products or warn customers about the dangers of usage when marketing their products. Although devices do come with information for safe usage, manufacturers bury warnings deep within their manuals. Even salespersons are often unaware that safety information exists. [\(8\)](#)
7. Extended use of computers and other digital devices is associated with certain physical health risks including poor posture, back problems, carpal tunnel syndrome and other ergonomic effects, eye strain, hearing issues, impeded fine motor skills, sensory issues, weight gain, passivity, sleeplessness, disruption of the blood-brain barrier, harm to the reproductive organs of both boys and girls, microwave sickness, and others. [\(9\)](#) [\(10\)](#) [\(11\)](#)
8. Prolonged sessions looking at and interacting with screens is associated with several conditions that are harmful to vision including myopia, lack of sunlight, lack of melatonin production, cumulative retinol damage, dry eyes, light frequency/brain stimulation disorders, augmented reality, and others. Students are required to wear safety goggles to protect their eyes and follow safety rules when using potentially dangerous science equipment in school labs. No eye safety precautions are required when using computers and other screen devices. [\(12\)](#)
9. Too much time spent on screen devices leads to troubling mental and emotional conditions including isolation, attention deficits, less face-to-face interactions, addictions, disconnection to the natural world, memory and retention disorders, negative impacts on cognitive and emotional aspects of reading, increased psychological difficulties, behavioral and discipline issues, ADHD, and others. [\(13\)](#)
10. Gamification of the curriculum means more harmful screen time. In June of 2018, the World Health Organization classified gaming as an addiction. [\(14\)](#)
11. Large class sizes mean that some students are being “taught” for long periods of time by computer while the teacher works with others. The computer becomes the de facto teacher – or babysitter. Rewarding kids in class with more screen time, as software programs – and teachers – often do, exacerbates the problem. Taking away screen time as a punishment is another problem. [\(15\)](#)
12. One-to-one devices are being given to kids too early. The children of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Silicon Valley executives went to or go to private schools with no computer technology until high school. Parents of public school students do not have the option of sending their kids to school with no computer technology in grades K-8. Also,

parents are not offered options to 1:1 programs that require students as young as preschoolers to use devices. [\(16\)](#) [\(29\)](#)

13. The needs of a six-year-old are not the same as a sixteen-year-old, but schools do not address developmental differences and needs in using computer technology. Computer technology is not “personalized.” It delivers a one-size-fits-all passive, authoritarian education. The time spent on a lesson can vary greatly from child to child, requiring some children especially those with special needs or English language learners to spend more time on devices. ⁽¹⁷⁾
14. Research shows that this grand experiment on our children initiated by the obligatory adoption of Common Core State Standards, SBAC, and now digital delivery of instruction at every level and in every content area is not working. Bill Gates, who has invested hundreds of million of dollars in this effort, has admitted as much. [\(18\)](#)
15. More time on screens means less time at recess, outdoors, playing and communing with nature – all of which contribute to the well-being of the whole child. ⁽¹⁹⁾
16. Parents have little to no voice in the adoption of screen devices and curriculum, even when they have demanded options and the assurance that this type of education delivery is safe for children. ⁽²⁰⁾
17. Constant monitoring and recording of student progress, down to every keystroke as some data tech executives have bragged, undermines student data privacy. ⁽²¹⁾
18. Screen time that feeds data mining operations and the sharing of data with third parties through apps, software, and platforms promoted by schools can lead to data breaches. Parents should question interoperability platforms like Project Unicorn used by Portland Public Schools. Student data is used to market products to children and perpetuate the commercialization of childhood. [\(22\)](#) [\(23\)](#) [\(24\)](#)
19. Schools may be liable for students’ health care costs related to medical conditions from too much screen time use at school. [\(25\)](#)
20. Congress has proposed a \$95 million study on the effects of technology on children. Called the Children and Media Research Advancement Act, or CAMRA for short, the bill would see that money distributed over the next five years, to researchers studying how things like mobile devices, social media, and virtual reality affect the way kids think, grow, and socialize. It’s way too much money, way too late. The evidence is clear. Many studies already exist showing the harm that digital devices do to children. We only need to act on it. We can’t wait five years for a government study while kids are being harmed now. What the proposal does say is that people are starting to pay attention to the problem. ⁽²⁶⁾ [\(27\)](#) [\(28\)](#)

SOLUTION

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) identifies as a priority the “physical and mental health of students, teachers and school staff.” The ODE also states as a matter of its “wellness” policy that, “The board will involve staff, parents, students, public health professionals, school administrators and the public in the development, implementation and periodic review and yearly update of this (wellness) policy.” In adherence to this declaration, it is incumbent upon the state to institute policies that protect students, teachers, and staff at public schools from the harmful health effects of excessive use of screen devices by doing the following:

- A) Convene a network of child development experts to address the problem of ubiquitous screen devices in schools. On April 20 and 21, 2018, in Boston, the Children’s Screen Time Action Network convened the very first multi-disciplinary conference to reduce children’s screen time. In the midst of national conversations about screen time, data privacy, and persuasive design, teachers, practitioners, advocates and parents came together to collaborate on real solutions to children’s overuse of digital devices. Health and education organizations in Oregon should have such meetings to address the problem. ⁽¹⁾
- B) Follow the guidelines for use of media that the American Academy of Pediatrics has set in 2016. ⁽³⁰⁾
- C) Require public schools to prove that the amount of time spent on screen devices is safe according to established guidelines.
- D) Appropriate computer technology to use as a tool for research, creativity, communication, and projects - NOT canned curriculum, drill and kill exercises, senseless games, and other activities that are intended to collect student data and in the process require extended periods of screen time. ⁽³¹⁾
- E) Inform parents of the health risks involved in with digital screen devices and provide them with the opportunity to give consent for their children to participate in computer based classes.
- F) Schedule more recess and playtime throughout the school day. ⁽³²⁾
- G) Provide alternatives for parents who want to opt their children out of digital learning. ⁽³³⁾ ⁽³⁴⁾
- H) Assign a state health agency to work with the Oregon Department of Education to determine and oversee health standards, create policy, and educate the public about health and safety concerns pertaining to digital technology in schools. Working in tandem, create information flyers, posters, pamphlets and curriculum to inform students about the safe use of wireless devices. Host information sessions and assemblies to keep parents and community members up-to-date on the safe use of

computer technology and limits on screen time devices similar to the Oregon Health Authority's resources on lead at school. It is obvious that the ODE has become a captured agency and is not doing its due diligence in making sure that students are safe at school. ⁽³⁵⁾

- I) Require screen device manufacturers to prominently display safety warnings and age recommendations on packaging as toy, food, cigarette, alcohol, and other dangerous product manufacturers are required to do. ⁽³⁶⁾
- J) Pass legislation similar to that passed by the Maryland legislature to limit screen time in schools and, in addition, include student education requirements on the safe use of those devices. It's a start, but Oregon can do better. In just this year alone, we know so much more than we did when the Maryland bill was first introduced. ⁽³⁷⁾
- K) Require that state and local school districts to provide a full accounting of how much money is being spent on computer technology including hardware, software, data collection, storage, and analyses. How does that compare to funding for other technologies?
- L) Fully fund Oregon's schools according to the Quality Education Model (QEM) so that we can lower class sizes, hire the best teachers, provide a robust curriculum, use computer technology wisely, keep kids safe at school, and give them the excellent education they deserve. (This goes without saying.) ⁽³⁸⁾

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HAS THIS BEEN INTRODUCED IN A PRIOR SESSION? NO
 DO YOU KNOW WHETHER THIS AMENDS A CURRENT LAW OR PROGRAM? NO

NOTES
 Completing the Problem and the Solution statements (Parts 1 & 2, above) is the best way to ensure that the draft accomplishes your objective. Attaching mock statutory language, without explaining the Problem and the Solution, lessens the likelihood of drafting the language correctly.
 Persons other than the legislator, legislator's staff or committee staff must present a written note from the legislator, legislator's staff or committee staff authorizing this request at the time the request is presented.
 This request is considered confidential unless otherwise authorized by the legislator making the request.

Please indicate if there is anyone we may consult:

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