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Digital Citizenship/Media Literacy Bill Awaits Governor's Signature

The Digital Citizenship /Media Literacy bill address the growing public concern regarding the way our children use media screens and what the screens teach children about the world.

Sponsored by Senator Marko Liias (D, Lynnwood), the bill establishes a process to ensure ongoing discussion and action at both the state and local school district levels. It stresses that our children must learn how to safely, ethically, responsibly, and effectively use technology.

"Our schools can and must play a leading role in teaching students to become safe, principled users of digital resources in an increasingly complex communications environment," said Senator Liias.

Washington's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will work with an advisory group to identify best instructional practices and develop a set of recommendations on digital citizenship, Internet safety, and media literacy. Beginning in 2017-18, school districts will be required to annually review their policies and procedures on electronic resources and Internet safety and to consider OSPI recommendations.

Seattle-based nonprofit Action for Media Education (AME) proposed the bill. AME's mission throughout its 25 year history has been to foster and promote digital and media literacy for children and the citizenry at large. AME president, Claire Beach, says the need for this bill has never been greater. According to a recent study, teenagers use an average of nine hours of entertainment media per day and tweens (ages 8-12) use an average of six hours a day, not including time spent using media for school or homework. (Common Sense Media, 2015). Many of our children spend more time in front of screens than with any other activity besides, perhaps, sleeping.

"In this 21st century, our definition of literacy must be expanded to include digital and media literacy education," said Marilyn Cohen, Director of the NW Center for Excellence in Media Literacy at the University of Washington.

Though digital communications have had many positive influences on the world, parents and educators have expressed concerns. Cyberbullying and sub-tweeting, for example, occur at alarming rates and can have devastating results. Media can create false realities. Children do not have the years or the sophistication to understand and process all the material exposed to them. Digital and media literacy are essential 21st century skills which help students navigate the world. Media literacy teaches them to recognize stereotypes and bias; it teaches them to look for what is left out of the message; and to ethically and responsibly use the tools given to them.

Stay tuned...