



Digital Health and Wellness Are Essential to Supporting Healthy and Engaged Students

IDRA Testimony for House Bill 3489, Submitted to the Texas Senate Education Committee on May 18, 2021

Dear Chairman Taylor and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, I serve as an Education Policy Fellow at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA supports HB 3489 and its role in the development and distribution of health and safety guidelines for best practices for effective integration and appropriate use of digital devices in public schools.

Digital technologies, such as the Internet, devices, and online educational programs, are instrumental resources in schools for student learning. Remote virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic made the use of digital devices and other online resources an essential part of students' learning experience. However, these new learning tools must have appropriate health and safety guidelines.

Learning that occurs through digital platforms entails extended periods of screen time that can impact students' physical and mental health and well-being. Through stakeholder convenings with students, IDRA has found that students' ability to navigate digital learning environments while considering their own physical and mental health is a major concern. Recent research around mental health and screen time suggests that prolonged screen time is associated with adverse psychological health effects, such as issues with focus and inattention, weakened emotional stability, and difficulty navigating in-person social interactions with peers (Twenge, et al., 2018).

The state of Texas must strive to create the safest online learning experience for students, and HB 3489 works toward this goal. Viable solutions toward appropriately addressing student mental health and wellness concerns and their impact on academic engagement must be pursued (Muñoz, 2021a), including the safe practices of interacting with digital technologies in schools.

Recommendations

In addition to supporting the protections in HB 3489, IDRA recommends state and local leaders ensure all programs ensure digital literacy training for students. Digital literacy is an integral component of digital learning and ensures students have the knowledge to safely and effectively use computer devices, navigate online programs, and access safe, credible sources of information on the Internet as part of their digital learning experience.

There must be robust communication between school districts and parents and families regarding the sharing of information on best practices for managing at-home screen time and digital device use, as it pertains to their student learning. Virtual instruction extends to the student's home environment, and families should have access to and an opportunity to implement best practices in the use of school digital devices in their home. Family engagement strategies are integral in promoting students' academic and social-emotional engagement and success.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Ana Ramón, IDRA Deputy Director of Advocacy, at ana.ramon@idra.org.

Resources

- Marshall, T. (April 2021). Solving the Digital Divide Requires Authentic Family Engagement. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/nlApr21a>
- Marshall, T., & Muñoz, C. (April 2021). Digital Destination – Texas Needs Broadband Connectivity for All Students and Families, Issue Brief. Intercultural Development Research Association. <https://idra.news/DigitalDestinationPDF>
- Muñoz, C. (March 2021). Mental Health Implications of Virtual Learning on Student Engagement. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/NLMar21a>
- Muñoz, C. (March 2021). Digital Divide Directly Impacted Student-School Engagement During COVID-19. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/NLMar21e>
- Twenge, J.M., & Campbell, W.K. (October 18, 2018). Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents: Evidence from a population-based study. Preventive Medicine Reports. doi:10.1016/j.pmedr.2018.10.003

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.