

California Takes Bold Step to Combat Misinformation with Mandatory Media Literacy Education



In response to the escalating tide of misinformation on the internet, California has enacted a groundbreaking measure mandating media literacy education for all K-12 students. Governor Gavin Newsom endorsed Assembly Bill 873, a significant legislative move requiring integrating media literacy skills into existing curriculum frameworks for English language arts, science, math, and history-social studies. This initiative, set to commence gradually from the next academic year, aims to equip students with the tools to discern fake news and critically evaluate online content.

Media Literacy Infused Across Subjects

Unlike traditional stand-alone courses, the new law ensures that media literacy becomes integral to various subjects and lessons throughout the school year. Assemblymember Marc Berman, the bill's sponsor, emphasized the necessity of arming young people with the skills to navigate the complex landscape of misinformation that influences real-world consequences, such as election outcomes and the stability of democracy.

Addressing Public Distrust in Media

This legislative move comes when public trust in the media, especially among young people, dwindles. A 2022 Pew Research Center survey revealed that adults under 30 are almost as likely to trust information from social media as they are from national news outlets. According to a Gallup poll conducted last year, a mere 7% of adults express "a great deal" of trust in the media. Media literacy proponents believe integrating it into the curriculum can combat this skepticism by empowering students to recognize reliable news sources and appreciate the media's pivotal role in a democracy.

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Urgency and Implementation Challenges

The urgency to counter misinformation led to the near-unanimous approval of AB 873 in the Legislature. However, critics argue that the law falls short of recommendations by not including provisions for teacher training, an advisory committee, librarian input, surveys, or a system to monitor its effectiveness. Berman defended the bill's simplicity, asserting that these features can be addressed later, emphasizing the need for quick implementation to promptly ensure students receive media literacy education. The law is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2024, coinciding with the state's curriculum framework updates, although teachers are encouraged to commence media literacy education immediately.

National Landscape of Media Literacy Laws

California's move aligns with broader national trends as other states, including Texas, New Jersey, and Delaware, have also enacted robust media literacy laws. According to Media Literacy Now, a nonprofit research organization advocating for media literacy in K-12 schools, more than a dozen other states are reportedly moving in a similar direction.

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Building on Past Efforts

AB 873 builds upon prior initiatives in California, notably Senate Bill 830 in 2018, which required providing media literacy resources to K-12 teachers without making it mandatory. Additionally, the new law intersects with the state's endeavor to expand computer science education, potentially encompassing aspects of media literacy. Assembly Bill 1251, recently signed by Governor Newsom, establishes a commission to explore ways to recruit more computer science teachers, while Assembly Bill 1054, sponsored by Berman, seeks to mandate high schools to offer computer science classes.

In the face of the evolving challenges of misinformation, California's proactive stance emphasizes the critical role education plays in preparing the next generation to responsibly navigate the complex and dynamic information landscape.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.

