



MISUSE OF SCREENS IN SCHOOLS: AN ACTION KIT TO HELP PARENTS



Myopia. Musculoskeletal problems. Sleep deprivation. Diminished cognitive abilities.

Those are just a few of the potential perils when screens and other digital technologies are overused or misused in schools, [researchers have found](#). Yet more and more of our children's time is spent in front of screens.

In part, this is due to limited information. "Our research indicates that schools are adopting digital education programs with little, if any, understanding of the details of how these products are designed and used," said CU Boulder Research Professor [Faith Boninger](#), co-director of the NEPC's [Commercialism in Education Research Unit](#), which has published [extensive research exposing problems with ed-tech use in education](#). She cautioned that school authorities often have "little understanding or consideration of how these products might harm the children in their care."

But another part of the problem is that, even when people see these problems and want to object, there is no avenue to do so. Boninger explains:

Parents and teachers who question their schools' choices have had little recourse but to accept it, because each one has had to start from scratch in order to figure out how to articulate their concerns, organize others in their community who are also concerned, and effectively bring those concerns to administrators. They're completely outgunned by a tech industry that has every resource of money and expertise at its command to push its wares on schools.

That may be changing, however. Parents, teachers, and others with concerns about screen

time in schools now have a new weapon.

Released earlier this month by the Screens in Schools work group of the Children’s Screen Time Action Network, the [Screens in Schools Action Kit](#) provides resources such as [questions to ask](#) about digital technology (e.g., amount of time spent daily on electronic devices), [sample district-wide recommendations](#) (e.g., offering parents a low/no-screen use option for their children), and a sample letter to a superintendent that highlights steps that can be taken to decrease the potential harm of screen use. The letter suggests eliminating the use of online textbooks viewed on screens that expose students to blue light, suppressing melatonin production that contributes to healthy sleep, eliminating computer-based homework, allowing families to opt out of computer-based activities, and following manufacturers’ safety guidelines by, for instance, taking steps to protect children’s eyes.

Based on a synthesis of research, the non-profit EverySchool, an advocate for healthy ed-tech use, [recommends limiting daily screen use](#) to no more than 20 minutes for first graders and no more than 70 minutes for high school seniors. The organization distinguishes between screen use that is “transformative” (e.g., learning to design a website), “supportive” (e.g., watching TED Talks) “restrictive” (e.g., points-based learning games) and “disruptive” (e.g., students’ personal use of cell phones while at school).

How can parents and educators be heard if they believe their local schools are ignoring such guidelines?

The Screens in Schools Action Kit contains counterarguments to common responses to parents or educators who raise concerns about screen time. For example, here’s how the kit suggests responding to the contention that most excessive screen time occurs at home, so schools shouldn’t be expected to miss out on the benefits of technology because some parents can’t control their children:

Schools, which have a duty of care toward our children and are legally obligated to look out for their safety, can’t go on assigning classwork and homework on screens, pretending that students aren’t already spending dangerous amounts of time on screens at home. Homework and textbook assignments on screens make it especially difficult for parents to monitor and guide their children’s screen time.

“Many parents and teachers are concerned about children’s use of digital technology in schools but are at a loss for what to do about it,” Boninger said. “This action kit provides resources to help them address their concerns with their schools and districts. It also lets them know that they’re not alone in their doubts about the value of digital educational programs.”

NEPC Resources on Computing, Technology, and Information Systems

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