SOCIAL MEDIA

A founding principle of PTA’s mission is to promote the safety and well-being of all children and youth, including their safety and well-being online. Studies have shown that the vast majority of teenagers now use the internet daily, have access to digital devices and are active on social media, including over one-third who report using social media “almost constantly.” Children ages 8-12 are also increasingly connected to the digital world, with nearly forty percent reporting having used social media before and almost one in five reporting they access social media on a daily basis.

As the prevalence of social media increases in the lives of our children, youth and families, so too does the need for additional research. Current research on the impact of social media on children and youth exists but is limited. Additional research is needed to inform future decisions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders.

Our association understands and affirms that social media and other digital technology can be a driver of success, enhancing the learning experience and fostering creativity and connectedness among students, educators, families and communities. For example, social media can serve as an important tool for building the communication skills of students with disabilities, as a space for sharing critical resources with families and as a platform for increasing awareness of issues impacting children and youth. As technology advances and adapts, it is critical that families, educators, clinicians, technology industry leaders, communities and policymakers prioritize promoting a safe and positive online experience for children and youth, while also working to expand access to the technology that fosters learning and well-being.

However, technology may also give rise to digital environments that can be harmful to children and youth. On social media, children and youth can become targets of cyberbullying, harassment and discrimination, predatory marketing, criminal and predatory activity, and encounter threats to the privacy of their personal information. Emerging research suggests that social media exposure may negatively impact mental health during an important developmental period and may undermine physical health and academic performance. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, studies have begun to uncover a link between social media use and increasing adolescent sleep problems and eating disorders and have shown that adolescents who spend more than 3 hours per day on social media may face double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes.

National PTA and its constituent associations urge its members at all levels to monitor, support and advocate for laws, regulations, policies and programs that:

- Develop the media and digital literacy, digital wellness and digital citizenship skills of children and youth, educators and families, to help children and youth act safely,
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*Adopted: 2024*

- Adopted responsibly and thoughtfully online and to connect families with tools, research, and support to help navigate digital environments and be successful online.

- Protect children and youth and prevent them from accessing dangerous content, including establishing intentional and explicit processes for reporting predatory, discriminatory or dangerous behavior online and holding social media companies accountable for addressing any behavior or content that threatens their physical and mental health and safety.

- Direct children and youth toward age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate content that fosters learning and well-being, including establishing rating systems and content warnings or markers for social media applications to alert parents, guardians and educators as to any and all objectionable content.

- Enforce strict limitations on collecting Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and sharing of users’ data with third parties by social media companies.

- Restrict targeted advertising, including the marketing of harmful products, directed toward children and youth on social media.

- Promote transparency across social media companies regarding algorithm implementation, including how they drive content to children and youth, and require they establish mechanisms for parents and guardians to disable content-driving algorithms for their children.

- Invest in consensus-building efforts to establish reasonable, industry-wide methodologies for age assurance on social media and other online platforms, with the understanding that balancing safety and privacy is a complex challenge.

- Address excessive social media use and encourage healthy screen time by requiring social media companies to offer and maintain features that allow parents and guardians to manage their children’s screen time, such as the ability to block features like auto-play, and other proven strategies.

- Strengthen privacy protections for children and youth on social media and online, including requiring their accounts be set to the highest privacy and protections by default, requiring explicit consent from parents and guardians prior to the collection of any personal information and sharing transparent privacy policies with them that use plain language that is understandable and accessible.

- Prioritize inclusivity and accessibility features, ensuring that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in online discussions, share their experiences and access valuable resources.
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- Invest in efforts to increase awareness of the impact of technology, including research on the benefits and harms of social media on children, youth and families

All children and youth should be safe at school, at home and in their community. National PTA and its constituent associations will continue to support efforts to ensure a safe, inclusive and positive digital experience for all children, youth and families, fostering learning and healthy lifestyles and ensuring they are equipped with the technological literacy and access to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Adopted: by the 2024 Board of Directors