

Student Digital Literacy



Ensure students have the fundamental skill sets they need from the early grades through college to be fully engaged in technology-mediated learning opportunities to develop lifelong fluencies for success in a digital world.

What is the issue and why is it important? What if SREB states do not make adequate progress on this issue?

Literacy means not only the ability to read and write, but also to be fluent in a world of digital information. Digitally literate citizens have the knowledge and skills to access, evaluate, manipulate, utilize, design and develop information — and ultimately to learn from the digital environment. While educators have known for some time that students needed these skills, it is only recently that state agencies have recognized their responsibility to ensure that students at all levels learn to comprehend and communicate digital information at varying levels throughout their education. This responsibility means laying the groundwork for digital literacy in the very early grades.

Digital literacy skills are critical for an informed and productive citizenry, as a gateway to social, political, educational and economic participation. Digital literacy belongs beside reading, writing and math as a fundamental skill in the modern world.

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Schools need to adopt a digital literacy curriculum beginning in the elementary grades to ensure that students develop the necessary skills in a stepwise, systematic way.

A 2016 Stanford University study of nearly 8,000 secondary school and college students

in 12 states makes clear that these skills are unlikely to develop on their own. It shows that most students cannot distinguish between an advertisement and a news article or determine the source of the information. Eighty percent of middle graders thought an ad marked as “sponsored content” was a legitimate news article. High school students couldn’t discern between fake news accounts and actual news sources on social media. College students were not able to evaluate the credibility of a website or wade through contradictory results of a Google search to find reliable and accurate information.

Yet, more and more, employers require digital literacy as an employment skill, and the Pew Research Center recognizes it as

one of the foundational tools of life-long learning and success. Digital literacy is often correlated with career achievement and productivity. The future competitiveness of American companies in the knowledge-based global economy could well depend upon the digital fluency of our workforce. Research shows that a lack of digital literacy skills contributes to a “digital divide.” People with lower incomes, the elderly, the less-educated, the unemployed, and people with disabilities have less access to digital communications — and therefore less opportunity to build skills related to the technology. Many of these people are already marginalized; their digital illiteracy only adds to their isolation because they are unable to access support networks, government services, political processes, or economic opportunities.

Digital literacy competencies must become an everyday part of the learning experience of school children; these skills should be integrated into instruction at all levels. Organizations such as P21.org and [ISTE](#) (International Society for Technology in Education) have undertaken significant work. The P21 framework for 21st century learning provides information and media on the topic and it has laid out technology literacy skills. ISTE has developed student standards that incorporate digital literacy to help students thrive in an ever-evolving technological world. Each of ISTE’s seven standards (empowered learner, digital citizen, knowledge constructor, innovative designer, computational thinker, creative communicator, and global collaborator) include four indicators used in measuring achievement of the standards. P21 and ISTE have laid the groundwork for students’ incremental digital literacy skills. States should adopt PK-20 digital literacy standards and incorporate the required skills into the curriculum so that students graduate with the digital skills they need to enter the workforce.

For postsecondary education, the Association for College and Research Libraries ([ACRL](#), a division of the American Library Association) has developed a framework for information literacy in higher education. ACRL has also developed a free information literacy [toolkit](#) to help individuals and groups understand and implement the framework. Marshall University librarians have designed an original literacy assessment based on the ACRL rubric and [Degree Qualifications Profile](#) from the Lumina Pathways project, with specific skill sets for associate, bachelor’s and graduate degrees.