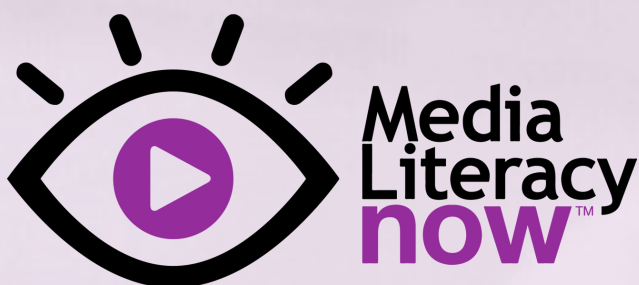


U.S. Media Literacy Policy Update 2021

*A state-by-state survey of the status of
media literacy education laws for K-12 schools*



U.S. Media Literacy 2020 Policy Report and 2021 Policy Update

Written by Erin McNeill

Research and analysis by Erin McNeill, Anderson J. Duff, Louise E. Weber,
David L. Green, and Sheila Seuss Kennedy

Additional editing and review by Alicia Haywood, Juma Inniss,
Denise E. Ramirez, Tamara Sobel, Mary Ann Stewart, Diolinda Vaz,
Katie Walsh, and Andy Zucker

Graphic design by Celina Lee and Anna R. Tarnow

This report made possible by



the “show me your work” company.

To learn more, visit [LearniCS.com](https://www.learniCS.com).

Media Literacy Now is a nonprofit advocacy organization with a mission to drive reform of the U.S. public education system to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn the key 21st century literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship. All data was collected from public sources and is free of political affiliation.

January 2022




TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Introduction**
- 5 The Findings**
- 6 State Laws**
- 10 Conclusion**



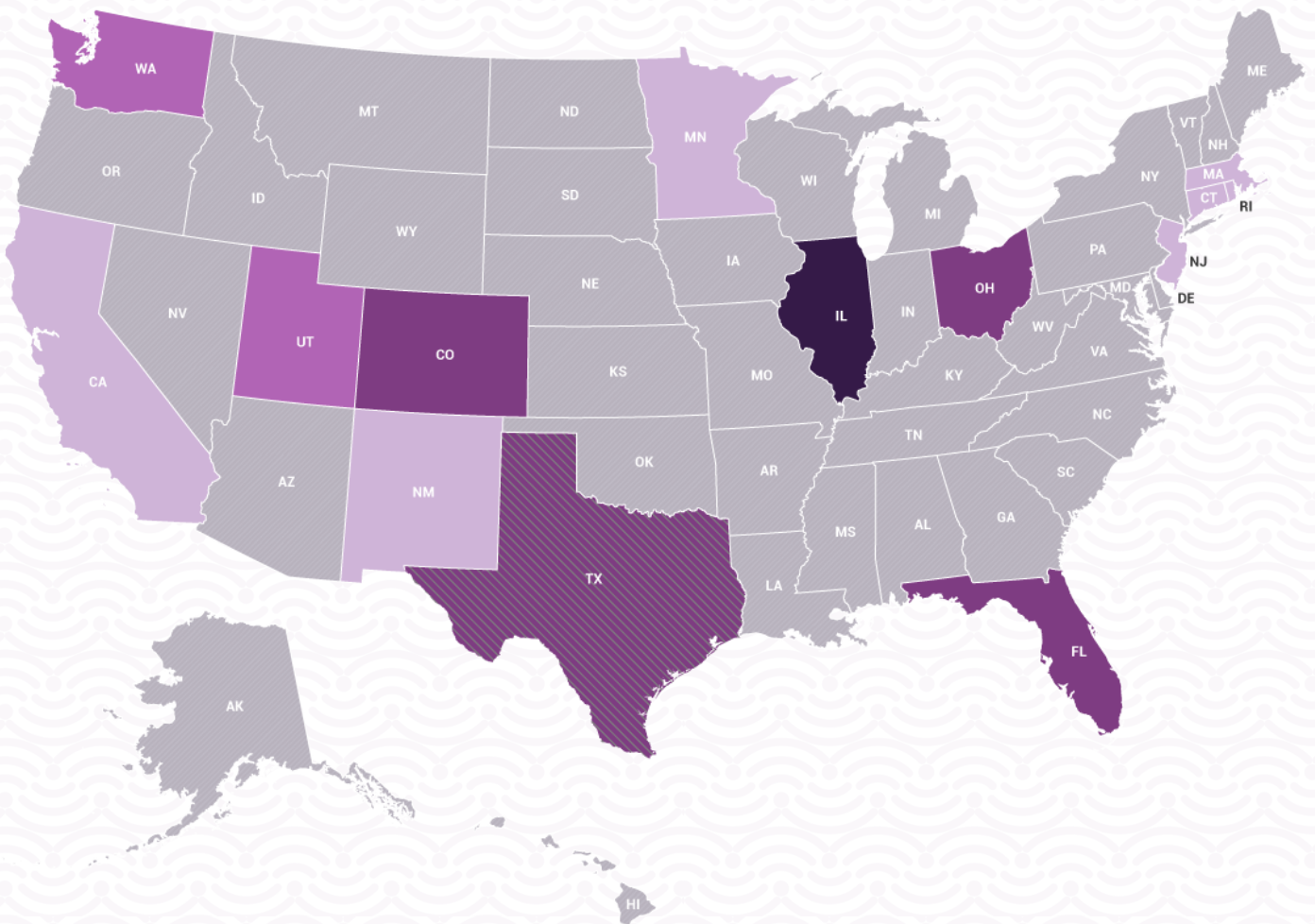
INTRODUCTION

It has been a tumultuous two years since the first Media Literacy Now policy report in 2020. But there has been progress on media literacy policy, despite a global pandemic with its accompanying spread of misinformation, disinformation, and poor official communication. This media environment, which has threatened individual and public health, has also contributed to awareness of the need for media literacy, which refers to the ability not just to discern incoming messages, but to understand the effect of the messages that one creates and distributes. An infodemic occurs when rumors overrun facts in a crisis and people can not make use of essential information. While the infodemic has continued mostly unabated during the period, this is the story of state legislators who have taken seriously their responsibility to guide education priorities in their states, to ensure that schools are meeting their civic mission to shape citizens.

During the 2020 session, most legislatures focused only on must-pass bills such as budgets. In 2021, at least a dozen state legislative bodies again took up and attempted to pass media literacy language, with success in four of them.

The following analysis is based solely on statutory law, not regulatory or administrative actions, which are beyond the scope of this report. Such statutory law doesn't always get implemented, but it does provide an avenue for activists and the public to hold their policymakers at all levels accountable.

THE FINDINGS



Copyright © Free Vector Maps.com

1 Leader in requiring media literacy education in classrooms (Illinois)

2 Have policy requiring media literacy in the education standards (Colorado, Florida, Ohio, Texas*)

*See narrative

3 Demonstrating strong progress toward media literacy education policy (Utah, Washington)

4 Taking various other routes toward media literacy education policy (California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island)

STATE LAWS

Here are the ranking changes for this update. This is an update to our January 2020 policy report. We are not going to repeat a lot of the findings published there. Explanation of the states that are ranked in this map but not discussed here can be found in the 2020 report. The colors used correlate with the 2020 report, but we've chosen to remove the descriptive names of those rankings.

Category 1

Illinois has catapulted ahead in our ranking of state statutory approaches to media literacy education. Illinois has become the first state to require that media literacy is taught in the classrooms. Previous leadership of other states introduced the concept of a comprehensive integration of media literacy in the education standards. While that was a significant step that deserves recognition, integration of a concept into standards can be difficult for policymakers to observe and monitor. The clarity of this Illinois requirement to teach media literacy in the classroom is helpful.

Illinois

We still hope for more and that Illinois will continue to make progress. The new law refers to “a unit” rather than a more extensive course of study, and only in high school. But this is a big step in the right direction and the language of the law imposes no limits on what a “unit of media literacy” might entail in terms of curriculum and classroom hours. In fact, what that unit “shall include” is quite extensive.

Media literacy advocates in Illinois are working with the state to further shape the parameters of media literacy instruction in the schools.

Here is the language of the new law, approved by the governor July 9, 2021:

Beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, every public high school shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction on media literacy. The unit of

instruction shall include, but is not limited to, all of the following topics:

(1) Accessing information: Evaluating multiple media platforms to better understand the general landscape and economics of the platforms, as well as issues regarding the trustworthiness of the source of information.

(2) Analyzing and evaluating media messages: Deconstructing media representations according to the authors, target audience, techniques, agenda setting, stereotypes, and authenticity to distinguish fact from opinion.

(3) Creating media: Conveying a coherent message using multimodal practices to a specific target audience. This may include, but is not limited to, writing blogs, composing songs, designing video games, producing podcasts, making videos, or coding a mobile or software application.

(4) Reflecting on media consumption: Assessing how media affects the consumption of information and how it triggers emotions and behavior.

(5) Social responsibility and civics: Suggesting a plan of action in the class, school, or community to engage others in a respectful, thoughtful, and inclusive dialogue over a specific issue using facts and reason.

Category 2

Colorado has taken a big step by requiring media literacy standards – although not comprehensively – and so it joins Florida, Ohio, and Texas. The law signed May 27, 2021 states:

The state board shall adopt revisions to the reading, writing, and civics standards that identify the knowledge and skills that an elementary through secondary education student should acquire relating to media literacy.

Colorado

The new law also requires the Department of Education to create an online bank of resources for schools to consider using, and to provide, upon request, technical assistance to any school districts seeking to incorporate media literacy into their policies or curriculum.

We move Florida and Ohio one step down, not because they have backtracked, but because of the significant leadership step taken by Illinois. The laws in

Florida**Ohio****Texas**

these two states have not changed in over a decade and we have not seen the legislature take steps to fund, monitor, or otherwise ensure implementation of these requirements. We have seen recent efforts by Florida legislators to advance media literacy education.

Texas is an interesting case. We are pleased by a new Texas teacher training requirement for civics education, the only such requirement in any state. Yet we are alarmed by the inclusion of censorship provisions that restrict what teachers may teach. These provisions will likely prevent teachers from presenting a wide palette of ideas on which students might practice the critical thinking skills they are acquiring through media literacy education.

The law signed Sept. 17, 2021 states:

To facilitate the teaching of [a civics] curriculum ... the commissioner shall develop and make available civics training programs for teachers and administrators ... A civics training program developed under this section must include training in: ... media literacy, including instruction on verifying information and sources, identifying and responding to logical fallacies, and identifying propaganda, as appropriate for the grade level and consistent with the restrictions under Section 28.0022.

These new restrictions, mentioned in the last sentence above, refer to the extensive new Section 28.0022 delineating what teachers may not teach in regards to race, sex, and the history of slavery in the United States. Teachers are also restricted from encouraging students to participate in the public policy process.

“This is a frightening effort to circumscribe whatever academic freedom high school teachers may have, and to threaten those teaching American history,” says Sheila Seuss Kennedy, emerita professor of law and public policy at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI).

We were tempted to place Texas in a category of its own, but because we are ranking according to the language of the law related to media literacy, we left Texas in place but have shown graphically in the map that there is a caveat. Also, we acknowledge that other states, including Florida, are also pursuing avenues to constrict the concepts and ideas that can be discussed in schools that may also impact the acquisition of media literacy skills. We felt compelled to comment on the Texas action because the new restrictions are in the very same law, and referenced in the same clause, as the new media literacy

training requirement. While a full analysis of those efforts is beyond the scope of this report, media literacy advocates should keep a close eye on any government actions that narrow the application of critical thinking skills. (Please see the 2020 report for more information about Texas standards.)

Category 3

Utah

Utah legislators continued to acknowledge the need for education that helps protect students from the threat of cyber-bullying, furthers suicide prevention and anti-pornography efforts, and supports social and emotional learning. They made progress by establishing a Digital Wellness, Citizenship, and Safe Technology Commission, signed by the governor March 30, 2020, to “ensure that students are digital media-literate, and able to use technology safely and ethically.” The commission is tasked with identifying best practices for reaching every student with training in digital citizenship. The bill calls for a “media literacy librarian” on the commission.

Digital citizenship is defined in the new law as “the norms of appropriate, responsible, and healthy behavior related to technology use, including digital literacy, ethics, etiquette, and security.” This is not the more comprehensive definition that Texas uses, which includes “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act on all forms of digital communication” -- a definition closer to the definition of media literacy in general use, just limited because of the addition of the word “digital.”

We recognize Washington for continued progress. Washington stands above all in committing money and staff to advancing media literacy education for its students. As there hasn't been a change to statutory language to require media literacy, we are leaving Washington in its current ranking.

Washington

CONCLUSION

Again, it's important to emphasize that for the purpose of this report, we have reviewed statutory language only. In most cases, we have reviewed state laws that use the terms "media literacy" or "digital citizenship."

We have also not commented on implementation, which requires more study. This report presents our interpretation of the laws and their significance to the advancement of media literacy education.

Department of education policies as well as district policies may also address media literacy and we seek to eventually incorporate those policies in future analyses.


Defining media literacy

Media literacy is the ability to:

Decode media messages (including the systems in which they exist).

Assess the influence of those messages on thoughts, feelings,
and behaviors.

Create media thoughtfully and conscientiously.







This report is dedicated to Claire Douglas Beach, who was an indefatigable advocate for media literacy education for young people in Washington state and everywhere.



Media Literacy Now
15 Main Street, Suite 102
Watertown, MA 02472

(617) 744-9563

-  medialiteracynow.org
-  info@medialiteracynow.org
-  [@MediaLitNow](https://twitter.com/MediaLitNow)
-  [MediaLiteracyNow](https://www.facebook.com/MediaLiteracyNow)