



15 Main Street, Suite 102
Watertown, MA 02472
(617) 744-9563

To: Sarah Toth, PhD, MEd, MCHES, Co-Chair, NHES Task Force, SHAPE America
Nadine Marchessault, MEd, NBCT, Co-Chair, NHES Task Force, SHAPE America

CC: Stephanie A. Morris, CEO, SHAPE America

Re: National Health Education Standards

Date: September 14, 2023

The undersigned would like to express gratitude for your extensive work in revising the National Health Education Standards. We realize the task of providing a guidance document for health educators across the country is a monumental one, but also a collaborative one. We would like to take this opportunity to provide the following input and recommendations based on the [recently shared draft](#). Specifically, we believe that the teaching of media literacy skills and referencing safety and wellness in the context of young peoples' digital use must be included.

Background

Life in the 21st century clearly relies extensively on technology and media, and our childrens' worlds are particularly media-inundated. Ninety-five percent of young people aged 13-17 report using a social media platform.(1) Nearly two thirds of teenagers report using social media every day and one third report using social media "almost constantly."(2) One recent survey found that teenagers, who spend roughly 8.5 hours per day using different types of media, spend an average of 3.5 hours a day on social media.(3) While there are clearly benefits to using digital information and social media – finding community, connection, information and learning, entertainment – there are also serious risks in young peoples' media use.

- A recent advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General warned that children and adolescents who spend more than 3 hours a day on social media face double the risk of mental health problems including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. (4)
- When asked about the impact of social media on their body image, 46% of adolescents aged 13-17 said social media makes them feel worse.(5)
- Problematic and addictive interactive media use takes a toll on many young people, affecting emotional health, sleep, and school performance.(6)
- Young people are easily exposed to information online that promotes alcohol bingeing, drug use, self-harm and risky behavior, including cutting, suicidal behavior, eating disorders and starvation (7, 8)
- Harassment and bullying online – often more severe and detrimental than in real life – is common, including hate towards racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities, and sexual harassment, which can have severe emotional and physical impacts on a child's health. (9)

Media Literacy Now is leading the grassroots movement to create a public education system that ensures all students learn the 21st-century media literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship.



Learning to look at, understand, and protect oneself in using media is an important element in positive emotional and physical health, and staying safe. It is especially important to develop this awareness and these healthy habits early in life. Young people are at a fluid and vulnerable time in their brain and emotional development; they are especially susceptible to being influenced by peer pressure, manipulation, and addictive and harmful effects that can come from certain media use. **(10)**

Developing general media literacy critical thinking skills and principles of digital wellness supports improved health literacy and can be effective in protecting against online harms.**(11)** Critical thinking around media use has been shown to be an effective form of protection from the mindsets that lead to eating disorders, poor body image, low self-esteem and depression.**(12)** Media literacy curricula have been shown to positively change attitudes and decision-making about substance abuse, **(13)** to change attitudes and behaviors around anger management and violence,**(14)** and to increase students' knowledge about and ability to make healthy food choices.**(15)** Media literacy-infused sex education is emerging as an effective intervention in disrupting abusive and violence-condoning attitudes around relationships.**(16)**

In fact, public health and education officials and organizations, including the U.S. Surgeon General, the American Psychological Association (APA), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have all made specific recommendations on the importance of media literacy education in preparing youth for healthier and safer lives in the digital age.**(17)**

Regarding the SHAPE America draft revision to the previous Health Education Standards, we believe there must be acknowledgment of the huge role digital media use plays in the lives and health of young people today.

Changes and Recommendations

The previous draft included learning "Standard 2" which referenced the need for students to "analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, *media, technology*, and other factors on health behaviors." The former draft built scaffolding to develop important media literacy skills from Pre-K to grade 12, including age-appropriately developed skills to:

- Describe how the media can influence health behaviors.
- Analyze how messages from media influence health behaviors.
- Evaluate the effect and impact of media and technology on personal, family and community health.
- Analyze and explain how media influences thoughts, feelings, and health behaviors.

The new draft has no specific mention of media at all and no reference to the previous media literacy/digital wellness skills, which we believe to be highly problematic.

Media Literacy Now is leading the grassroots movement to create a public education system that ensures all students learn the 21st-century media literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship.



The new "Standard 7" encourages students to "demonstrate practices and behaviors to promote health and well-being" with no reference to the digital habits and practices of young people. We believe this ignores the reality of the amount of time, energy and mental and emotional attention young people expend in their digital lives; evaluating and improving health behaviors must include those that are screen-related.

As SHAPE America engages in the critical process of guiding and providing resources for the nation's K-12 health educators, we urge you to give attention to the reality that media plays a large and influential role in youth health and development. Therefore including media literacy and digital wellness principles in health education guidance for teachers is not only the responsible thing to do, it is essential. It is also important to mention that there are many high quality resources to recommend to teachers as part of the guidance and professional development process for health educators.

We hope SHAPE America will heed this input as it continues to develop the best possible guidance for today's health educators, including the importance of specific preventative health education for our digital age.

Thank you,
Sincerely,

Erin McNeill, CEO
Tamara Sobel, J.D., National Advisor on Health Education & Media Literacy



Lisa Honold
Founder & Director



Irene Ly
Counsel, Tech Policy



Josh Golin
Executive Director



Elizabeth Englander
Executive Director,
Massachusetts
Aggression
Reduction Center



Michelle Ciulla Lipkin
Executive Director



Doreen Marshall, Ph.D.
CEO, National Eating Disorders
Association



Media Literacy Now is leading the grassroots movement to create a public education system that ensures all students learn the 21st-century media literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship.

MediaLiteracyNow.org



References:

- 1, 2 . Vogels, E., Gelles-Watnick, R. & Massarat, N. (2022). Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022. Pew Research Center: Internet, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>
3. Riehm, K. E., Feder, K. A., Tormohlen, K. N., Crum, R. M., Young, A. S., Green, K. M., Pacek, L. R., La Flair, L. N., & Mojtabai, R. (2019). Associations Between Time Spent Using Social Media and Internalizing and Externalizing Problems Among US Youth. *JAMA psychiatry*, 76(12), 1266–1273. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.2325>
4. U.S. Surgeon General Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health (May 2023); Miech, R. A., Johnston, L. D., Bachman, J. G., O'Malley, P. M., Schulenberg, J. E., and Patrick, M. E. (2022). *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth (8th- and 10thGrade Surveys)*, 2021. Inter-university Consortium for Politica
5. Bickham, D.S., Hunt, E., Bediou, B., & Rich, M. (2022). *Adolescent Media Use: Attitudes, Effects, and Online Experiences*. Boston, MA: Boston Children's Hospital Digital Wellness Lab, https://digitalwellnesslab.org/wpcontent/uploads/Pulse-Survey_Adolescent-Attitudes-Effectsand-Experiences.pdf,
6. Boer, M., Stevens GWJM, Finkenauer C, van den Eijnden RJM, The course of problematic social media use in young adolescents: A latent class growth analysis. *Child Dev.* 2022;93(2):e168-e187. doi:10.1111/cdev.13712; *Media Use by Tweens and Teens, CommonSense Media (2021)*, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/8-18-census-integrated-report-finalweb_0.pdf
- 7, 8. Dyson, M. P., Hartling, L., Shulhan, J., Chisholm, A., Milne, A., Sundar, P., Scott, S. D., & Newton, A. S. (2016). A Systematic Review of Social Media Use to Discuss and View Deliberate Self Harm Acts. *PloS one*, 11(5), e0155813. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0155813>;
Sumner, S. A., Ferguson, B., Bason, B., Dink, J., Yard, E., Hertz, M., Hilker, B., Holland, K., Mercado-Crespo, M., Tang, S., & Jones, C. M. (2021). Association of Online Risk Factors With Subsequent Youth Suicide-Related Behaviors in the US. *JAMA network open*, 4(9), e2125860. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.25860>;
Lonergan, A. R., Bussey, K., Fardouly, J., Griffiths, S., Murray, S. B., Hay, P., Mond, J., Trompeter, N., & Mitchison, D. (2020). Protect me from my selfie: Examining the association between photo-based social media behaviors and self-reported eating disorders in adolescence. *The International journal of eating disorders*, 53(5), 485–496. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23256>
9. Moreno, M. A., Chassiakos, Y. R., Cross, C., Hill, D., Ameenuddin, N., Radesky, J., Hutchinson, J., Boyd, R., Mendelson, R., Smith, J., Swanson, W. S., & Media, C. C. (2016). Media use in school-aged children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 138(5). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2592>;
Tynes, B. M., Giang, M. T., Williams, D. R., & Thompson, G. N. (2008). Online racial discrimination and psychological adjustment among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 43(6), 565-569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.08.021>.

Media Literacy Now is leading the grassroots movement to create a public education system that ensures all students learn the 21st-century media literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship.



10. Crone, E. A., & Konijn, E. A. (2018). Media use and brain development during adolescence. *Nature communications*, 9(1),588. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-03126-x>
- Blakemore, S. J., & Mills, K. L. (2014). Is adolescence a sensitive period for sociocultural processing?. *Annual review of psychology*, 65, 187–207. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurevpsych-010213-115202>
- Romer D. (2010). Adolescent risk taking, impulsivity, and brain development: implications for prevention. *Developmental psychobiology*, 52(3), 263–276. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.20442>;
11. P. Parandeh Afshar, F. Keshavarz, M. Dehghan; (2022) Health Literacy and Media Literacy: Is There Any Relation? *Community Health Equity Research & Policy* Volume 42, Issue 2
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0272684X20972642?journalCode=qchb>
12. 51. Thai, H., Davis, C. G., Mahboob, W., Perry, S., Adams, A., & Goldfield, G. S. (2023). Reducing Social Media Use Improves Appearance and Weight Esteem in Youth With Emotional Distress. *Psychology of Popular Media*. 10.1037/ppm0000460.
- Kurz, M., Rosendahl, J., Rodeck, J. *et al.* School-Based Interventions Improve Body Image and Media Literacy in Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *J Primary Prevent* **43**, 5–23 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-021-00660-1>
- Matthews, H. (2016). *The Effect of Media Literacy Training on the Self- Esteem and Body-Satisfaction Among Fifth Grade Girls*. Walden University;
- Levine, M. (2016) *Media Literacy as an Effective and Promising Form of Eating Disorders Prevention*. Eating Disorders Resource Catalogue. Retrieved from
<https://www.edcatalogue.com/media-literacy-as-an-effective-and-promising-form-of-eating-disorders-prevention/>;
- Kagie, M. (2018) Preventing Eating Disorders by Promoting media literacy and Rejecting Harmful Dieting Based Mentalities. *The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology*. 13(1) 64-80.];
- Wade, T. D., Davidson, S., & O’Dea, J. A. (2003). Preliminary controlled evaluation of a school-based media literacy program and self-esteem program for reducing eating disorder risk factors. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 33(4), 371-383.
- Wechsler, H., Nelson, T. F., Lee, J. E., Seibring, M., Lewis, C., & Keeling, R. P. (2003).
13. J. Kupersmidt (2012), Improving Media Message Interpretation Processing Skills to Promote Healthy Decision Making About Substance Use: The Effects of the Middle School Media Ready Curriculum, *Journal of Health Communication*, Vol.17 Issue 5, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10810730.2011.635769>
14. Flashpoint: An Innovative Media Literacy Intervention for High-Risk Adolescents, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/flashpoint-innovative-media-literacy-intervention-high-risk>, cited in J.Moore, N.Dechillo, B.Nicholson, A. Genovese, S.Sladen, *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, Volume: 51 Issue: 2 (Spring 2000)
15. Center for Media Literacy, “CML Pilots Media Literacy Unit for Obesity, Nutrition Education”2005; see also “The Impact of Health-Promoting Media-Literacy Education on Nutrition and Diet Behavior,” *Handbook of Behavior, Food and Nutrition* pp 3391-3411, Jan. 2011

Media Literacy Now is leading the grassroots movement to create a public education system that ensures all students learn the 21st-century media literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship.



16. Scull, T.M., Dodson, C.V., Geller, J.G. et al. A Media Literacy Education Approach to High School Sexual Health Education: Immediate Effects of Media Aware on Adolescents' Media, Sexual Health, and Communication Outcomes. *J Youth Adolescence* 51, 708–723 (2022).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-021-01567-0><https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10964-021-01567-0> ; E. Rothman, N.Daley, J. Adler, (2020) A Pornography Literacy Program for Adolescents, *Am J Public Health*. 2020 February; 110(2): 154–156, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6951388/> Note: Students are not shown pornography in these curricula.

17. Social Media & Youth Mental Health, U.S. Surgeon General Advisory (May 2023) <https://tinyurl.com/np86xe7r>. p.15: "Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of digital and media literacy curricula in schools and within academic standards. Digital and media literacy provides children and educators with digital skills to strengthen digital resilience, or the ability to recognize, manage, and recover from online risks (e.g., cyberbullying and other forms of online harassment and abuse, as well as excessive social media use)."

The APA has recognized that "Adolescents' social media use should be preceded by training in social media literacy to ensure that users have developed psychologically-informed competencies and skills that will maximize the chances for balanced, safe, and meaningful social media use."

American Psychological Association, Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence, May 2023, <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use>

The AFT recommends educating students about social media, "develop lesson plans and teach students about the dangers of using social media products." American Federation of Teachers, "Likes vs. Learning: The Real Cost of Social Media for Schools", <https://www.aft.org/press-release/new-report-calls-out-social-media-platforms-undermining-schools-increasing-costs>

Media Literacy Now is leading the grassroots movement to create a public education system that ensures all students learn the 21st-century media literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship.