



NEW YORK STUDENTS NEED MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION NOW

A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR NEW YORK STATE

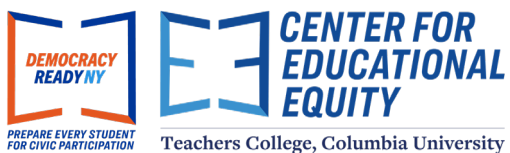


Teachers College, Columbia University

DemocracyReady NY is a multigenerational, statewide, nonpartisan coalition committed to preparing all New York students for civic participation. The Coalition is a project of the Center for Educational Equity, a nonprofit policy and research center at Teachers College, Columbia University.

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“The task of equipping students to navigate and thrive in the real world requires a new skill set. That’s what media literacy offers.” (Rogow, 2023)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today’s world, media literacy is a necessity and must be part of the pathway to a high school diploma. Young people engage with screen media for many hours each day, and media messages influence nearly every aspect of their lives. Media literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to think critically and make responsible decisions about the media they consume, create, and share. It provides a vital set of tools that ensure young people can navigate the new world of social media, artificial intelligence (AI), and other emerging technologies.

Adults and young people throughout the state recognize the many challenges that media and the internet pose for the future of American democracy, as well as for the health and happiness of our citizens and our children today. Media literacy education can encourage positive behaviors and discourage risky ones.

The New York State Education Department has signaled its interest in addressing this important subject—particularly since media literacy is so critical to the mission of civic readiness to which the state’s education system is already committed. In response, we are recommending an action plan to guide New York education officials in advancing universal media literacy education—and to ensure New York does not continue to fall behind other states that have already taken steps to ensure their students become media literate.

The plan is grounded in our two prior media literacy reports¹ and based on a survey of the national media literacy education policy landscape, a review of the research on best practices, and a detailed analysis of media literacy education policy and practice in New York. It has three parts:

1. The first is to **establish an intergenerational New York State Task Force for Media Literacy Integration** that will study and make recommendations for integrating media literacy into curriculum, instruction, assessment, and preservice education using existing state standards.
2. The second component is to **identify and fund pilots to scale promising programs** emerging across the state to prepare educators across content areas to provide media literacy education, including models for implementation, curriculum, professional development, assessment, and pre-certification.
3. The third component of this plan proposes that NYSED expand its efforts to **ensure certified school librarians in all New York schools**, critical staffing to provide all students an appropriate media literacy education.

In this presidential election year, and with the great surge of interest in AI, we urge New York’s education officials to move quickly to ensure our schools can fulfill their role of providing young people with the media literacy knowledge, skills, and habits to use media positively in their own lives and to safeguard democracy against current and future threats.

1. See Wolff, J.R., LoBue, A.G., & Rebell, M.A. (2020). *Developing digital citizens: Media literacy education for all students*. Democracy-Ready NY & Center for Educational Equity, Teachers College, Columbia University, and Rogow, F. (2023). *Preparing for civic responsibility in our digital age: A framework for educators to ensure media literacy education for every student*.

INTRODUCTION

In this digital age, media literacy is an absolute necessity and must be part of the pathway to a high school diploma. Young people spend hours each day interacting with screen media.² In today’s world, media messages promote products, causes, candidates, events, and teams. Social media has become a major platform for news and information, and, as such, has a significant impact on students’ sense of self. Algorithms maximize confirmation bias for financial gain. AI makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish truth from fiction. In short, new media technologies are reshaping our social landscape.

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Media literacy education helps young people think critically and make healthy, responsible decisions about the media they consume, create, and share. Media-literate students can decode the many messages they receive; they think about who created them and why; they can tell the difference between fact and opinion. Media literacy education can encourage positive behaviors and discourage risky ones.³

What is media literacy? The National Association for Media Literacy Education defines media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.” Media literacy includes components of news literacy, digital literacy, information literacy, visual literacy, and digital citizenship. It requires an understanding of the underlying technologies that power the media — and the ethical implications of their use. Media literacy education is an important tool in ensuring young people can navigate the new world of artificial intelligence (AI) and understand AI’s role in shaping media experiences and content.

Because media literacy education emphasizes evergreen skills like careful observation, logical reasoning, and critical inquiry, comprehensive media literacy education will prepare New York students for life now and also for emerging technologies—including yet-to-be created forms of mediated communication.

In short, media literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to understand, share, and communicate using the media in which they are immersed. As we have described it elsewhere, “Media literacy education is a multidisciplinary expansion of traditional literacy instruction that teaches students to apply critical inquiry, reading, and reflection skills to all forms of media that they encounter, use, and create” (Rogow, 2023, p. 5).

With the constant barrage of information and misinformation, it is more vital than ever that young people are equipped with the competencies (knowledge, skills, and habits) to navigate this complex landscape. A central purpose of schooling is to prepare future generations to exercise their civic responsibilities. In a digital world, media literacy,

2. According to a 2021 survey, 8- to 12-year-olds consume approximately 5.5 hours of screen media a day and 13- to 18-year-olds consume 8.5 hours of screen media, using social media, browsing websites, and watching videos online (Rideout, Peebles, Mann, & Robb, 2022).

3. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the National Academies of Science, Medicine, and Engineering, and U.S. Surgeon General have all recommended media literacy education to reduce the harmful effects of media on young people, as well as to accentuate the positive (Pierrottet, 2024; Turner et al., 2017).

particularly news and information literacy, must be a high priority in all schools. To be media literate in the age of AI includes a focus on how to identify generated content, how to analyze it critically, and how to use and create with AI responsibly, ethically, and effectively.

Media literacy education is particularly important in New York, where the state constitution guarantees all students the right to be prepared for productive civic participation (*Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) v. State of New York*, 2003), and state education officials are committed to this goal (New York State Education Department, 2023). Today’s students cannot be effective, engaged civic participants in our democratic society without solid media literacy skills. New York’s delay in implementing media literacy requirements is especially disappointing, given the state’s commitment to civic readiness.

The New York State Education Department has signaled its interest in addressing this important subject—particularly since media literacy is so critical to the mission of civic readiness to which the state’s education system is already committed. In response, we are recommending an action plan to guide New York education officials in advancing universal media literacy education—and to ensure New York does not continue to fall behind other states that have already taken steps to ensure their students become media literate.

New York Can Be a Leader in Media Literacy Education

New York State is falling behind other states that have already taken steps to ensure their students become media literate. As of February 2024, according to the National Association of State Boards of Education, some 19 states have passed legislation on promoting media literacy, and some others have advanced media literacy education without a legislative mandate (Pierrottet, 2024).

States like California, Delaware, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and our neighbor, New Jersey, have passed legislation that requires media literacy education in schools (McNeill, 2024). Massachusetts will likely soon join these states in providing systematic media literacy education for all students. There, the state is investing in research that will lead to recommendations for how to increase attention to and investment in media literacy education, including determining the appropriate amount of instruction for each grade level. It is time for New York to reassert leadership as one of the nation’s foremost states for education.

“States like California, Delaware, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and our neighbor, New Jersey, have passed legislation that requires media literacy education in schools.”

Gov. Kathy Hochul has charged the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services with developing a media literacy toolkit for educators. This is an important first step. Beyond an emergency response, however, New York needs to adopt proactively an equitable, systematic, statewide plan for teaching media literacy competencies to all students from pre-K through graduation. We provide a set of recommendations for such a plan grounded in our prior reports (Rogow, 2023; Wolff, LoBue, & Rebell, 2020) and based on a survey of the national media literacy education policy landscape, a review of the research on best practices, and analysis of media literacy education policy and practice in New York.

“[Media literacy] is an invaluable legacy for today’s educators and policymakers to leave tomorrow’s citizens.”

The New York State Education Department has a critical role to play in developing this plan. We urge the Commissioner to undertake the steps we outline immediately and in coordination with the state’s efforts to develop new diploma requirements and graduation measures—which must include media literacy. In this way, New York can take its rightful place as a leader in this space. Educators in our

state can make sure that all our students are equipped to analyze, evaluate, create, and share media safely, responsibly, and respectfully. This is an invaluable legacy for today’s educators and policymakers to leave for tomorrow’s citizens.

Challenges to Implementing Media Literacy Education in New York Schools

While some New York schools are teaching media literacy, they are in the minority. When it comes to reaching all P-12 students in New York State, media literacy education faces a number of challenges that need to be addressed systemically.

- *Uneven Implementation:* Instructional time dedicated to media literacy varies significantly among schools due to differing fiscal resources and priorities, leading to disparities in students’ exposure to essential skills.
- *Equity Concerns:* Schools serving students from low-income families and students of color are less likely to be staffed with a school library media specialist and less likely to provide students with quality media literacy education.
- *Lack of NYS Media Literacy Framework:* Educators need clear guidelines and expectations to integrate media literacy into their teaching across content areas at all grade levels.
- *Lack of Teacher Preparation and Professional Development:* Educators feel unprepared to teach media literacy and need access to media literacy training and professional development opportunities.
- *Lack of Resources and Support:* Even when educators recognize the urgent need for media literacy education, schools struggle with competing priorities as a result of insufficient investment and pressure to cover core content.
- *Need for Curriculum Integration:* Educators can feel overwhelmed when presented with “additions” to the curriculum. With targeted professional development, educators can effectively integrate media literacy into existing objectives while enhancing the learning environment for all students.
- *Assessment Gaps:* Critical thinking skills applied to media messages need to be incorporated into state assessments to ensure the integration of these competencies across content areas and throughout curriculum and instruction.
- *Lack of Monitoring and Reporting:* There is a lack of transparent monitoring and reporting on the state of media literacy education in New York schools, making it

difficult to assess the effectiveness and reach of current initiatives. With a statewide plan, the New York State Education Department can overcome these challenges by developing a clear, comprehensive policy for teaching media literacy competencies to all students. In what follows, we outline a set of immediate action steps NYSED can take to support media literacy education and make New York a leader in advancing media literacy statewide.

THE ACTION PLAN

Our recommended steps toward addressing these challenges are based on a survey of the national media literacy education policy landscape, a review of the research on best practices, and a detailed analysis of media literacy education policy and practice in New York. The action plan is divided into three components.

Step 1. Create a **New York State Task Force for Media Literacy Integration** that will

- a. Review the approaches other states have taken in integrating media literacy across the content areas, including AI literacy.
- b. Recommend how to integrate media literacy into curriculum and instruction using existing state learning standards.⁴
- c. Identify media literacy concepts and skills that need to be added, with recommendations about the appropriate levels and subjects for integration into the existing content areas and course requirements.
- d. Inventory current best practices in media literacy in New York State to identify scalability.
- e. Study, work with NYSED, and make recommendations on the integration of media literacy outcomes into current and future NYS assessments.
- f. Study and make recommendations on the inclusion of media literacy into New York State certification requirements for teacher education and school library programs.⁵

The task force should be made up of members who can speak for diverse perspectives and stakeholder organizations representing: students, families, teachers (of various levels and subjects), certified school library media specialists and library systems administrators, educational administrators (at the school, district, and BOCES levels), media literacy experts, technology specialists, teacher unions, school board members, and NYSED. The task force membership should also reflect the demographic diversity of our state. NYSED should endeavor to have the task force complete this work by June 30, 2025.

Step 2. **Identify and fund pilots to scale promising programs** emerging across the state equitably to prepare educators across content areas to provide media literacy education, including models for implementation, curriculum, professional development, assessment, and pre-certification that

4. To help in this regard, DemocracyReady NY's 2023 report, *Preparing for Civic Responsibility in Our Digital Age: A Framework for Educators to Ensure Media Literacy Education for Every Student*, written by Dr. Faith Rogow, articulates the goals, objectives, and methods of media literacy education in actionable terms for educators in school settings. It provides schools, districts, and the state with the guideposts they need to implement culturally and developmentally appropriate media literacy instruction and to facilitate the creation of crosswalks with existing education standards.

5. New York currently has a four-year master teacher program for STEM educators; a parallel program for media and digital literacy educators could put the state in a true leadership position.

- a. Strengthen librarians' existing role as leaders for media literacy and providers of professional development across content areas.
- b. Teach all educators how to repurpose media used in the classroom (video clips, books, charts, maps, social media, etc.) for document-based analysis of sourcing, credibility, interpretation, etc., as well as subject area knowledge.
- c. Train all educators in student-centered, question-based, standards-driven media decoding that will engage traditionally marginalized learners.
- d. Address the needs of all schools, districts, and regions to ensure the equitable impact of this training for all New York State students.
- e. Leverage NYS School Library Systems' existing functions to provide professional development to all school librarians and collaborating teachers.

One successful New York State media literacy initiative that reflects the above needs is *ML3: Librarians as Leaders of Media Literacy*. It began in 2021 as a partnership between NYS School Library Systems Association and Ithaca College's Project Look Sharp. The ML3 initiative has delivered full-day media literacy professional development to over 1,500 New York State school librarians in the past three years, with many participants involved in year-long follow-up groups. ML3 has also piloted a very successful online course for New York school librarians, a hybrid course for teachers facilitated by their school librarian, and Train the Facilitators PD and resources to prepare school librarians to deliver these media literacy courses to other librarians and to teachers in their district.

ML3, in partnership with the American Association of School Librarians and in collaboration with the National Association for Media Literacy Education, has a current two-year Institute of Museum and Library Services grant to scale up the New York model nationally. This federal funding will support the development and dissemination of resources that will enable statewide scaling in New York through synchronous and asynchronous professional development for school librarians and for school librarians to train teachers in their schools and districts.

Another potential model exists on Long island, where seven pilot school districts, in collaboration with Stony Brook University's Center for News Literacy, are currently integrating elements of news literacy into the required instruction of all students as early as elementary school.

Step 3. Expand statewide efforts, including advocacy for full funding, to ensure a **certified school library media specialist in all New York schools in order to**

- a. Collaborate with and advise their colleagues on the best strategies and resources for effective media literacy integration.
- b. Help train teachers across content areas at all grade levels in effective media literacy integration.
- c. Provide direct media literacy instruction to students based on recommendations from the Task Force for Media Literacy Integration (see #1 above).
- d. Provide instructional leaders in every New York State school who will help address current (e.g., AI) and future changes in information technology.⁶

⁶ This is in addition to the other essential work school librarians currently do in their schools and will need to be accounted for in the ways that librarians are compensated, scheduled, and integrated into their schools as professional resources for other educators.

“The most critical resource for media literacy education within schools is qualified personnel.”

The most critical resource for media literacy education within schools is qualified personnel. Schools and districts must have sufficient well-prepared educators to develop media literacy in all of their students, including students learning English as a new language and students with disabilities. Yet most educators have not received up-to-date media literacy training through their teacher education programs, nor have they had

the opportunity for professional development in this area.

Library media specialists are teaching professionals trained to impart media and information skills and media literacy strategies. As the “experts in the building,” they have the potential to provide media literacy instruction to students and to serve as a valuable source of support for classroom teachers on the ever-changing landscape of media literacy. For this reason, New York can no longer consider school librarians a luxury—we must work together to ensure full funding for a certified school library media specialist in every school.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the state, we are agonizingly aware of the many challenges that media and the internet pose for the health and happiness of our young people today. Youth and adults alike recognize how misinformation and disinformation threatens the future of American democracy. We also know we must learn to navigate AI and other emerging technologies. The potential roles—and risks—of the use of AI in education continue to evolve rapidly for educators and students alike. As part of a comprehensive media literacy education, students should learn to discern AI tools that are useful, accurate, and aid productivity from those whose models are incomplete, misleading, produce biased output, or can magnify academic-integrity concerns.

New Yorkers are looking for leadership in media literacy education to ensure our students graduate from high school prepared to understand, share, and communicate using the media in which they are immersed. In this document, we outline a set of immediate actions the New York State Education Department can take to support media literacy education and make New York a leader in advancing media literacy for *all* its students. We urge New York’s education officials to move ahead quickly to ensure our schools can fulfill their role of providing young people with the media literacy knowledge, skills, and habits to use media positively in their own lives and to safeguard and strengthen democracy against current and future threats.

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