



AB 2071 (Hoover): Pupil instruction: digital wellness

SUMMARY

[AB 2071 \(Hoover\)](#) requires California middle and high schools that offer health education classes to incorporate the topic of *digital wellness* into existing mental health instruction.

Digital wellness education teaches students how technology affects their health, how to stay safe online and on social media, how to critically evaluate digital and AI content, and how to build screen time habits that support their mental and physical well-being and learning.

BACKGROUND

In 2021, [SB 224 \(Portantino\)](#) required California middle and high schools that offer health education to include mental health instruction, which covers topics such as how to recognize mental health challenges, where to get help, and how to reduce stigma.

In 2024, [AB 3216 \(Hoover\)](#) required California schools to adopt smartphone use policies. This bill builds on that foundation by ensuring students also receive the education they need to develop healthy digital habits.

PROBLEM

[Nearly 94% of California youth](#) report experiencing mental health challenges. While SB 224 took an important first step by requiring mental health instruction in schools, it did not address [digital technology factors now driving the youth mental health crisis](#) such as social media, AI-generated content, chatbots, cyberbullying, online gambling, misinformation, and excessive screen time.

Both the [American Psychological Association](#) and the [former U.S. Surgeon General](#) have called on policymakers to support digital and media literacy education in schools to help students recognize and manage the harms of social media and other digital technologies on their mental health.

SOLUTION

This bill expands SB 224's mental health instruction requirement to include digital wellness education in districts that already offer middle and high school health education classes. While these classes must cover the core principles of digital wellness and the relationship between technology use and mental health, individual teachers may (at their discretion) cover additional topics appropriate to their grade level, including screen time habits, online safety, cyberbullying, AI and media literacy.

Like SB 224, this bill requires no appropriation — it adds a topic to existing health courses and creates no new programs, staff, or funding requirements. AB 2071 directs the California Department of Education to develop a plan for expanding digital wellness instruction by January 1, 2028.

SUPPORT

GENup (sponsor), Media Literacy Now, California Media Literacy Coalition, Media Education Lab

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

Sara Hilliker
Legislative Aide
(916) 319-2007
Sara.Hilliker@asm.ca.gov