



Digital Health and Wellness Are Essential to a Digital Citizenship Curriculum

IDRA comments in support of House Bill 129, relating to requiring a digital citizenship curriculum. Submitted by Thomas Marshall to the House Public Education Committee on March 16, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We support HB 129 and its substitute to include HB 2682.

Digital citizenship courses have been implemented in other states across the country and Texas should be the next. The committee substitute, HB 2682, would build students' social-emotional skills to navigate digital spaces.

We respectfully suggest adding a section on digital health and wellness. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that virtual instruction will be a staple of our classrooms for the foreseeable future, so we must be sure to prioritize student's voice in a bill like this one. During stakeholder convenings with students, IDRA has found that students' ability to navigate digital learning spaces while considering their own physical and mental health is a major concern.

Digital learning entails extended periods of screen time that can affect students' physical and mental health and well-being. In addition to the substantive components of interacting on the Internet, these aspects of well-being should also be considered pillars of digital citizenship. This is especially true for our older students whose social emotional health can be impacted by the overuse of devices and cyberbullying as the bill already addresses.

We suggest including a new section underneath section "(C)" that would address digital health and wellness to read as follows: "(D) digital health and wellness including the understanding of how to protect yourself and your well-being online, including reduction of screen time, and other less digitally strenuous ways to connect virtually."

Thank you for your consideration. IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.