

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

March 27, 2019

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Student Screen Time (02-25-19-03)

Question

During public comments, Ms. Silvestre requested information regarding strategies for reducing the amount of student screen time as referenced in the testimony of Dr. Spector.

Response

In 2016, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) partnered with Common Sense Education to deliver a digital citizenship curriculum to MCPS students. This partnership was established upon the recommendation of a spring 2014 task force that addressed the growing need for students and adults to interact positively when using online platforms with skills that empower students to think critically, behave safely, and participate responsibly with technology. Beginning in the 2016–2017 school year with Grades 6–8, this program has been implemented in stages among elementary, middle, and high school students who receive instruction through age-appropriate curricula. In 2017–2018, the program expanded to include elementary school students in Grades 3–5 and high school students in Grade 9. In 2018–2019, the program includes all students in kindergarten through Grade 10. Notably MCPS recently achieved districtwide recognition from Common Sense Education for effective implementation of the digital citizenship curriculum.

Following are resources available via Common Sense Education to help address students' use of screen time:

1. Digital Citizenship Lessons that address awareness of screen time use and self-management: Grades 3–8: [Media Balance & Well Being Lessons](#) and Grades 9–12: [Digital Life 102](#); with additional Media Balance lessons in early fall 2019.
2. Get everyone on the same page with a [family media agreement](#).
3. [Healthy Media Habits](#).
4. [Tools to use your device less](#) that includes screen time features for iPhone and Android.

5. Ways to [Outsmart the Sneaky Science](#) that keeps us on our devices for longer than intended.
6. Change your Phone to Greyscale to reduce screen time especially at night; [Instructional Video](#).
7. [How to turn off autoplay](#) to reduce screen time.
8. [Five Ways to Save Yourself From Device Addiction](#).
9. Other Apps to help manage screen time use: [Forest](#) and [Moment](#).

Other resources for students are included in MCPS' Comprehensive Health Curriculum. Aspects of health and safety include technology use, which is based on the National Health Education Standards. In Grade 6, topics include media/technology harassment and cyberbullying. In Grade 8, topics include the responsible use of technology.

As Dr. Edward Spector, psychologist, pointed out in his testimony (attached), he has “clients come to [him] experiencing compulsive patterns involving video games and social media use.” His request for curriculum availability without digital media and technology currently is not supported by the United States Department of Education (USDE). USDE’s Office of Educational Technology in [Learning Technology Effectiveness](#) states, “Technology is not a silver bullet and cannot—by itself—produce the benefits we seek in learning, but without technology, schools have little chance of rising to 21st-century expectations. Syntheses of best available evidence consistently indicate the potential for positive effects when technology is a key ingredient in well-designed learning systems. Smart policy will both ensure equality of access to technology and also encourage uses of that technology that focus on specific connections to learning processes and address all the factors in complete learning systems. Smart research and development investment will be in learning systems that include technology applications as well as the conditions that support students and teachers to use them effectively toward strong learning.”

The American Psychological Association in its [Digital Guidelines: Promoting Healthy Technology Use for Children](#) understands “many American parents are looking for better ways to handle their children’s tech use” and includes these recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics for children’s media use:

- For children under 18 months, avoid screen-based media except video chatting.
- For children 18 months to 24 months, parents should choose high-quality programming and watch with their children.
- For children 2 to 5, limit screen time to one hour per day of high-quality programming.
- For children 6 and up, establish consistent limits on the time spent using media and the types of media.

Additionally, the Maryland General Assembly recognizes the need for guidance as it relates to students' engagement with digital devices and as a result, introduced House Bill (HB) 1110, *Public Schools—Health and Safety Best Practices—Digital Devices*. The purpose of HB 1110 is to require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health, to develop guidelines and procedures for the use of digital devices in public school classrooms. MSDE shall provide the guidelines and procedures to each county board for consideration and adoption on or before July 1, 2019.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Maria V. Navarro, chief academic officer, at 240-740-3040.

JRS:MVN:BJC:ldr

Attachment

Copy to:

Executive Staff

Mrs. Hazel

Mr. Murphy

Ms. Webb

Edward Spector, Psy.D., LLC

February 25, 2019

Hello, my name is Edward Spector. I am a psychologist in Rockville, Maryland and I serve primarily Montgomery County Public School students. My practice is entirely dedicated to the healthy use of technology. My clients come to me experiencing compulsive patterns involving video games, and social media use. The World Health Organization recently recognized and coded Gaming Addiction as a new mental disorder. Treatment for this condition, like other addictions often requires a detox or a break or period of abstinence from the problematic behavior. A digital detox would entail a break from all digital media to interrupt the unhealthy psychological dependence my clients demonstrate with screens. My experience as a practicing psychologist treating this psychological disorder is that students enrolled in MCPS are not able to do a digital detox because the curriculum and education provided by MCPS is tightly integrated, reliant on, and embedded in digital media.

As a result, treatment options are rather bleak. I can withdraw kids from MCPS and send them to specialty residential care, I can withdraw them from MCPS and have them homeschooled while they're being treated, or I can wait until the summer to do a full digital detox.

Now that the World Health Organization has recognized gaming addiction as a mental disorder, measures should be taken to adjust the MCPS curriculum so that it is accessible with or without digital media and technology. I recommend that MCPS develops such a system so that my patients will not have to choose between getting the treatment they need and staying in school. I am not a lawyer; however, in the near future families will likely be walking into IEP meetings with Gaming Addiction Disorder as the primary diagnosis. They will request the logical accommodation from the school to educate their child without a screen. My hope is that MCPS will be ready.

A curriculum that is not bound to digital media and computer use would not just benefit people suffering from Gaming Addiction. Most mainstream news programs discussing parenting in the digital age in some way recommend taking breaks from technology and setting limits on screens. And yet, parents frequently feel helpless when it comes to their ability to do this because their child's education so depends on an internet connection and access to a computer. Parents should have a way to limit their Child's screen use as it relates to education and if MCPS had a screen limited or non-digital option, everyone would benefit.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you this evening.

Edward Spector, Psy.D., LLC
Licensed Psychologist