



MEDIA LITERACY

**MEDIA LITERACY NOW
RHODE ISLAND**

EDUCATION & ADVOCACY FOR ALL

**RECOMMENDATIONS
TO
RIDE**

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BRINGING MEDIA LITERACY TO THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND Recommendations for Action

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Overview

When RI Law 16-22-28 was passed and signed into law in 2017, instructing the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to consider incorporating media literacy education into the Board of Education's basic education program (BEP) regulations, a group of educators and activists convened to develop recommendations for implementation.

As a result of its unique history in developing media literacy initiatives in public schools, Rhode Island is well-poised to exert national influence and leadership as it prepares learners for the complexities of life in the media- and technology-saturated society of the 21st century. In this report, we offer strategies for how media literacy can be embedded into the Basic Education Program so that all Rhode Island youth are well-prepared for college, careers and citizenship in a digital age.

The Problem

A sense of urgency is growing because across Rhode Island, students are graduating from high school without adequate media literacy competencies. What's the problem?

Well-Being and Safety. Schools face challenges that result from the unsupervised use of digital and mass media in the home, as children's use of video games and social media may promote unhealthy attitudes and behaviors, including sleep loss, attention difficulties, dependency on digital devices, cultivation of stereotypes, cyberbullying and increased violent behavior.

Lack of Engagement. Well before Grade 6, many students who live active digital lives at home have decided that school is simply not relevant to their lives, leading them to be disengaged from traditional learning tasks and assignments. When learners and educators don't perceive how schoolwork is relevant to the current and future needs of our society, they miss out on expanded learning opportunities.

Fake News. A sense of urgency is growing because across Rhode Island, students are graduating from high school without adequate media literacy competencies. For example, many do not demonstrate the skills necessary to be a savvy news consumer, lack the ability to use online searching to verify factual claims and recognize the point of view and bias that is present in media messages. Research has shown that many American students cannot correctly identify an industry group masquerading as a think tank or distinguish between sponsored content and a legitimate news article. Students lack knowledge of how search engines work, believing that results are displayed based on accuracy, rather than the preferences of advertisers.

Distrust and Polarization. Concerns about the increasing polarization of political discourse and a decline in trust for civic institutions have led to greater

awareness of how media literacy can address “the growing divergence between the speed at which technology is able to change and the speed at which educational institutions are able to keep up,” as Sam Wineburg of the Stanford History Education Project has noted.

Embracing RIDE’s Vision for Public Education

RIDE’s Vision for Public Education in Rhode Island, it states, “Rhode Island schools prepare every graduate to pursue a fulfilling career, be a critical and creative thinker, a collaborative and self-motivated learner, and a culturally competent and active citizen.”

Media literacy education contributes to this vision and to specific priorities of the 2015 - 2020 Strategic Plan in these ways:

- **Authentic learning.** Through media literacy education, learners make connections between skills and knowledge learned in the classroom and their experiences with mass media and digital technologies at home and in the community. They engage in inquiry-driven and project-based learning to develop transferable knowledge and skills.
- **21st century skills.** Media literacy learning experiences develop students’ ability to use digital media for self-expression and collaboration, developing critical thinking skills that enable students to become effective communicators.
- **Expanded/extended learning.** Libraries and other cultural organizations provide opportunities for media literacy learning experiences that engage learners who seek out learning experiences beyond the school day.
- **Globally-competent graduates, cultural competency, dual-language/world language.** Media and technology can help people learn about the world and deepen our ability to respect cultural differences. Through viewing and listening to diverse global media, learners increase their motivation to improve their language skills.
- **Blended and digital learning and one-to-one technology for all students.** Media literacy education advances student autonomy by helping them develop a sense of agency about their identities as digital authors; it also deepens their sense of social responsibility about their online activities both in and out of school.
- **Social and emotional learning and wellness, school climate, school culture.** Media literacy education emphasizes the development of respect for divergent interpretations of information and communication and advances digital citizenship skills including respect for others and creating tolerance. These practices help create a climate which builds student well-being and enhances school safety.
- **Relevant and engaging professional learning for teachers and administrators.** When teachers gain confidence in using digital tools, texts and technologies, they empower students as digital learners.

- **Partner with postsecondary education.** Colleges and universities including the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and Bryant University offer media literacy learning experiences to undergraduate and graduate students as well as continuing education experiences for K-12 teachers and librarians.

Context: Why Media Literacy Matters for Rhode Island

Media literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.

--Center for Media Literacy

To be ready for college, career, and citizenship, Rhode Island students need to be able to navigate a complex, confusing, and often confounding media landscape. What sources can be trusted, and which simply can't? What are the corporate interests behind what we read, view and hear, and how do they influence our understanding of the world? How do I manage the barrage of information from my television, my inbox, my earbuds, and my social media feeds? And how can I contribute to the conversation and use the power of communication and information to make a difference in the world?

Rhode Island is blessed with innovative teachers, librarians, technology educators and media professionals who are providing learning opportunities for students to become media literate - able to *access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages* - and leverage these skills in a wide variety of forms for lifelong learning and citizenship.

Brief History of Media Literacy in Rhode Island

Rhode Island educators have been developing media literacy initiatives in public schools for many years. The interest in bringing media literacy into Rhode Island schools goes back decades. In 1997, Pam Steager was living in Providence and working as a prevention specialist in a local suburban school system. In thinking about all the influences on youth behavior and attitudes that sometimes led to dangerous, discriminatory, or violent behavior, she realized that the media they were consuming (music, movies, video games, etc.) often provided messages counter to those prevention specialists, other educators, and parents were trying to instill. She set out to discover who else was looking into that aspect. She first discovered media literacy through online searches and, increasingly, at prevention conferences, and was fortunate to obtain a spot in the 1998 Felton Media Literacy Scholars Program run by Dr. Renee Hobbs at Babson College so she could learn more. After completing that course, she began assisting Dr.

Hobbs with curriculum writing and educator workshops around the country. In 1999, she applied for federal funding for a media literacy program in the Providence Public Schools and was one of ten grantees in the country to receive three years of funding (\$450,000) for program implementation.

The resultant Media SmART! Project trained over 75 teachers, librarians, and counselors in summer institutes or courses from 2000-2003, and many more through in-service or after-school workshops. Parents were provided with information about the importance of media literacy at home as well as at school. Students in after-school clubs focused on learning about violence in the media and how to create their own media messages through video production activities. Trained educators and librarians facilitated the after-school groups and often integrated media literacy lessons into their classrooms. They were assisted throughout the project by professional video producers, college interns, and AmeriCorps volunteers. Rhode Island State Council for the Arts provided additional funding to hire media artists to work with Media SmART! Project students.

Students and teachers have continued to engage in learning media literacy in Rhode Island. Under leadership from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, (RISCA), the Give Me 5 high school filmmaker workshops and competition started in 2009 and has since provided a vital and ongoing platform for youth media production and learning experiences.

Unlike in many states, future teachers have opportunities to learn media literacy pedagogies in their academic programs in Rhode Island. At Rhode Island College, Professor Lesley Bogad first taught a course on media literacy in 2003 when she took over the school staff training component from the Media SmART! program. Since then, almost 170 educators have taken the elective course, which explores the need for youth and adults alike to develop skills to read, analyze, interpret and produce visual and digital texts as well as written ones. Bogad's course takes popular culture as a serious education venue and seeks to expand the experiences that educators have with digital technologies in their classrooms.

The state of Rhode Island has received national recognition for its innovative approaches to professional development in digital and media literacy. In 2013, the University of Rhode Island developed the Summer Institute in Digital Literacy, a 42-hour intensive program offered on the downtown Providence campus. More than 700 K-12 educators, librarians and college faculty have participated in the program, which is now in its 6th year. The program is part of the URI Graduate Certificate in Digital Literacy, a blended learning program that consists of a 12-credit sequence that begins with the Summer Institute and includes additional coursework in online reading and literacy, digital authorship and multimedia, and leadership in digital literacy. This pioneering program was officially recognized in the 2016 National Education Technology Plan, developed by the U.S. Department of Educational Technology.

In 2014, the University of Rhode Island received \$485,000 in federal funding for Media Smart Libraries, a program to advance the media literacy competencies of school and public librarians in the state. More than 60 participants earned digital badges in developing their ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a wide variety of forms. For these reasons, Rhode Island is well-poised to exert national influence and leadership as it prepares learners for the complexities of life in the media- and technology-saturated society of the 21st century.

In the spring of 2016, Michael Trofi and Erin McNeil began to approach members of the General Assembly about the importance of media literacy in relation to civic education. State officials Adam Satchell and Hanna Gallo were among the earliest supporters of a bill that would encourage the Rhode Island Department of Education to consider including media literacy into the Basic Educational Program. After two rounds of public hearings where more than a dozen parents and educators made formal petitions to state legislators for action, the bill moved forward and was signed into law on July 19, 2017.

The Media Literacy Education Law

Signed into law, July 19, 2017: The Rhode Island Board of Education Act, SECTION 16-22-28: Instruction in Media Literacy.

“The department of elementary and secondary education shall consider, in consultation with national or statewide organizations focused on media literacy, the incorporation of media literacy education into the board of education's basic education program regulations. For the purposes of this section, "media literacy" means the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate using a variety of forms, including, but not limited to, print, visual, audio, interactive, and digital texts.”

Recommendations

Our primary recommendation is for the Rhode Island Department of Education to modify the Basic Education Program to include specific language that emphasizes **how media literacy pedagogies support authentic learning across the curriculum, with special relevance in supporting English Language Arts and Social Studies education.** To bring media literacy education into Rhode Island public schools, we recommend these actions:

1. Increase the variety and quantity of professional development opportunities in media literacy for K-12 faculty and staff and increase funding for existing efforts;
2. Encourage districts to make more efficient use of existing curriculum resources in media literacy education across the grade levels;
3. Create K-12 horizontal and vertical curriculum that utilizes one-to-one technologies and expanded and extended learning beyond the school day and school walls and incorporate meaningful, community service projects and topics students are curious about;
4. Take actions to ensure that all administrators understand media literacy core concepts and their relation to current events, school climate and student well-being and safety.

PART II: VOICES FOR THE FUTURE

Citizenship Skills through Voice and Choice

Amanda Murphy, Westerly High School

I believe media literacy is important because I think that all students need to be aware of the media messages that they're consuming every day. In a 2015 study by Common Sense Media, they reported that teens spend approximately nine hours a day on their screens, whether it be smart phones, on their computers, or watching television. They also reported that 49% of teens prefer to get their news from social media sites. So I think as educators, it's our responsibility to help them dissect the information they're seeing. I think it's really important the we give them opportunities to critically analyze the mixed media that they're viewing and consuming on a daily basis. I think in doing so, we're giving them the tools and the skills they need to become creators of really thoughtful media to help contribute to the conversation.



Media literacy is an integral skill to civic awareness. As a classroom educator, I see the way students constantly consume information. That consumption needs

to be balanced with the ability to deconstruct these media messages. Students have to see, listen, and understand media across the political spectrum to be able to be informed citizens. Informed citizens understand the issues, identify the bias when issues are pushed out by the media, and then make their own meaning of these messages by being knowledgeable about the entire issue. Educators have a unique opportunity to use media literacy skills to in their classroom to improve civic engagement and get student actively thinking about their world and what they can do to change it.

Incorporating Multiple Points of View in the Classroom

By Jon Gold, Middle School History teacher, Moses Brown School

I've taught at Moses Brown for 12 years - middle school American history and an 8th grade class called Global Thinking. In those classes we read and analyze many different types of media. I also work with my students pretty closely on their critical thinking and critical reading skills, which overlaps with media literacy in a deep way.



Given the mental shortcuts we take while learning, and the treacherous landscape in which that learning occurs, learning to know in 2018 is indeed a challenge. We certainly don't want our classrooms to fall prey to the same damaging patterns we see in our social media consumption; we don't want our classrooms to become echo chambers in which there is no dissension (nor do we need to bend over backward to accommodate all views). While it's easier to stay ensconced in an echo chamber of mutual biases and closed-loop reasoning, our students will better learn to know—and come to some actual truths—when they venture out to interrogate and reflect.

Have you ever noticed the high-altitude instructions on a box of brownie or cake mix that tell you to change the ingredients slightly to account for atmospheric differences? To me, this is what teaching in the current moment feels like: We are still making brownies, but we have to adjust the recipe just a bit to account for the atmospheric changes of the so-called “post-truth era.” Teachers, many with great skill and expertise, have been helping students learn to separate fact from fiction, identify bias and opinion, and practice critical thinking since well before the recent rise of fake news and echo chambers. The atmosphere is now different, but we are still baking brownies.

To me, media literacy is a larger part of preparing students to function in a complex democracy. However, I think of media literacy less as decoding bias or detecting subtle messages. I prefer not to focus on what's fake, and instead help

students determine what's real and what matters to them. I see our job as educators as helping students learn how to know, which means helping them understand what counts as knowledge, how their brains sort and process information, and why it's vital that we create a common set of epistemic principles. The current knowledge landscape makes this even harder.

In a time when intense polarization, fake news and echo chambers make it harder to learn to know well, we need to empower students to develop robust epistemologies built on a shared reliance on logic, evidence and rationality. Doing so will help them resist oversimplification, counteract motivated reasoning and seek to make connections between ideas and among people. In today's world, to be informed means more than just having information; it also means having a well-developed understanding of the nature of knowledge and how we think. The charge for teachers, then, is difficult but clear.



Library Leadership in Media Literacy

By Darshell Silva, Librarian, Quidnessett Elementary School, North Kingstown.

As a School Librarian and Technology Integration Specialist in a Preschool-12 school as well as per course faculty at the University of RI's Graduate School of Library and Information Studies, I strongly feel that quality media

literacy education needs to be available for educators and students throughout the state of Rhode Island.

Media literacy education impacts the students I teach and educators I work with by helping them to become informed consumers and producers of media in all formats. In this day and age, people are bombarded with media in a variety of formats from the time they awake until the time they sleep - be it through radio, print, television, Internet, social media, etc.. They need to be informed consumers to sift through all of the information they are being bombarded with. Careers today and in the future demand savvy producers of digital media.

Producing digital media requires hands on practice to do well. I assist my students and other educators in obtaining the information and skills through hands on media literacy project based learning experiences. This allows them to not only analyze specific aspects of media but to also to apply the analysis and produce their own media with a specific intent. For example, in a recent project students analyzed a composite photo from 1902 to understand that photos have been altered for a specific intent for many years. They then researched photos of places where historical events took place then found a photo of a current event that took place on the same site and made a composite photo to illustrate how social issues have or have not changed. Through this activity students produced powerful photos that elicited a specific response or understanding which demonstrated their comprehension of the use of media to express ideas and

convey meanings to others as well as giving them the skill to alter a photograph. Project based learning in media literacy provides my students with the tools to navigate our media driven society. All students should be provided these same tools.

Media Literacy in High School English

Lori Huntley, English teacher, West Warwick High School, West Warwick

I teach high school English and I believe that media literacy is important because today young people are bombarded by media messages on a daily basis. If they don't have the skills to differentiate between fake news or advertorials and real news, then they're destined to help with the spread of misinformation. Being able to knowledgeably contribute to discourse on a variety of issues is a must in a democratic society. That's why I teach media literacy classes to my students every year.

As a high school English teacher, I have integrated technology into my classroom to enhance student learning. By varying reading and writing of all media texts, students can use their strengths to master standards. Students engage with the text more, and I have also noticed that students are more willing to go back and reread as they interact with text.

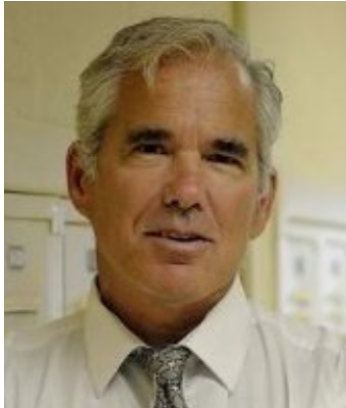
One example of how I integrate media literacy is a lesson for students to determine the purpose and reliability of a website. Students are given five websites about an explorer. They then work in a team and carefully read the information on and about the page. They determine the intended audience (and possible bias), the credibility, relevance, accuracy, authority, and purpose of each. Together, they determine the best sites to use. They rate the website based on guiding questions in each category. Through class discussion they share their results, and transfer their knowledge to work on their research. Some examples of increasing access and utilizing creation of media messages help illustrate the power of this pedagogy:

- Two seniors created a Spark Adobe presentation to meet standards in argument writing. They argued that parents cause a problem in the student parking lot by clogging the lanes and creating too many lines of traffic. Using Spark Adobe, they showed video of congestion in the student parking lot.
- Another student used Spark Adobe to create a combination of written word and a slide show profile of the school band room. These students achieved standards in writing.
- For reading comprehension, students read the digital text, *Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek*. The interactive combination of text, visuals, and videos provided students with a real-life look at an avalanche.
- In another class, students could choose their format to show knowledge of a play. Students with learning disabilities met reading standards by

displaying their comprehension of a play through visuals and quotes using Spark Adobe.

A School Leader's Perspective

By Mark Garceau, Superintendent, Westerly Public Schools



If we want our kids to be truly college and career ready, and true life long learners, we need to recognize that they are always learning and always pulling from far more sources than any textbook that we put in front of them. That's how we learn. We learn from books, from documentaries, from our Twitter feeds, from what we see on the web, from popular media, etc. We draw on all of these to build knowledge and shape our thinking about everything from history to politics to philosophy to modern culture.

Media Literacy aligns with the instructional shifts in the Core standards in ELA that require regular practice with complex, content rich text, reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text and building knowledge through content rich complex text. Building this evidence-based knowledge can't happen unless we know how to be critical consumers of (and eventually contributors to) the massive amounts of information coming our way each day.

We can't hope to build solid bases of knowledge on the backs of unverified news or "alternative facts" and we ought to feel comfortable and confident enough to ask for sources of evidence. Then from there, we ought to know enough to critically consider the credibility, validity and potential biases of those sources.

We simply have never seen such an absolute explosion of media bombardment or been subjected to the endless assault of the 24 second news cycle. Rumor, false information and the rest have always existed and segments of the populace have always fallen for it, but when government institutions can be undermined, when people's quality of life issues (finances, health care, national security) can be impacted and when leaders use social media as a tool for informing, messaging or deflecting, the need for media literacy may never be more important.

In addition to developing media literacy to support students' building of knowledge, explicitly teaching the fundamentals of fact checking, of the importance of considering perspectives and bias, of the need to verify sources and developing the ability to critically consider what's fueling "the story behind the story", may be the single best defense against their becoming victims of manipulation by propaganda, lies and fake news.

The skills, the dispositions, the habits of mind needed to be critical consumers of information can be explicitly taught, practiced and developed and as educators we have a responsibility to our students as informed participants in a democratic society.

Visualizing the Future

We think Rhode Island can be the first media-literate state in the nation.

Imagine if:

- All PreK-12 students in Rhode Island know not only how to tell the difference between fact and fiction in media, determine the purpose of media messages and access age-appropriate technology and media, but also how the ever-changing media and technology landscape affects their lives.
- Every elementary school librarian was comfortable offering a media literacy workshop to parents of preschool children, helping them to make good choices of apps, TV shows, movies and games to support their children's learning.
- Elementary children learn to spot harmful stereotypes that are part of entertainment media and celebrity culture, appreciating the social responsibility of those who create and share stories.
- Students learn to create stories and messages that reflect and share their unique cultural background and life experiences, increasing cultural competence for all.
- All middle school educators participated in professional development programs in media literacy that enable them to guide their students through their experiences with social media, helping them be responsible consumers and creators.
- Middle school students can easily spot media stereotypes and bias in their media choices.
- Filmmakers, animators, and media artists actively support local schools to develop project-based learning in media arts, supporting students and teachers in media creation projects that engage and educate.
- Rhode Island high school students use digital media to demonstrate learning objectives, and become aware of how media is used to persuade as well as inform and entertain.
- High school students learned how to read and analyze local, national and international news and participate in school, community and legislative discussions about public policy topics including gun control, health care, economic development and more.
- Local colleges and universities partner with public schools in helping students analyze and create public service campaigns to support local businesses and community-based organizations.
- Local public relations firms, Rhode Island-based media outlets, and other professional media workplaces provide information sessions for parents,

educators and students, along with internships for students interested in media careers.

- Rhode Island non-profit community service partners work with students to create information and marketing campaigns to let the public know about local issues, resources, and services.

The Way Forward: RI Superintendents Identify Priorities

After the legislation was signed into law in the summer of 2017, the Media Literacy Now RI team collected ideas from educators and administrators in the state. We also circulated a Flipgrid video discussion board opportunity for team members and others to share their media literacy stories. We held a webinar on the topic during Media Literacy Week in November, 2017 to further the discussion. After that, on the Media Literacy Now RI website, we asked all visitors to contribute even more ideas, and shared that link via our social media networks, including the Facebook page and Twitter account. We received nearly 100 submissions. From those submissions, we prepared a comprehensive list of potential action steps to advance media literacy in Rhode Island.

On April 5th, 2018, Pam Steager, Dr. Hobbs, and West Warwick educator Lori Huntley presented the legislation and the list of the proposed ideas at a monthly meeting of RI school superintendents where they provided both written and verbal feedback. The superintendents prioritized our list in rank order both for most achievable initiatives and suggested year of implementation.

Based on the advice of superintendents, our primary recommendation is for the Rhode Island Department of Education to modify the Basic Education Program to include specific language that emphasizes **how media literacy pedagogies support authentic learning across the curriculum, with special relevance in supporting English Language Arts and Social Studies education**. To bring media literacy education into Rhode Island public schools, the superintendents overwhelming recommend these actions:

1. **Increase** the variety and quantity of professional development opportunities in media literacy for K-12 faculty and staff and increase funding for existing efforts
2. **Encourage** schools to make more efficient use of existing curriculum resources in media literacy education across the grade levels
3. **Create** K-12 horizontal and vertical curriculum in districts that utilizes one-to-one technologies and expanded and extended learning beyond the school day and school walls by incorporating meaningful, community service projects and topics students are curious about
4. **Take actions** to ensure that all administrators understand media literacy core concepts and their relation to current events, school climate and student well-being and safety.

About Media Literacy Now Rhode Island

This document was authored by the members of the Media Literacy Now Rhode Island Steering Committee, which was formed in 2016 to advance legislation to bring media literacy to all Rhode Island students. Members include: Michael Trofi, Erin McNeill, Pam Steager, Frank Romanelli, Amanda Murphy, Mary Moen, Brien Jennings, Lori Huntley, Renee Hobbs, Marc Garceau, Carolyn Fortuna, and Darshell Silva.

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