Media Education Lab

Media Literacy in California

A Look at K-12 Classrooms and Policy Recommendations

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Foreword

Young people are growing up in a media environment that is changing constantly. Most get their news and information online, where algorithms are built to keep them scrolling, not necessarily to keep them informed. Teachers see the effects in their classrooms, and this report shows that most believe media literacy has become an essential part of education.

California is home to some of the world's largest social media and AI companies. But until now, we have known very little about how media literacy is being taught in the state's schools. While we cannot generalize this study to represent all California schools, it provides us an important starting point.

Educators clearly see the value of media and AI literacy. At the same time, they estimate that key media literacy practices reach only about half of the students at their schools. They say they need clearer guidance, more training, funding, and time. The problem is not that educators are unwilling to teach these skills. It is that they often lack the support to do so.

Our current discourse on how to implement media and AI literacy should start with that point. Instead of blaming teachers for the lack of media literacy practices, we should devote resources as training, policy and teaching materials relevant to the context of their students' community.

A bright spot of how California students can reach a high level of media and AI literacy is not in the findings of the report, but rather in the authorship of this report. Elise Choi, as a sophomore high school student, reached out to me two years ago regarding the advocacy work and research of the Media Education Lab. From a Zoom meeting, we developed this research that she led with a high level of professionalism and eagerness to learn and explore how to measure the implementations of media and AI literacy. Elise also serves as a journalist ifor the Los Angeles Times High School Insider and wrote Assembly Bill 2071 which directs the California Department of Education to develop a state plan for digital wellness instruction. Besides her duties as a high school student, she advocated for this bill which was signed into law September 2026 by Governor Newsom.

If Elise is represents the future generation's skills and devotion for wellbeing, we are in good hands. Young people understand the urgency of this issue because they experience it firsthand, and they are not waiting for adults to solve it for them. I hope this report gives policymakers, educators, and advocates useful evidence as they work to make media literacy education available to every student in California and beyond.

Chicago, U.S.A., October 20, 2026

Yonty Friesem, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Media Education Lab
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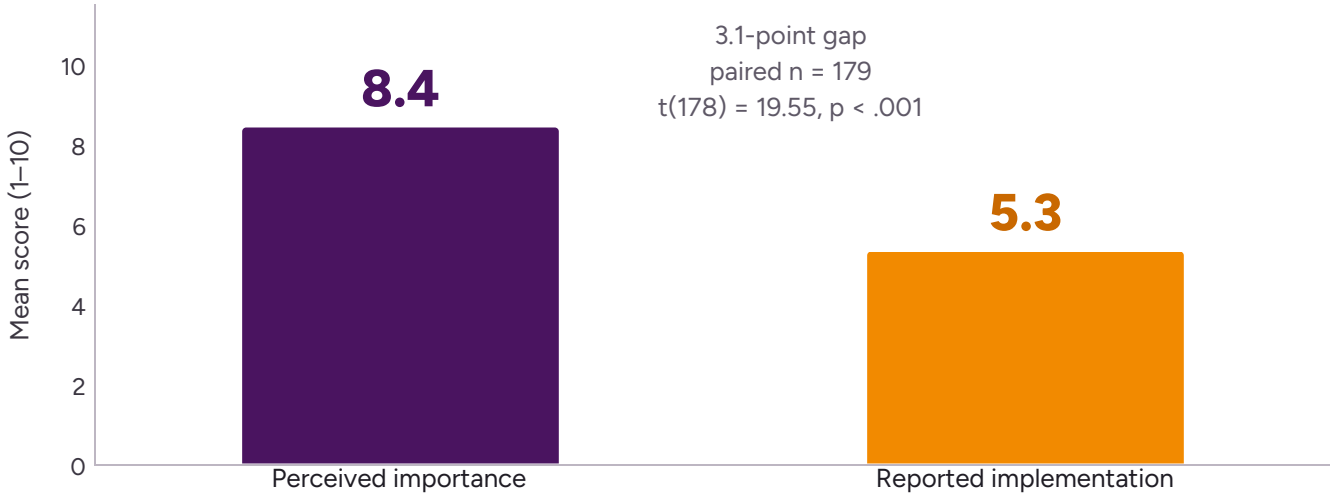
Executive Summary

Between September 2025 and February 2026, nearly 500 California educators responded to our statewide survey. After we removed incomplete and duplicate submissions, we were left with 185 complete, valid responses from teachers, school librarians, principals, and administrators representing 127 zip codes. These responses, along with interviews with 14 educators, form the basis of this report.

We wanted to understand two things: How important do California educators believe media and AI literacy education is, and how much of it is actually reaching students?

Educators value media literacy far more than they see it taught



Four key findings emerged:

1 **Educators see media and AI literacy as highly important.** On average, respondents rated its importance 8.4 out of 10 when weighing it against the many other issues facing public education. Nearly three-quarters (74%) gave it a rating of 8, 9, or 10. More than 80% rated each of the six reasons for teaching media literacy as "important" or "most important," and 64% said that learning to evaluate the credibility of information was "most important."

2 **Instruction falls far short of the perceived level of importance, and the gap is consistent across every practice we measured.** Across 21 common teaching practices, the average implementation score was 5.3 out of 10. Educators estimated that these practices reach only about half of the students at their schools. The difference between the average importance rating and the average implementation rating was 3.1 points, a statistically significant gap. All 21 practices received scores below the average importance rating. Some of the lowest scores were for teaching students about the business of media (4.2), algorithms and AI (4.2), and how to balance online and offline life (4.3).

3 **The barriers to instruction appear to be structural, not based on a lack of interest.** Opposition to media literacy did not emerge as a theme in the responses. Educators were not asking whether it should be taught. They were asking how to teach it well and how to reach more students.

4 **Educators identified four main needs.** To reach more students, respondents said schools need curriculum guidance (37%), teacher training and professional development (28%), funding and resources (23%), and more time (12%).

Based on these findings, we recommend that California publish model guidance and a curriculum crosswalk showing where media literacy fits within existing frameworks. The state should also build on AB 873, a 2023 law directing the Instructional Quality Commission to consider media literacy when several curriculum frameworks are next revised. California should invest in school librarians as media literacy leaders, fund ongoing professional development, and help schools include media literacy in existing courses rather than create new standalone courses.

Over time, California should move from allowing media literacy to be included in state frameworks to requiring it, supported by a larger and more representative statewide study of how it is being taught. Educators clearly want students to learn these skills, but motivation by itself will not close the gap between what educators value and what students actually receive. State policy and support are also needed.

Why This Matters Now

Digital media is part of everyday life for young people. It is where many of them get news, talk with friends, and learn about the world. But the algorithms behind their feeds are built to keep them engaged, not necessarily to give them accurate or balanced information. Children and teens are also encountering AI chatbots, deepfakes, clickbait, and a constant stream of content that may be biased, misleading, or false.

Nearly all U.S. teens have access to a smartphone, and close to half say they are online "almost constantly" (Pew Research Center, 2024). In a Stanford study of 3,446 American high school students, two-thirds could not distinguish news stories from ads on a website's homepage. When students were asked to investigate a website that claimed to publish "factual reports" on climate science, 96% failed to uncover its connection to the fossil fuel industry (Breakstone et al., 2019).

Schools are one place where students can learn how to make sense of what they see online. In 2025, the American Psychological Association recommended comprehensive AI literacy education for adolescents, along with protections against exploitation and manipulation. The U.S. Surgeon General's office has also called on policymakers to support the development and evaluation of digital and media literacy curricula in schools (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023).

Research suggests that this kind of instruction can help. A meta-analysis of 51 studies found that media literacy programs improved students' knowledge, critical thinking about media messages, and confidence (Jeong et al., 2012). A 2025 review of 119 studies also found positive effects across several media literacy and education outcomes, especially among younger participants, although the results differed by outcome and target group (d'Haenens et al., 2025).

Even with this evidence, the United States has no national standard or requirement for media literacy instruction. What students learn still varies widely from one state, district, school, and classroom to another (DiGiacomo et al., 2023).

California's Moment

California has a particular stake in this issue. Many of the world's largest social media and AI companies are based there, and California students spend hours each day using the products those companies create. In September 2026, Governor Gavin Newsom signed 13 bills to protect children online, including new safeguards for AI companion chatbots and limits on addictive social media features for users under 16 (Lecher, 2026). Most of these laws regulate technology companies; only a few address what students learn, among them AB 2071, a digital wellness education law described in the case study later in this report (Office of the Governor, 2026).

The state has also begun to address media and AI literacy through legislation. In 2023, California passed AB 873, which directs the Instructional Quality Commission to consider adding media literacy to the English language arts, mathematics, science, and history-social science curriculum frameworks when they are next revised. The law was seen as an important first step, but it was also critiqued for lacking funding, deadlines, enforcement, and a requirement that schools actually provide instruction (NAMLE, 2024).

AB 2876, passed in 2024, added AI literacy to the picture. It directs the commission to consider AI literacy when the mathematics, science, and history-social science frameworks are next revised. It also calls for media and AI literacy to be considered in the criteria used to evaluate instructional materials during future state adoptions. Like AB 873, however, it requires the state to consider these topics rather than requiring schools to teach them.

Where do these laws stand? Most of AB 873's framework provisions have not yet been triggered, because they apply only when a framework is next revised. California's current English language arts framework was adopted in 2014, while the science and history-social science frameworks were adopted in 2016. The mathematics framework was adopted in 2023, shortly before AB 873 took effect. None has been revised since the law was passed.

The first sign of implementation has come through the state's 2026 English language arts instructional-materials follow-up adoption. The 2025 education budget trailer bill (AB 121) required the guidance for this adoption to include media literacy content, consistent with AB 2876's direction to consider media literacy when ELA materials are next adopted. Review panels met in July 2026, and the State Board of Education is scheduled to take final action in

November 2026. The guidance used in the review includes media literacy and asks reviewers to look at source credibility, digital texts, misinformation, and the assessment of media literacy skills. This is an important step, although it does not create a statewide requirement that schools teach media literacy.

California's curriculum frameworks guide schools, but they do not dictate what happens in every classroom. Districts and teachers still have considerable control over what they teach and how they teach it. As a result, students' access to media literacy education continues to depend on local priorities, available resources, and individual educators. Those differences are what this study set out to measure.

California also lacks a clear statewide picture of what schools are currently doing. AB 787, introduced in 2023, attempted to address that problem. The bill would have required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to survey teacher librarians, principals, and technology directors about how their schools teach digital citizenship and media literacy. It also called for recommendations to the Legislature on how to put effective practices in place statewide. The bill passed the Assembly and cleared the Senate Education Committee, but it stalled in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

A 2019 study surveyed 41 California school librarians about students' news literacy and their own teaching practices (Farmer, 2019), but it did not answer the broader questions examined here. Before this project, we could not identify a study that measured both how much California K-12 educators value media literacy and how widely they believe it is being taught.

This report offers a starting point. The sample is not representative of every educator in California, and the findings should be read with that limitation in mind. Still, the responses provide an initial statewide view of what educators think about media and AI literacy, what they see happening in their classrooms and schools, and what support they believe they need.

What Is Media and AI Literacy?

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication (NAMLE, n.d.). These skills are not limited to one subject or course. They can be taught in different ways across the curriculum. In the classroom, this might mean:

- Looking closely at a video, advertisement, or social media post to identify who made it, why it was made, whom it is meant to reach, and what point of view it presents.
- Comparing news, opinion, sponsored content, and entertainment while deciding which sources are credible.
- Planning and creating original media, such as presentations, scripts, videos, or graphic designs, for an audience beyond the classroom.
- Learning how companies collect and sell personal data and how algorithms and AI systems use that data to select content, advertisements, and recommendations.

AI literacy builds on many of the same skills. It includes understanding how AI systems produce content, how algorithms influence what people see online, and how to use AI tools carefully and critically. This study examined media and AI literacy together because students encounter them together in their daily lives.

About This Study

We conducted this mixed-methods study between September 2025 and February 2026 through the Media Education Lab.

The survey. We adapted the Media Literacy Implementation Index (MLI), a survey developed and validated by Renee Hobbs and colleagues to measure how often students take part in core media literacy activities (Hobbs et al., 2022, 2024). Our version differed from the original in two ways. We used a 10-point scale instead of a 5-point scale to capture more variation in responses, and we added questions about AI literacy.

We shared the survey through direct emails to more than 1,000 California educators, publicly available California Department of Education contact lists, LinkedIn, education nonprofits and newsletters, and online groups for California teachers. The survey received 477 submissions. After removing incomplete, duplicate, and spam responses, 185 complete responses remained. These respondents came from 127 zip codes across California, spanning communities with a range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and worked in elementary, middle, and high schools. All survey findings in this report are based on their responses.

School librarians made up 31% of the final sample, followed by high school teachers at 27% and elementary and middle school teachers at 16%. The remaining respondents included administrators, technology specialists, and educators in other roles. Seventy-one percent worked in public schools.

The interviews. To better understand the survey results, we also interviewed 14 California educators between November 2025 and January 2026. The group included six principals, three teachers, three librarians, and two specialists. Each semi-structured interview lasted about 15 minutes and gave participants a chance to speak more openly about their experiences and concerns.

The study received Institutional Review Board approval through Columbia College Chicago. All participants gave informed consent, and their responses were anonymized.

How to read these numbers

This study has several limitations. Because we used snowball sampling, the respondents do not represent a statistically representative sample of all California educators, and the findings should not be generalized to the state as a whole. Although respondents came from across the state, Southern California educators are overrepresented, while educators from Northern California and rural areas are underrepresented.

School librarians also make up nearly one-third of the sample. Previous research suggests that librarians are often among the educators most involved in media literacy. Their larger presence in the sample may have raised both the importance and implementation ratings. Because we did not conduct a subgroup analysis, we cannot determine how it affected the size of the 3.1-point gap between the two.

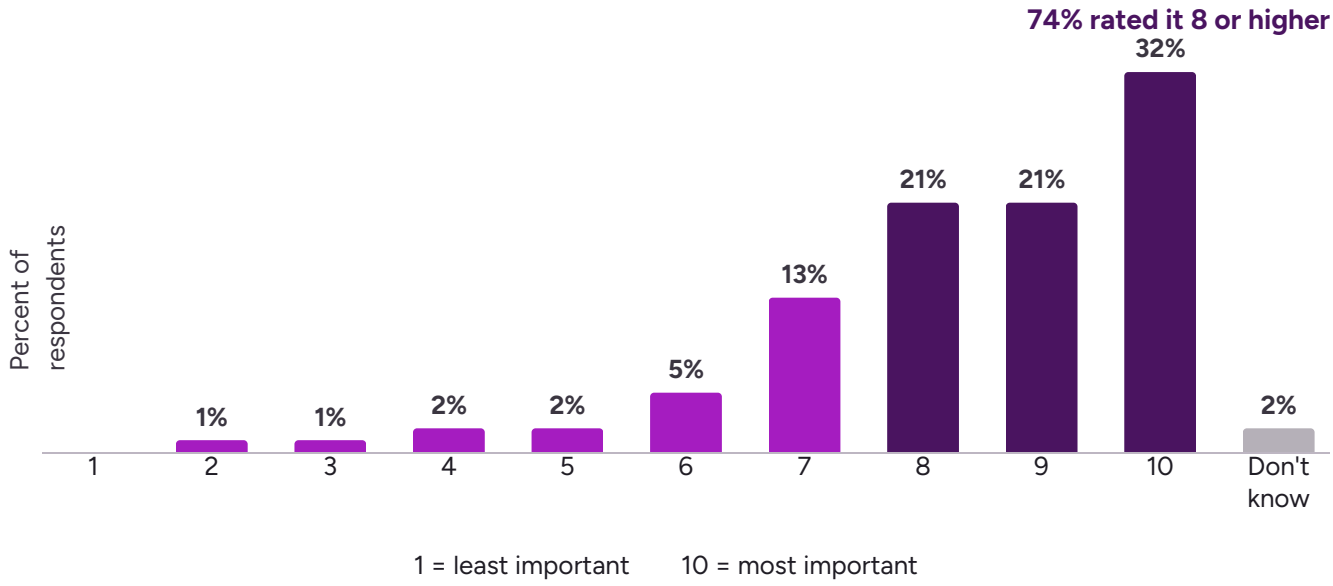
The study also relies on educators' estimates of how often students encounter different teaching practices. We did not observe classroom instruction, assess the quality of that instruction, or test students' media literacy skills.

Finally, although the survey was adapted from a validated instrument, our modified California version was not separately validated. The results may also be affected by the limits of self-report surveys. For example, respondents may have reported stronger support for media literacy because they viewed it as the desirable response.

Finding 1: Educators Place High Value on Media Literacy

We asked educators to rate the importance of media and AI literacy instruction on a scale of 1 to 10, considering the many other issues facing public education. The average rating was 8.4. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) gave it a rating of 8, 9, or 10.

How important is media & AI literacy, compared to everything else facing public education? (n = 185, mean = 8.4)



We then asked educators to rate six reasons for teaching media and AI literacy. These included recognizing stereotypes, encouraging creativity and self-expression, developing technology skills for college and careers, participating in democracy, understanding the benefits and harms of media, and judging whether information is credible. More than 80% of respondents rated each reason as either “important” or “most important.” Evaluating the credibility of information received the strongest response: 64% rated it “most important,” well above any of the other reasons.

Educators' written responses helped explain these ratings. The five most common themes were preparing students for AI and the future (26%), building critical-thinking skills (17%), protecting democracy and civic life (15%), teaching digital citizenship and ethics (12%), and addressing student well-being and the harms of social media (7%).

"The way that we receive information today is so vastly different from even just 10 years ago... all the information that shapes how they see the world comes from social media. And that is primarily TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube."

— California school librarian and former teacher

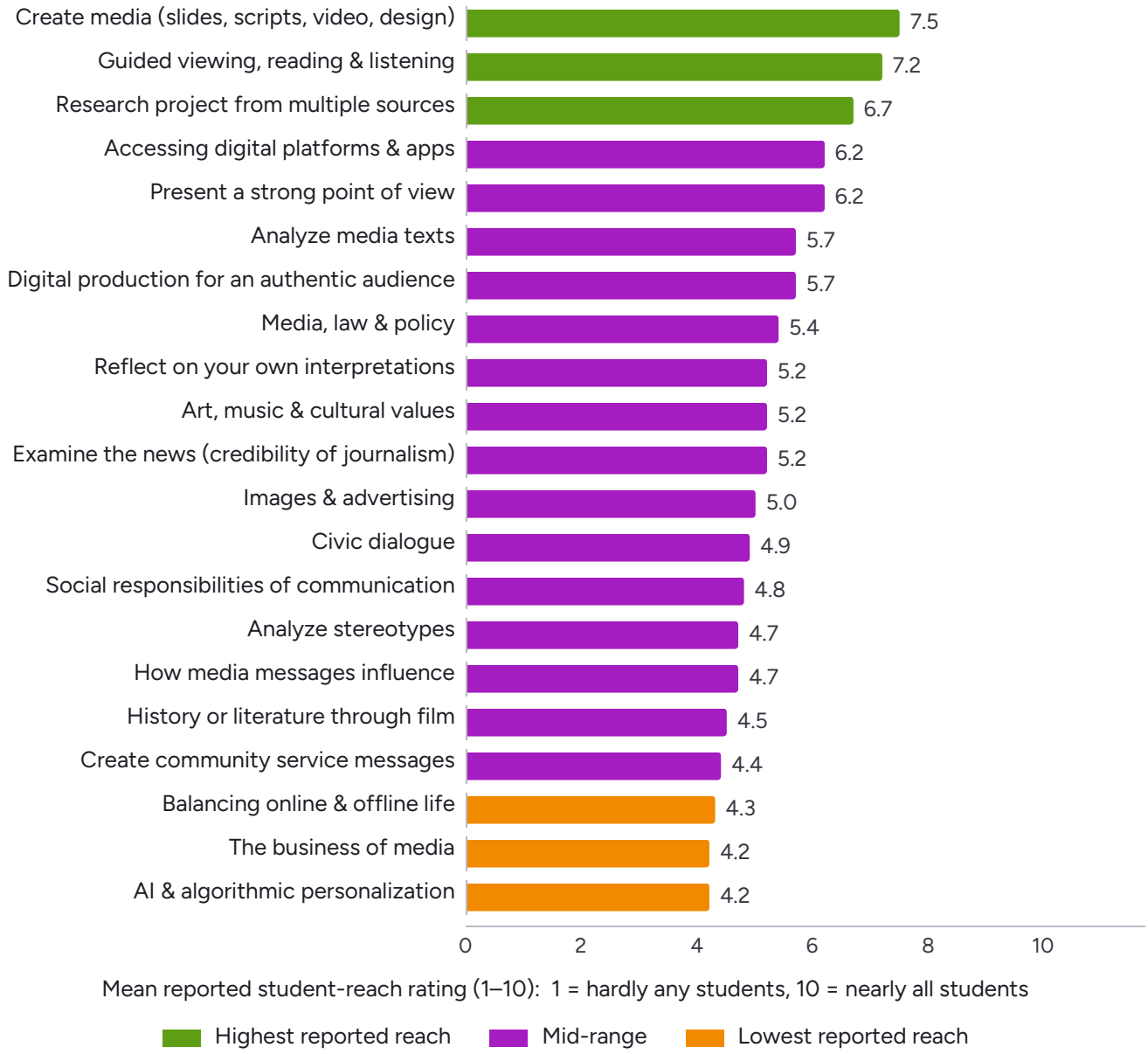
Taken together, these responses show that the educators in this sample already view media and AI literacy as a major priority in public education.

Finding 2: Instruction Reaches About Half of Students and Is Lowest for Media Systems and Digital Wellness

We asked educators to estimate how many students at their schools would encounter 21 different media and AI literacy practices during the current school year. They used a scale from 1, meaning hardly any students, to 10, meaning nearly all students. The practices covered a wide range, from learning how to access digital platforms to examining news coverage and creating original research projects.

The average rating across all 21 practices was 5.3. In other words, respondents estimated that media and AI literacy instruction reaches about half of the students at their schools.

How many students encounter each practice?
(mean reported student-reach ratings across 21 media & AI literacy practices; overall mean = 5.3)



Highest-rated: creating and analyzing media

The highest-rated practices involved students creating or closely examining media. Producing original work, such as slides, scripts, animations, videos, and graphic designs, received the highest average score at 7.5. Analyzing a media artifact with a teacher's guidance to identify its author, purpose, audience, and point of view followed at 7.2.

Completing a research project using information from several media sources received an average score of 6.7.

Lowest-rated practices: understanding media systems and managing digital life

Students were less likely to encounter lessons about how media systems operate or how digital media affects their lives. Tracking media use and discussing its effects on health, identity, and relationships received an average score of 4.3. Learning how media companies make money by selling audience attention scored 4.2, as did learning how algorithms and AI systems collect data and personalize content.

This was one of the clearest patterns in the findings. Respondents reported that students were more likely to create and use media than to study who profits from it, how attention is monetized, or how algorithms influence what they see. Lessons about balancing online and offline life were also among the least common.

There was a similar gap around news. Although 64% of respondents rated evaluating the credibility of information as "most important," they estimated that examining news coverage reaches only about half of the students at their schools, with an average score of 5.2.

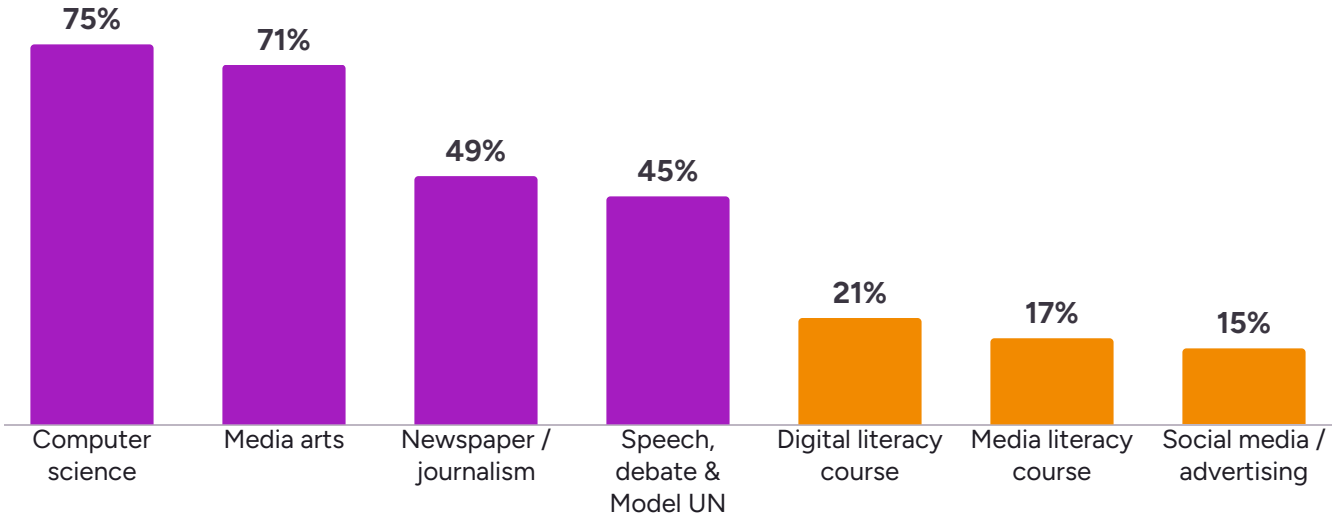
Responses also varied widely. Across the 21 practices, standard deviations ranged from 2.34 to 2.78 on the 10-point scale. This suggests that students' reported exposure to media literacy instruction differs considerably from one school setting to another.

Media-related electives are common, but dedicated courses are not

More than 70% of respondents reported that their schools offer computer science and media arts electives. About half reported newspaper or journalism programs and speech and debate. However, only about one in five said their school offers an elective devoted specifically to digital or media literacy.

These electives may help students develop related skills, but they are optional and reach only the students who choose to enroll. Offering courses connected to media literacy is not the same as making media literacy instruction available to every student.

Adjacent electives are common — dedicated media literacy courses are rare (percent of respondents reporting that their school offers each elective)



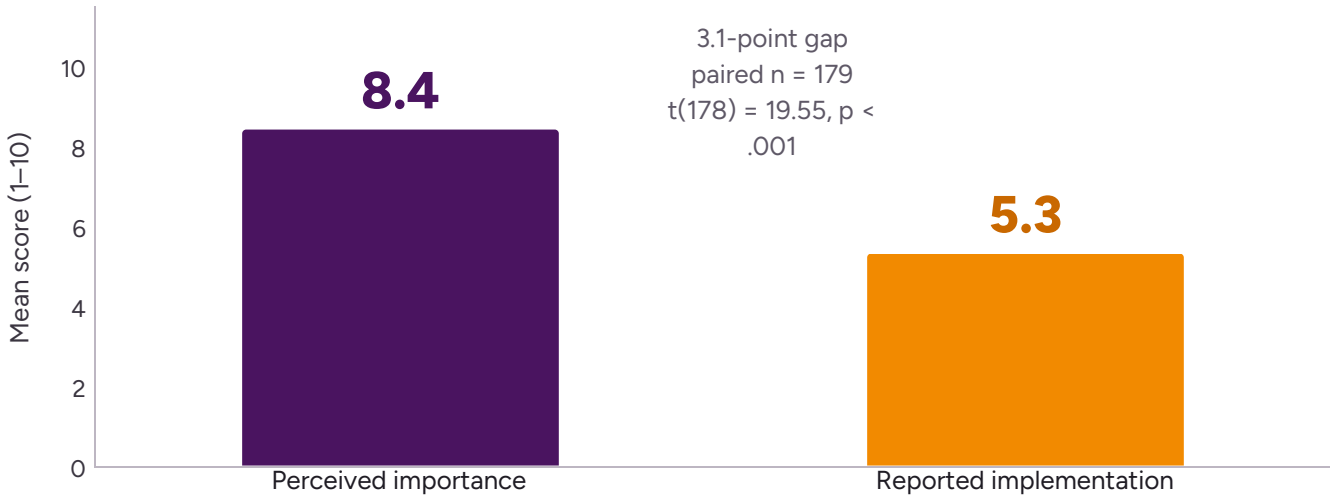
Finding 3: The Barriers Appear Structural, Not Attitudinal

Educators gave media and AI literacy an average importance rating of 8.4 out of 10. At the same time, they estimated that the 21 instructional practices reach about half of the students at their schools, for an average implementation score of 5.3. That is a difference of 3.1 points.

For the 179 respondents who completed both measures, we compared each person's importance rating with their average implementation rating. The difference was statistically significant ($t(178) = 19.55$, $p < .001$).

All 21 instructional practices also received average scores below the overall importance rating of 8.4. In other words, the gap was not caused by only a few low-scoring practices. It appeared across everything we measured.

Educators value media literacy far more than they see it taught



A note on reading this comparison. Both ratings use a 1-to-10 scale, but they measure different things. The importance question asks how much educators value media and AI literacy. The implementation questions ask educators to estimate how many students encounter 21 specific practices. The 3.1-point gap is therefore a descriptive comparison between importance and reported reach, similar to comparisons used in importance-performance research. It should not be read as an exact difference in a single measure.

The broader pattern is more important than the number itself. Educators placed media and AI literacy near the top of the importance scale but estimated that the practices reach about half of the students at their schools. This pattern appeared in the overall results and across all 21 practices.

Three findings suggest that structural barriers were more prominent than attitudinal barriers in this sample:

- **Educators consistently gave high ratings to media literacy.** Seventy-four percent rated its importance at 8 or higher. More than 80% rated each of the six reasons for teaching it as either "important" or "most important."
- **Respondents asked for practical support.** The needs they identified were curriculum guidance, professional development, funding, and time. These are school and system conditions, not objections to media literacy itself. Opposition to teaching media literacy did not appear as a theme in the coded responses.
- **The interviews pointed to the same problems.** Across the 14 interviews, educators raised the same four needs as survey respondents.

These findings are consistent with national research showing that educators' interest in media literacy often exceeds the support available to them (NAMLE, 2024). They also point to a limitation of AB 873, which opened the door to including media literacy in future curriculum frameworks but did not provide funding, professional development, or a requirement that schools offer instruction. For the educators in this study, lack of interest was not the problem. They were more concerned about having enough guidance, training, funding, and time to teach media literacy well.

In Educators' Own Words

Between November 2025 and January 2026, we interviewed 14 California educators: six principals, three teachers, three librarians, and two specialists. When we asked why media and AI literacy matter, their responses centered on six recurring themes.

Discerning credibility in a complicated media landscape

> "There's a lot of misinformation and disinformation out there that is being embedded into true information... It's just such a crazy landscape that you need to understand what that type of literacy is in order to understand the information that you're being bombarded with."
>
> **— Teacher**

> "It's very difficult to be able to uncover the different layers of where that information is coming from and who's motivated by what when you're consuming that information...that's a challenge. I know that's something we're going to have to really worry about here in education."
>
> **— Principal**

Educational equity

"If it's not mandatory and it's optional, then you'll have two generations: the generation that will do it without any issues, and the generation that is gonna resist because it's too new to them..."

— Principal

"In my district I don't see them being taught at all... We don't even teach our teachers."

— Librarian

"The only way that we could really...implement true media literacy and make sure equity-wise that everybody is getting the same thing would be to create a course or some sort of graduation requirement."

— Librarian (former Teacher)

"The way that our local schools are teaching digital media literacy is incredibly inconsistent."

— Specialist

Mental health and digital wellness

"I think digital wellness is very important. Even in elementary school, we know a lot of the kids are already on the computer and their iPads, and they're probably on social media already. So I think any type of digital awareness training would be important to all the kids."

— Principal

“There's that book that's out called The Anxious Generation. I know LA Unified has used that to inform a lot of their policies around media, like what you're talking about, media consumption and digital devices and all that sort of stuff. I just believe that we need to keep having conversations with our communities and our kids to make sure that we're best serving them.”

— Principal

“What role do I think that schools should play in teaching digital wellness? That is very, very important, something that we definitely, definitely, definitely needed.”

— Librarian

Digital citizenship

“Just to be...better citizens in terms of navigating the world and trying to understand the things that are going on around them and how to sort through misinformation, but also the media makers themselves and to curate their own stories and tell their own stories as well.”

— Principal

“It’s really important that we have a baseline understanding, no matter what our background is, of how algorithms are being used to impact systems and laws in our community.”

— Specialist

Critical thinking skills

"The ability to think critically isn't going away. It's just changing how students apply critical thinking. Teaching students how to critically think is going to become more important than ever. And teaching students how to disseminate information that's incorrect versus not incorrect is going to become more important than ever."

— Principal

"You got a lot of good engineers behind Facebook that are paid handsomely to keep you engaged on what you already agree on. And so why don't we try to break that mold a little bit and look for other sources of information?"

— Principal

Practical skills for future employment

"It is the future of our students' ability to get jobs. I've told them you urgently need to start seeing what these tools are like because it is going to determine jobs that students are eligible for in the future."

— Principal

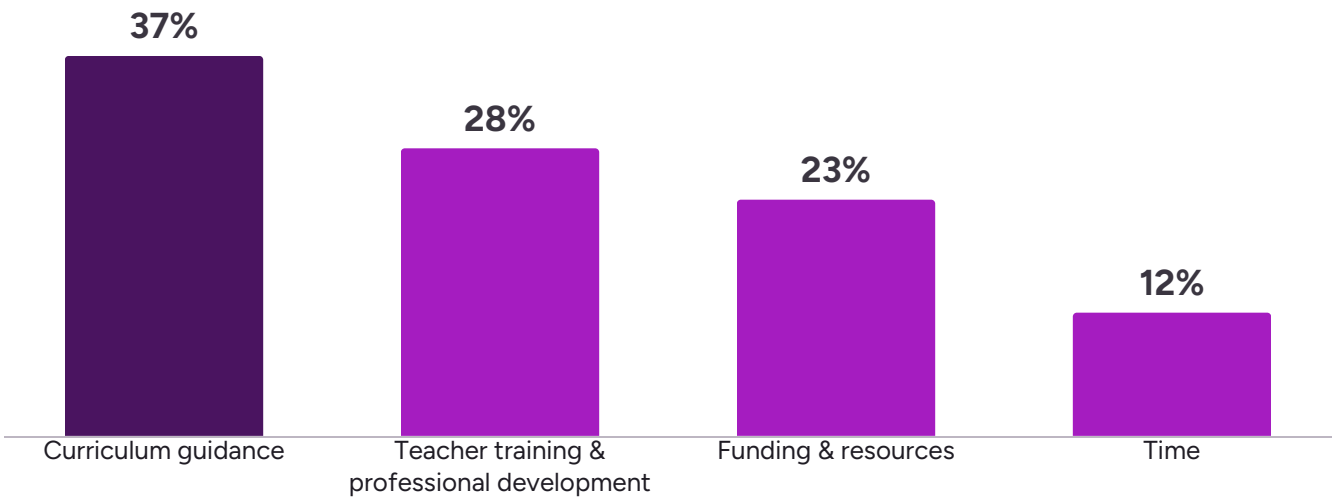
"Use AI. Please use AI. The thing is it is such a useful tool. I use it not just to help better craft emails but I use it to help me think critically about how data is gonna be used within each department, and how I'm going to use data for xyz. I have a lot of comfort using AI and I think everyone should be comfortable using the tool the same way we are comfortable now using the internet."

— Principal

Finding 4: What Educators Say They Need

At the end of the survey, we asked what would help more students take part in the 21 media and AI literacy practices described in this report. Among the 150 respondents who answered, four needs came up most often: curriculum guidance (37%), teacher training and professional development (28%), funding and resources (23%), and time (12%).

What educators say they need to expand media literacy education (themes in 150 open-ended responses)



Guidance and training came first. Together, curriculum guidance and teacher training accounted for nearly two-thirds of the responses, ranking higher than "time." It suggests that many educators first need clearer information about what to teach and support in learning how to teach it.

The interviews pointed to the same needs. Interviewees identified the same four issues, although in a different order: professional development, curriculum requirements and guidance, time, and funding. Six of the 14 interviewees were principals, so the results may reflect an administrator's perspective more strongly than the survey results. The interview sample is too small, however, to determine why the order differed.

The pattern matches national research. A RAND survey of public school teachers identified many of the same barriers: competing responsibilities, pressure to cover other required content, limited training, a lack of instructional resources, and unclear curriculum guidance (Baker et al., 2021). NAMLE's 2024 national survey also found that many educators who teach media literacy are largely self-taught.

Educators were concerned about equity. One principal warned that optional implementation could leave students split into "two generations" with different levels of technological fluency. A teacher described it as "a real equity issue." Their concern was that students in well-resourced districts would have greater access to media literacy instruction than students in districts with fewer resources.

This study did not compare student outcomes across districts, so it cannot determine whether that divide is already occurring. It does show that educators see unequal access as a serious risk of leaving media literacy instruction voluntary.

Case Study: AB 2071 and the Push for Digital Wellness Education

California's recent legislative history shows how difficult it can be to turn support for media literacy into changes in schools. AB 873, passed in 2023, directed the state to consider media literacy when several curriculum frameworks are next revised. Advocates welcomed the law but criticized it for lacking funding, deadlines, and a requirement that schools provide instruction. That same year, AB 787 proposed a statewide survey of how media literacy was being taught. It passed the Assembly but stalled in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

In 2025 and 2026, student advocates pursued another approach. Their review of the state Education Code found that SB 224, passed in 2021, requires middle and high schools that offer health education to include mental health instruction. The law does not directly address the ways digital life can affect young people's mental health, including excessive screen time, compulsive social media use, cyberbullying, and AI companion chatbots.

That gap became the basis for a digital wellness bill proposal. Student advocates developed the proposal with partners at Media Literacy Now and the Media Education Lab and presented it to about two dozen legislative offices in the Senate and Assembly.

In February 2026, Assemblymember Josh Hoover (R-Folsom), vice chair of the Assembly Education Committee and author of California's Phone-Free Schools Act, agreed to carry the digital wellness bill, introducing the bill as AB 2071. Senator Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana) joined as a coauthor, giving AB 2071 bipartisan authorship in both houses. The California Alliance for Media Literacy formed to support the effort and grew to include more than 40 educators, researchers, librarians, nonprofit leaders, and policy experts.

The bill changed as it moved through the Legislature. The original version would have required middle and high schools that offer health courses to include digital wellness instruction. Senate amendments removed that classroom requirement. The enacted version directs the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop a statewide plan for expanding digital wellness instruction by January 1, 2028.

The plan must include age-appropriate instructional resources for elementary, middle, and high schools; ways to keep the material current as digital and AI technologies change; guidance for schools with limited technology resources; family education; methods for evaluating instruction; and strategies for supporting and training educators.

After the Assembly and Senate unanimously passed AB 2071, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the bill into law on September 10, 2026, along with 12 other bills intended to protect children online or regulate social media platforms (Office of the Governor, 2026).

AB 2071 offers a partial response to the barriers identified in this study. The bill focuses on digital wellness, which falls within the broader media literacy framework. It does not address every part of media literacy but addresses the need for curriculum guidance by requiring CDE to develop instructional resources and an implementation plan. The bill does not fund teacher training or require schools to teach digital wellness.

Nonetheless, the passage of AB 2071 shows that lawmakers are willing to act on digital wellness and media literacy. It also shows how much can change as a bill moves through the legislative process. AB 2071 gives California a plan and instructional resources, but further action is needed to reach students statewide.

Policy Recommendations: What California Could Do

The recommendations below respond to the needs educators identified in this study. Equity should guide each one. Interviewees worried that if media literacy remains voluntary, students in wealthier districts will have greater access than students in districts with fewer resources. One educator described the risk as creating “two generations” of students with very different levels of digital knowledge.

1 **Follow through on AB 873 and AB 2876.** These laws direct the state to consider media and AI literacy during future framework revisions and instructional-materials adoptions. California should build on the 2026 English language arts follow-up adoption by integrating these skills as other frameworks and materials are revised.

2 **Publish model guidance and a curriculum crosswalk.** Curriculum guidance was the most common need, named by 37% of respondents. The California Department of Education should provide clear examples of media and AI literacy instruction and show where these skills fit within existing English language arts, history-social science, science, and health frameworks.

3 **Provide sustained, funded professional development.** Training was the most common need raised in the interviews and the second most common in the survey. Teachers across subject areas need ongoing training, practical lesson examples, and time to plan with colleagues, not just one-time workshops.

4 **Set clearer expectations and track what reaches classrooms.** Framework language alone does not guarantee that students receive instruction. California should follow the full path from frameworks and instructional-materials criteria to local adoption, classroom teaching, and students’ actual exposure.

5 **Support school librarians as media literacy leaders.** Many librarians already teach these skills and work with educators across subjects and grade levels. California should support them in coordinating instruction and professional learning, while providing regional or county-level help to schools without a credentialed librarian.

6 **Create a media literacy endorsement or certificate pathway.** A recognized pathway would help educators develop deeper expertise and allow districts to identify teachers and librarians who can lead this work.

7 **Fund a representative statewide study.** In 2023, AB 787 would have required California to study how media literacy was being taught in its schools, but the bill did not pass. This report helps fill part of that gap, but an independent study with a nonrepresentative sample cannot provide the statewide picture that California needs. California should fund a representative study that combines educator surveys with measures of classroom implementation and student learning. The research should be repeated over time so the state can see whether new policies are making a difference.

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