



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Coalition to Empower our Future  
**Re:** Three-in-four California Parents Support Comprehensive Youth Mental Health Solutions Over Narrow Ones and Believe Heavily Restricting Technology Will Have Unintended Consequences  
**Date:** June 2026

### Overview

The Coalition to Empower our Future partnered with Mercury Analytics to conduct an online survey among 600 parents in California, as well as live conversations with parents across the state. This research took place between April 2 and April 10, 2026.

This research finds that when it comes to solving the youth mental health challenge, parents in California strongly support comprehensive solutions and believe that narrow, ban-based solutions will cause negative unintended consequences. They want digital literacy solutions that equip young people to use technology responsibly and succeed in a highly digital world.

### Key Research Insights

**Three-in-four parents in California support comprehensive solutions to youth mental health over narrow ones.** California parents believe that a broad, varied range of factors drive youth mental health challenges, so they support comprehensive solutions to address these challenges rather than solutions that target a single factor. They believe phones and technology are among many contributing factors, but not the only ones.

**Q:** Thinking about solutions to youth mental health and wellbeing, which of the following do you think is the best approach, even if neither is perfect?



**QUOTES FROM CA PARENTS ON THE FACTORS DRIVING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AND WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS:**

*“Ultimately, **a lot of those mental health challenges are driven by what’s happening in the household** – what you prioritize and what you talk about with your kids.”*

*“There’s a conflation between mental health and technology – that one causes the other. But I’m not sure there is. **I think there are other factors we aren’t discussing.**”*

*“**It will take more than just one organization – it will take a village,** including parents and other parties taking action to make [broad solutions] a priority.”*

**Three-in-four California parents agree that a narrow, ban-based approach to youth mental health can have unintended negative consequences.** Parents in California say bans and sweeping technology restrictions minimize the many other factors driving youth mental health challenges. They describe bans as solving a symptom of the problem – not the root cause. They believe kids will always find a way to use technology, with or without their parents’ supervision and whether it’s banned or not.

**Q:** Please indicate if you **agree or disagree** with the following statement:

*“A narrow approach to youth mental health and wellbeing that **bans or heavily restricts youth access to phones and technology** will cause negative unintended consequences for young people.”*



**QUOTES FROM CA PARENTS ON THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF A NARROW, BAN-BASED APPROACH:**

*“I don’t necessarily support taking the phones away. It’s like **solving a symptom, but not necessarily the problem.**”*

*“If kids know they’re already not supposed to be on a platform, **it would cause friction to come to a trusted adult to share something that’s going on** if they know they’ll get in trouble for being on it in the first place.”*

*“I don’t support outright bans where kids can’t bring them on campus at all. For me, **it’s a safety concern – I want my child to have a device.** Things have happened on campus that were recorded, and we wouldn’t have known otherwise. So, I don’t necessarily support taking phones away.”*

**Nearly nine-in-10 California parents say that young people and their parents need to be taught how to use technology safely and responsibly.** Specifically, they say artificial

intelligence (AI) is a significant part of this conversation. Parents feel responsibility in teaching their kids how to navigate AI and other technology.

**Q:** Do you **agree or disagree** that **young people** should be taught how to use AI safely?



**Q:** Do you **agree or disagree** that **parents** should be taught how to use AI safely?



#### QUOTES FROM CA PARENTS ON WHY DIGITAL LITERACY IS IMPORTANT:

*“**The real world is going to be out there at some point**, so if you shield them from the big, bad Internet, I think you’re doing them a disservice.”*

*“Without guardrails or parental controls, it’s not safe. **They know how to navigate the internet, but not safely.**”*

*“The AI world can be good and bad. But kids live in a non-reality world and are overwhelmed with misinformation online and through AI. **Their ability to process that information, I think, is pretty concerning.**”*

**Parents in California overwhelmingly support implementing digital literacy solutions for young people, parents and educators.** They say effective solutions equip young people, parents and educators to harness technology for good – for example, media

literacy training programs for teachers; digital wellness guides for parents and families; and online safety lessons for students. They believe these solutions establish smart, clear guardrails for young people and actionable guidance for parents and educators.

**Q:** Below is a list of resources and tools some people have said can help support youth mental health. Please indicate how **effective or ineffective** each would be.

**(Showing % EFFECTIVE)**

<b>Training programs for teachers on digital and media literacy</b> to help them teach students how to evaluate online information	89
<b>Student-led digital wellbeing groups</b> , organized to promote healthier online behaviors and support mental and social well-being	87
<b>Parent/family digital wellness guides</b> , resources that give parents research-based strategies and conversation tools to help manage their children's technology use	86
<b>Online safety lessons for students</b> , covering topics like cyberbullying, privacy and responsible online behavior	86
<b>Social media literacy curriculum for students</b> to help them understand how social platforms shape attention, behavior and online experiences	86
<b>Lessons on app engagement and design</b> to teach students how platforms are built to influence behavior and hold attention	85
<b>News and information literacy resources for the age of AI</b> to help students evaluate whether online information is credible, especially when AI is involved	83
<b>AI and online literacy lessons for students</b> to teach them how algorithms, AI and online platforms work	82