



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Coalition to Empower our Future  
**Re:** Seven-in-10 Voters and Parents Say Banning or Heavily Restricting Youth Access to Phones and Technology Will Have Unintended Negative Consequences  
**Date:** June 2026

### Overview

The Coalition to Empower our Future partnered with Mercury Analytics to conduct an online survey among 2,000 nationwide voters and oversamples of 600 parents each in California, New York, and Texas. The coalition also conducted live conversations with parents in these same three states. This research took place between April 2 and April 10, 2026.

This research finds that voters and parents strongly support comprehensive solutions to youth mental health, and they believe that narrow, ban-based solutions will cause negative unintended consequences. Voters and parents are highly supportive of digital literacy solutions that equip young people to use technology responsibly and succeed in a highly digital world.

### Key Research Insights

**Three-in-four voters and parents support comprehensive solutions to youth mental health over narrow ones.** Voters and 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 PARENTS ON WHY YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS MUST BE COMPREHENSIVE:**

**“It’s kind of like whack-a-mole.** You do one thing and people figure out a workaround [for] it. You’re not going to do one thing once and be able to fix the problem.” – TX Parent

**“It will take more than just one organization. It will take a village,** a lot of people, taking action to make [broad solutions] a priority.” – CA Parent

“We have to come up with the solutions together with psychiatrists, with therapists, [with] scientists. **We have to all [do it] together.**” – NY Parent

**Seven-in-10 voters and three-in-four parents agree that a narrow, phone ban-based approach to youth mental health can have unintended negative consequences.**

Voters and parents 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 or not it’s banned.

**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 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.**” – CA Parent

“Speaking from my own experience, I was open with [my parents] about what I was doing. Bans, with no questions asked, are not a good solution because it’ll be like **‘okay, I’m not allowed to do this, so now I have more of an inclination to do this.’**” – NY Parent

“I’m okay with phones being in backpacks, but 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.” – CA Parent

“Schools in America are so unsafe. **Kids need their phones to call their parents or 911.**” – NY Parent

**“If there are bans on Instagram, there are tons of other apps that kids can go to... If they’ve got too much time, they’re going to want to do things [themselves], and these things will cause problems.”** – CA Parent

*"I don't think [banning phones] is enough on its own, and I can say for myself, living in a household where I wasn't allowed to have a phone and social media **didn't stop me from having a phone and social media. Kids are going to get around that.**" – NY Parent*

*"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." – CA Parent*

**Voters and 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. Around four-in-five voters and nine-in-10 parents agree that not only do young people need to be taught how to use AI safely, but parents need to be taught to do so as well. Parents feel responsibility in teaching their kids how to navigate AI and other technology, and some feel behind the learning curve.

**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 PARENTS ON WHY DIGITAL LITERACY IS NECESSARY FOR BOTH YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS:**

*"**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." – CA Parent*

*"**Sometimes I feel like I don't know the right way.** There's so much out there that I haven't learned about being safe on the internet." – NY Parent*

*"I think **kids are technologically savvy, but not digitally literate.** A lot of them are unable to use higher-order thinking skills to understand what they are watching or experiencing." – TX Parent*

*"As technology is evolving, as parents, **you have to evolve too.**" – NY Parent*

**Voters and parents 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, online safety lessons for students; digital wellness guides for parents; and media literacy training programs for teachers. 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)**

Digital Literacy Solution	NW Voters	CA Parents	NY Parents	TX Parents
<b>Training programs for teachers on digital and media literacy</b> to help them teach students how to evaluate online information	87	89	93	91
<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	85	86	91	89
<b>Lessons on app engagement and design</b> to teach students how platforms are built to influence behavior and hold attention	85	85	87	84
<b>Online safety lessons for students,</b> covering topics like cyberbullying, privacy and responsible online behavior	84	86	89	88
<b>AI and online literacy lessons for students</b> to teach them how algorithms, AI and online platforms work	82	82	87	85
<b>Student-led digital wellbeing groups,</b> organized to promote healthier online behaviors and support mental and social wellbeing	82	87	88	87
<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	81	83	87	86
<b>Social media literacy curriculum for students</b> to help them understand how social platforms shape attention, behavior and online experiences	79	86	86	89

#### QUOTES FROM PARENTS ON WHY THEY SUPPORT SPECIFIC DIGITAL LITERACY SOLUTIONS:

##### ONLINE SAFETY LESSONS FOR STUDENTS

*"Kids and parents need to be more aware of what's out there. It's important to teach them how to be less reactive to things they're seeing and not let things get to you." – CA Parent*

##### PARENT/FAMILY DIGITAL WELLNESS GUIDES

*"I think it would be a great tool...it always starts at home. That's where your kids are first. **If we started talking about digital literacy and how to keep our kids safe on the internet in parenting classes and books,** the way we talk about breastfeeding or changing diapers, we'd be able to navigate that space because we'd already have those tools." – NY Parent*

**TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS ON DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY**

*"It might take some time and resources, but if they're already teaching students, **having that training to pass on would be preferred.** I'm not saying they'd be able to teach everything, but even imparting a little bit, pushing things forward, would help." – TX Parent*