

The Association for Media Literacy

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Minister Lecce's Plan to Ban Cell Phones & Social Media Platforms in Ontario Classrooms Hinders Educators' Ability to Teach Digital Literacy Skills

[Toronto, April 29, 2024] In response to yesterday's announcement that the Ministry of Education intends to ban cell phones and social media platforms in Ontario schools, the [Association for Media Literacy](#) is compelled to highlight the contradiction inherent in [mandating digital literacy education](#) while simultaneously banning the tools necessary for effective implementation of said mandate. We urge the Ministry to guarantee exceptions to policies that would hinder the teaching of digital literacy, a crucial transferable skill.

While the AML agrees that cell phones and social media platforms can contribute to distractibility and mental health concerns for some students, we believe the Ministry's policy response will do little to address these issues and may even exacerbate them. Enforcement is not the solution; education is.

Students urgently need to be taught about these media -- including how they are designed to be addictive, how they create warped versions of reality, and how to protect themselves from bad actors online -- and to be equipped with the skills, strategies and tools necessary for mitigating these issues. To access this digital literacy education, students and educators require access to both cell phones and social media platforms in the classroom. Banning these is a simplistic response that does nothing to prepare students for the realities they will continue to face outside the classroom.

Confiscating smartphones and suspending "repeat offenders" creates an uncooperative and unhealthy relationship between students and educators and is counter-productive. It will further disadvantage marginalized students by removing Special Education and ELL students' discreet access to assistive technologies on their smartphones, and (as we know from existing suspension data) lead to disproportionate suspensions of BIPOC children and youth.

Further, we question the efficacy of bans on smartphones in classrooms when distractions persist through other school-provided devices like Chromebooks. Students will find additional workarounds to this ban, as they have in the past, such as using VPNs and data rather than

Board-provided internet connections. Long-standing discussions about distractions from streaming services have yet to yield a resolution, indicating the complexity of these issues. Addressing them effectively requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach to managing the modern classroom environment.

The Association for Media Literacy remains committed to advocating for practical, equitable, and effective solutions to the challenges facing modern education. We urge the Minister to clarify this policy as it pertains to the concerns outlined above.

For further inquiries or to schedule an interview, please contact Director Carol Arcus at 647-998-3050 or carcus@rogers.com.

The Association for Media Literacy (aml.ca) is an official Subject Association under Ontario's Ministry of Education. AML wrote Ontario's media literacy curriculum, making Ontario the first educational jurisdiction in the world to mandate media studies in every core English/Language course. AML continues to play a crucial role in Ontario's media curriculum development through the recent Grades 1-9 Language document.