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Where students read

SCREEN TIME COMMITTEE GUIDE

A framework for evaluating and improving student screen use

This guide provides a framework to help district- and school-based screen time committees make informed decisions about technology use by focusing on the quality, purpose, and impact of screen-based learning experiences.

The goal should not be to reduce screen time at all costs, but to ensure that every minute of screen use supports meaningful learning, student well-being, accessibility, and digital readiness. Effective screen use should enhance teaching and learning while preserving opportunities for discussion, collaboration, movement, and hands-on experiences.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Purpose before platform

Technology should be selected because it advances a specific learning goal and not because it is available, new, or convenient.

2. Active learning over passive consumption

Technology should engage students as active participants through reading, writing, creating, researching, discussing, and problem-solving.

3. Development matters

Technology should match students' cognitive development and support age-appropriate learning.

PK-2: Technology should be limited, guided, and intentional. Prioritize play-based learning, oral language development, read-alouds, tactile exploration, and meaningful adult interaction.

3-5: Technology should support literacy, creativity, research, communication, and foundational digital citizenship while preserving ample opportunities for offline learning.

6-8: Technology should support inquiry, collaboration, information evaluation, critical thinking, and responsible participation in digital environments.

9-12: Technology should prepare students for college, career, civic engagement, and lifelong learning through research, communication, media literacy, digital responsibility, and self-directed learning.

4. Balance matters

Technology should complement, not replace, offline learning experiences. Effective classrooms create opportunities for both digital and non-digital learning.

5. Safety, privacy, and responsibility matter

Technology should support safe, ethical, and age-appropriate participation in digital environments.

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SCREEN TIME QUALITY REVIEW PROCESS: A SIX-PART TEST

The committee should consider the following questions when reviewing a digital learning tool:

Improves learning outcomes

- Does it support literacy, learning, and/or measurable academic growth?
- Is there evidence that students benefit from using it?
- Does it align with district goals and instructional priorities?
- Does it increase the amount students read?
- What learning outcomes does it support?
- Does it encourage sustained reading habits?
- Does it motivate reluctant or disengaged readers?
- Does it support literacy growth through increased access and reading volume?

Promotes active engagement

- Do students use it to read, write, research, or create?
- Does the technology require thinking and participation?
- Would students be engaged in meaningful learning without the screen?
- Does it support active reading, annotation, reflection, or discussion?
- Are students engaging deeply with texts or passively consuming content?
- Does it encourage independent reading and learner agency?

Expands access and opportunity

- Does it increase access to books and learning materials?
- Does it remove barriers for emerging readers?
- Does it support student accommodations and disability needs?
- Does it make learning more accessible for multilingual learners?
- Can access to the tool or its features reduce participation barriers?
- Does it provide equitable access regardless of device or location?
- Does it offer accessibility features (e.g., text-to-speech, audiobooks, translation tools, adjustable or large-print text, alternative formats, etc.)?
- Does it help more students successfully engage with grade-level content?

Supports educators

- Does it provide useful data or insights that improve instruction?
- Does it integrate into existing classroom practices?
- Is implementation sustainable and realistic?
- Does it reduce administrative burden or streamline workflows?
- What ongoing technical support and/or dedicated account services are available?
- What training, professional development, and implementation support are available?

Builds digital literacy skills

- Does it strengthen digital literacy skills?
- Does it support responsible and ethical technology use?
- Does it prepare students for college, career, civic engagement, and lifelong learning?

Protects student privacy and safety

- What student data is collected?
- How is the data protected?
- Does the provider comply with district privacy policies?
- Are AI-powered features transparent and age-appropriate?
- Does it provide a safe, student-centered experience?

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THE SCREEN TIME VALUE CONTINUUM

Lowest value	Highest value
• Passive video watching • Endless scrolling or browsing • Digital worksheets used as substitutes for instruction • Repetitive drill activities without feedback • Entertainment-focused use • Screen use without a clear learning purpose	• Reading and literacy development • Research and inquiry • Content creation and communication • Collaboration and discussion • Critical thinking and problem-solving • Media and information literacy • Digital citizenship and responsible online behavior • Digital fluency and real-world technology skills

WHY READING TECHNOLOGY IS DIFFERENT

Screen-based reading is not passive consumption. Committees should evaluate digital reading platforms differently from entertainment-oriented technologies.

Research consistently demonstrates that literacy development depends on:

Access to books | **Reading volume** | **Reading frequency** | **Student choice** | **Reading engagement**

When technology expands access to reading materials and encourages sustained independent reading, screens become tools for literacy growth, helping students build the reading habits and digital fluency needed to thrive in a digital world.

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO LITERACY TECHNOLOGIES

When evaluating digital reading platforms, committees should use the same review framework outlined earlier in this guide. Particular attention should be given to whether the technology:

- Increases access to books
- Encourages reading frequency and volume
- Supports active reading and comprehension
- Removes barriers for diverse learners
- Strengthens independent reading habits
- Advances district literacy goals



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HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATIONAL SCREEN USE WITH SORA

Sora was built specifically for PK-12 schools to help students discover books, access reading materials, and engage in meaningful reading experiences.

Unlike entertainment-focused platforms, Sora's features are intentionally designed to support literacy, increase access to books, remove barriers to reading, and encourage independent reading habits.

A purpose-built platform for schools

- Student-safe, ad-free access to books
- School-managed collections
- Age-appropriate content access
- Secure authentication using school credentials
- Integration with district and school systems
- Privacy-conscious design aligned to school needs

Expanding access to reading

- 24/7 access to ebooks and audiobooks
- Reading access at school, at home, and on the go
- Immediate checkout and reading experiences
- Broad device compatibility
- Greater access to books regardless of location

Designed for accessibility

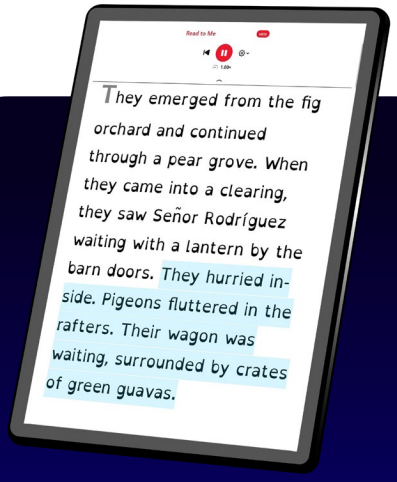
- Adjustable display settings
- Dyslexic-friendly reading fonts
- Audiobooks and read-alongs
- Text-to-speech support
- Multilingual app interface
- Content available in dozens of languages
- Features to help reduce barriers for diverse learners

Student choice and engagement support

- Explore topics that interest them
- Access diverse perspectives and experiences
- Find books that match their interests and reading levels
- Build independent reading habits
- Increase reading frequency and reading volume

Supporting literacy instruction

- Engage in independent reading
- Build reading stamina
- Access curricular reading materials
- Access leisure reading materials
- Participate in literacy initiatives and reading programs
- Set and adjust personal reading goals
- Challenge themselves and peers to read more
- Develop habits that contribute to long-term literacy growth



Accessibility tools like large print, text-to-speech, and more.



A 13-language interface serves multilingual school communities.



Reading goals and challenges motivate and provide teachers real-time data.

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HELPFUL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKER CONVERSATIONS

When discussing digital reading tools with colleagues and decision-makers, remember:

- Access to books is one of the strongest predictors of reading engagement.
- Digital reading platforms can expand access, support equity, provide opportunities for personalization, and boost engagement.
- Meaningful reading and literacy development can occur in both print and digital formats.
- Students benefit from direct instruction in how to navigate, evaluate, and make meaning from all types of texts.
- Educational screen time should be evaluated primarily on instructional value, while also considering balance, developmental appropriateness, and general student well-being.
- Literacy-focused technology should be evaluated differently from entertainment-focused screen use because its primary purpose is supporting reading, learning, and access to content.
- The goal should be maximizing meaningful learning rather than simply reducing screen time.

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