

Current Topics in K-12 Education

Session One

Cora Stempel
Vassar LLI Spring 2026



Thank you for completing the survey!



Cell Phones



Artificial Intelligence



Mental Health



Literacy Wars



Graduation Requirements



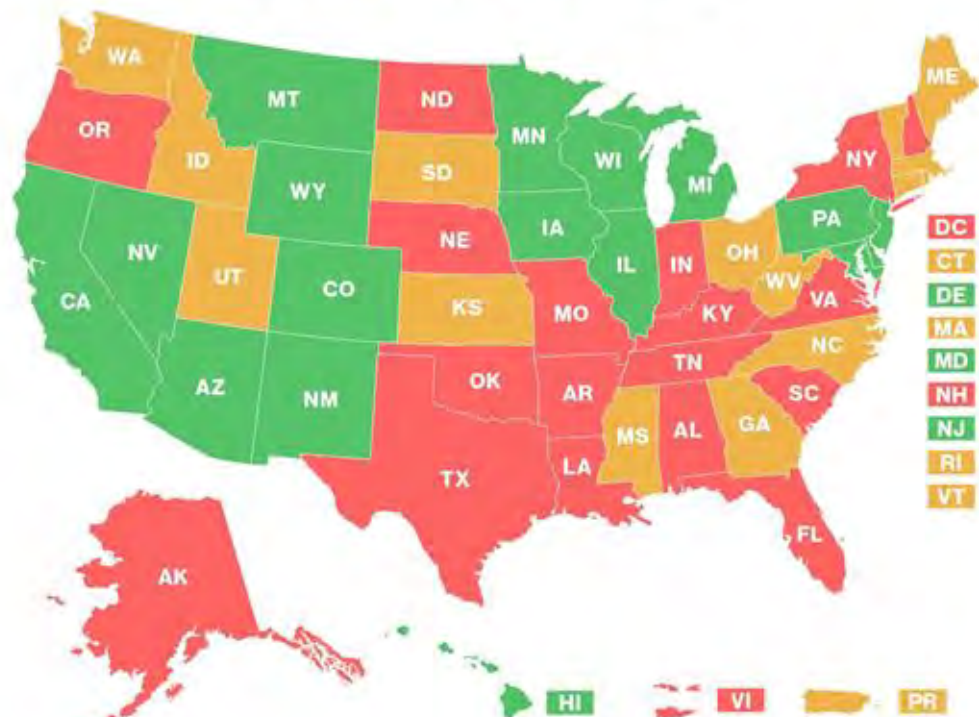
Where did all the cell phones go?



School Cellphone Bans 2025-2026

Most states support phone bans; some leave decisions to local districts

Ban **Partial Ban** **No Outright Ban**



Six Ways to Use Cell Phones in the Classroom

Access to Apps



Use educational apps for learning & practice.

Podcasts



Create or listen to educational audio content.

Virtual Field Trips



Explore the world through digital experiences.

Collaboration



Work together on projects and document editing.

Artistic Creations



Produce videos, photos, and digital art.

Research & Reference



Quick access to information and resources.



Why are educators and others so concerned about cell phones?



Distractability



Cyberbullying



Increase in anxiety
among teens



Decrease in academic
performance post
COVID

This is the adolescent brain on social media

Cognitive load theory suggests that **working memory has a limited capacity for processing information at any given time.**

Smartphones, with their constant stream of notifications, applications, and readily accessible entertainment, impose a significant extraneous cognitive load on students. **This overload directly impacts their ability to effectively process and retain information presented in the classroom.**

(California Learning Research Network
2021)

Context switching incurs a cognitive cost, requiring the brain to reload information and re-establish focus on the primary task (e.g., engaging in collaborative tasks, solving a problem). Research has shown that this task switching significantly reduces efficiency and increases the likelihood of errors. Furthermore, **frequent task switching can lead to attention residue, where thoughts about the previous task persist and interfere with performance on the current task.**

Cyber Bullying

Bullying and cyberbullying in K–12 schools significantly impact student safety, mental health, and academic performance. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), “In 2021–22, about 19 percent of students aged 12–18 reported being bullied during school... among students who were bullied, 22 percent reported that the bullying happened online or by text.”

(Edutopia April, 2025)

The challenge for schools is that this type of bullying doesn't just happen on the playground. The law does allow schools to intervene when they can show that the behavior or speech which occurs outside of school, interferes with the “safe and orderly” operation of the school.

Students' Freedom of Speech and the Courts

The “Substantial Disruption” Test

The Tinker ruling in 1969 created the primary legal standard for evaluating student speech in public schools: the “substantial disruption” test. This test dictates that school officials cannot censor or punish student expression unless they can demonstrate that the speech would “materially and substantially interfere” with appropriate discipline and school operations.

Mahoney vs. BL (2022): Schools can intervene in cases that involve:

- Serious or severe bullying or harassment targeting particular individuals
- Threats aimed at teachers or other students
- Failure to follow rules concerning lessons, writing papers, computer use, or participation in other online school activities
- Breaches of school security devices

Academic Achievement and the Impact of COVID



“Learning Loss” & Data

Data from across the country show declines, especially in reading and math.



Widening Achievement Gaps

Certain groups suffered more as a result of resource and social inequities. Achievement gaps are widening significantly.



Stress, Anxiety, Trauma

Students returned to school showing signs of stress, anxiety and trauma.



The Anxious Generation

How the Great Rewiring of
Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic
of Mental Illness

Jonathan Haidt

Coauthor of [The Coddling of the American Mind](#)

Children on Mars: The First Generation

Considerations for the Future of Human Settlement

- Psychological Adaptability & Resilience
- Educational & Social Development in Isolation
- Long-term Physical Health Effects
- Ethical & Legal Frameworks for Minors



What's the research on anxiety among adolescents?



MAJOR DEPRESSIVE PERIODS
(2004–2020)

GIRLS: **+145%**
BOYS: **+161%**



ER VISITS FOR NON-FATAL SELF-INJURY
(2004–2020)

GIRLS: **+188%**
BOYS: **+48%**



SUICIDE RATES
(AGES 10-14,
1982–2020)

GIRLS: **+167%**
BOYS: **+91%**

Note: In each case, the significant increase began in 2010. Researchers identify a direct correlation between these increases and the ubiquitous nature of smartphones and social media use.

What are the other arguments for increases in anxiety and why don't they explain the rise?

OTHER POTENTIAL FACTORS



911



Climate Change

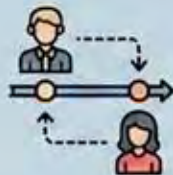


World Conflict



COVID

WHY THEY DON'T EXPLAIN THE CURRENT RISE



Previous generations faced similar significant global stressors, but we didn't see the same dramatic, widespread rise in mental health concerns until the ubiquity of social media.



When students shared concerns **IN PERSON** with peers, it was more likely to result in collective support and **POSITIVE ACTION**.








Social media interaction often leads to comparison, cyberbullying, and **ISOLATION**, fueling fear instead of constructive connection.

UNDERSTANDING THE “REWIRING OF CHILDHOOD”

FIRST LET'S ADDRESS WHAT CHILDREN NEED IN ORDER TO GROW AND DEVELOP INTO SUCCESSFUL ADULTS:

ESSENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT: A PLAY-BASED CHILDHOOD (FREE PLAY)

-  1. TOLERATE BRUISES & LEARN FROM MISTAKES.
-  2. HANDLE THEIR EMOTIONS.
-  3. READ OTHER CHILDREN'S EMOTIONS.
-  4. TAKE TURNS.
-  5. RESOLVE CONFLICTS & PLAY FAIR.

CONSEQUENCES OF REPLACEMENT

WHEN A PLAY - BASED CHILDHOOD IS REPLACED WITH A PHONE-BASED CHILDHOOD, THESE AND OTHER SKILLS SUFFER.



ATTUNEMENT





Children require profound connection which bonds pairs, groups, and communities.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF ATTUNEMENT

-  1. A profound connection essential for deep social bonding.
-  2. Binds pairs and larger community groups.
-  3. Crucial for social and emotional development.



THE CONSEQUENCES OF ABSENCE

When attunement is inhibited (e.g., by mostly asynchronous social media) and users crave connection, serious difficulties arise:

-  1. Forming healthy attachments.
-  2. Coping with unexpected challenges.
-  3. Regulating emotions effectively.
-  4. Making sound decisions involving risk.

SOCIAL LEARNING: TWO IMPORTANT 'LEARNING PROGRAMS':

THE BIASES OF SOCIAL LEARNING

-  1. **EXISTENCE OF ROLE MODELS:**
Identifying key figures to emulate.
-  2. **CONNECTING WITH HIGH STATUS:**
Seeking: Seeking out excelled individuals and allowing their connections.

SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT

-  1. **TARGETS PSYCHOLOGY:**
Leveraging 'likes', 'shares', 'tweets', and comments.
-  2. **DIVERTS TIME & ATTENTION:**
Redirecting valuable focus away from appropriate models.
-  3. **ENDANGERS USERS:**
Directing individuals to unverifiable and unsafe sources.

Jonathan Haidt's Recommendations

FOR SCHOOLS

-  1. **BAN CELL PHONES:** Implement whole-school cell phone bans during all school hours.
-  2. **INCREASE FREE PLAY:** Provide more time for unsupervised free play during and after school.
-  3. **IMPLEMENT LET GROW PROJECT:** Adopt and integrate the Let Grow Project for student independence.
-  4. **RE-ENGAGE BOYS:** Apply educational strategies and environments to support boys.

FOR PARENTS

-  1. **PROVIDE INDEPENDENCE:** Offer unsupervised free play with increased responsibility.
-  2. **LIMIT SCREEN TIME:** Set strict screen limits, especially for elementary-aged children.
-  3. **NO SMARTPHONES / SOCIAL MEDIA:** Delayed smartphone access until high school and social media until age 16.



New York State Law



As of September 2025, New York requires statewide, bell-to-bell restrictions on smartphones in K-12 schools.



Governor Hochul developed and enacted this initiative based on feedback from teachers, parents and students.



Under the new regulations, school districts across New York developed their own policy for restricting smartphones – empowering administrators and teachers to advance a plan that works best for their buildings and students.



Statewide Policy,
Local Implementation

District Policy Requirements

Key elements for a comprehensive policy:



Consultation

Consultation with local stakeholders, including bargaining units, is required.



Website Posting

Must be posted on the district's website and available in multiple languages.



Parent Contact

Clear information on how parents/guardians can reach their students during the school day.



Device Storage

A detailed description of how devices will be securely stored during the school day.



Suspension Rules

Students may not be suspended solely for a violation of this policy.



Annual Report

Districts must provide an annual report on discipline related to cell phones, including demographics.

Role of Local Bargaining Units

Strategic Opportunities



Policy Development Team

Request formal representation on any committee or team developing the new policy.



Implementation Planning

Advocate for union involvement in creating the implementation timeline and procedures.



Implementation Protocols

Participate in developing fair, consistent implementation procedures that do not overburden classroom teachers and support staff.



Share Best Practices

Share policy considerations with administrators based on the experiences of other locals so they can learn about effective policy models and consider adopting and borrowing from them.

Considerations in policy development



Agree on goals:

Is it about limiting distractions?
Avoiding in school behavioral concerns?



Set a good example:

Make sure all the adults are modeling the practices and policies.



Obtain stakeholder buy-in:

Listen to concerns BEFORE you write the policy.

Cell Phones in Public Schools

Students and Personal Electronic Devices Policy 5695

Defining "Internet-Enabled Devices"



- Any smartphone, tablet, smartwatch, or device connecting to the internet/social media.
- **Does NOT include district-supplied educational devices.**

Daily School Environment Impacts



Significant distraction to school environment.



Negatively impact student mental health.



Contribute to disciplinary infractions.



Reduce student engagement.



Risks During Emergencies



Distract from following staff/responder directions.



Contribute to spread of misinformation.



Create congestion in emergency response system.



Interfere with district's emergency protocols.

Cell Phones in Public Schools

Students and Personal Electronic Devices Policy 5695

Mandatory & Legal Exceptions



Individualized Education Program (IEP) & Section 504 plans.



Where required by law.



Permitted where included in plan.

Emergency Situations



District permits the use of internet-enabled devices in the event of an actual emergency.

Specific Permitted Circumstances

1



Manage student's healthcare (e.g., diabetes, asthma, medication).

2



For translation services.

3



Routinely responsible for care of a family member (case-by-case, upon review).

Instructional Exceptions

Students may be permitted to use devices for specific educational purposes if criteria are met.

Device Registration



Student has registered the device with the district, in accordance with district procedures.

Teacher Authorization



With administrative approval, the teacher has authorized use for a particular activity. Device stowed after.

Network Access



Uses district's network to access Internet/authorized apps under Policy 4526.



Important: Devices used only for outlined purposes, silenced and stowed when not in use.

How are phones being secured?



YONDR Pouches

Sealable pouches that students keep, unlocking them at the end of the day.



Secured in Lockers

Phones are stored securely in assigned lockers during school hours.



Leave at Home

Policies encouraging students to not bring phones to school at all.

Schools in NYS responded to a survey from the governor's office in December 2025



92%

Reported a Smooth
Transition to
Distraction-Free Learning



83%

Reported More Positive
Classrooms and Better
Student Engagement



75%

Reported Improvement
in Their Ability To Teach
Effectively

What are students, teachers and parents saying about the ban?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that students are more engaged, both in class and in less formal settings such as the cafeteria.



Teachers generally express appreciation for the ban, indicating that the quality of classroom discussions and student attention has greatly improved.



Cell phone related discipline referrals are down, particularly at the middle and high school levels.



More than 40 percent of teenagers ages 13 to 17 support banning cellphones during class, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in the fall.



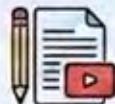
It's not just about taking the phones away!

To enhance digital literacy skills for students, focus on the following key areas:



Information Evaluation: Learn to assess the credibility and reliability of online sources.

- **Digital Communication:** Master effective communication tools and etiquette in digital environments.
- **Online Safety:** Understand privacy settings, cybersecurity practices, and safe browsing habits.
- **Content Creation:** Develop skills in creating and editing digital content, such as documents, presentations, and videos.
- **Collaboration Tools:** Become familiar with platforms for collaborative work, like Google Workspace or Microsoft Teams.
- **Data Management:** Learn to organize, analyze, and interpret data using spreadsheets and databases.



Educator Sources for Digital Safety Training

Common Sense Media:

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/articles/30-great-lesson-plans-for-internet-safety>

Time Will Tell

Will the elimination of access to cell phones and social media during school hours improve student outcomes?

Will we see a reduction in reports of students experiencing anxiety and bullying?

What research would you like to see done?



Current Topics in K-12 Education

Session Two

Cora Stempel
Vassar LLI Spring 2026



Why Focus on Mental Health and Well-Being?

- When youth experience poor mental health, they are also at increased risk of school absence and dropout, risky sexual behavior, and illicit substance use.^{2,3}
- Some groups of youth experience worse mental health outcomes:^{1,4,5}
 - Female students
 - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning students (LGBTQ+)
 - Students who have experienced racism in school

In 2021...

- 42% of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for at least 2 weeks in the past year
- 22% of high school students reported that they had seriously considered suicide⁴

What Can Schools Do?

- **Promote the mental health and well-being of students** through education, prevention, and early intervention efforts.
- **Provide safe and supportive environments** that connect students to caring adults and encourage positive peer relationships.
- **Link students and families to mental and behavioral health services** when needed.



How are New York State schools addressing the mental health crisis among students?

NYSED's Board of Regents Memo (May 2018) & **Education Law §804** amendments clarified health education requirements.



INTEGRATION

Include mental health and the relation of physical and mental health.

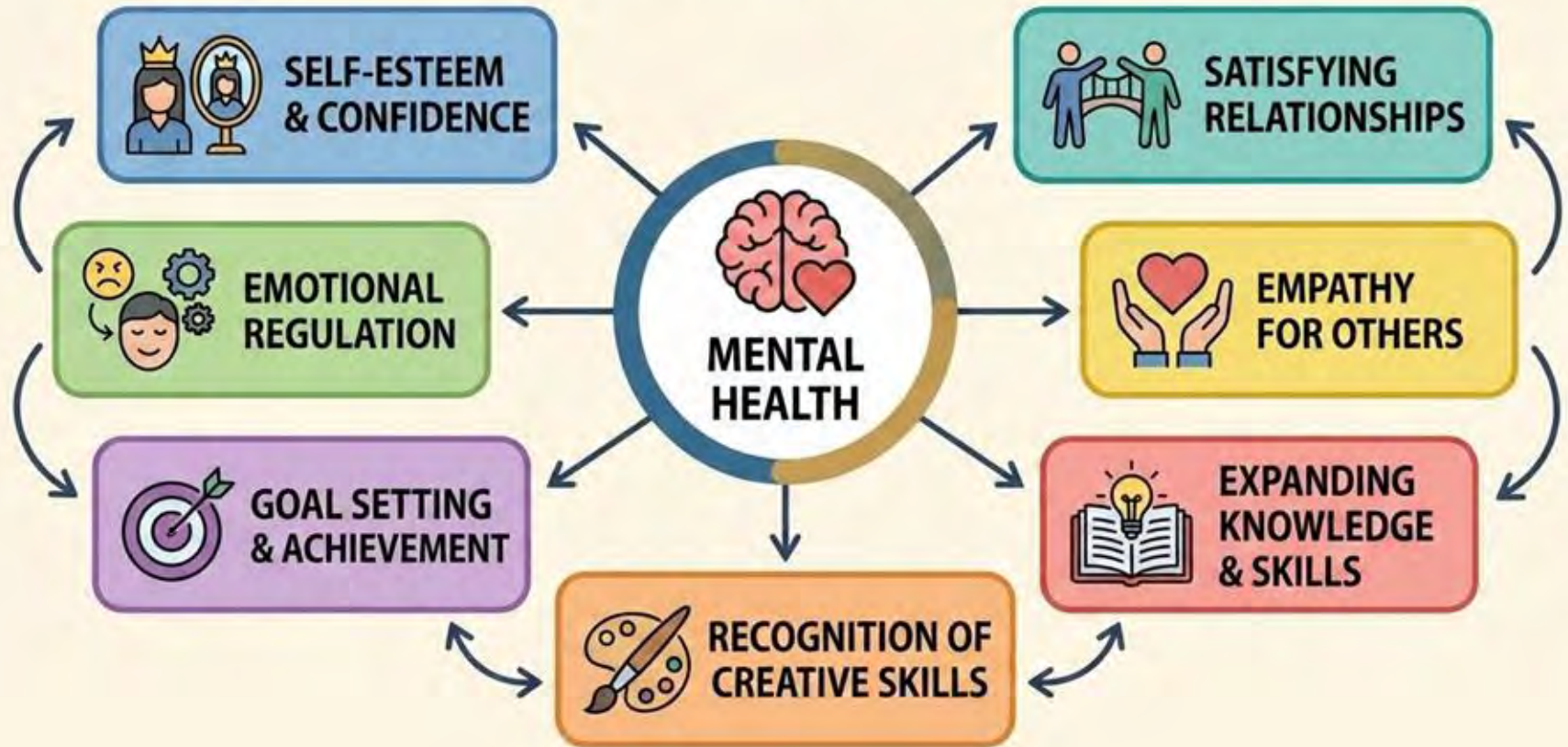


STUDENT OUTCOMES

Enhance understanding, attitudes, and behaviors to promote health, well-being, and human dignity.

(Chapter 390, Laws 2016; Chapter 1, Laws 2017)

COMPONENTS OF MENTAL HEALTH



KEY MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY COMPONENTS



1. OBTAIN & MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH

Understanding how to obtain and maintain good mental health.



2. DECREASE STIGMA

Decreasing stigma related to mental health.



3. ENHANCE HELP-SEEKING

Enhancing help-seeking efficacy (know when, where, and how to obtain good health with skills to promote self-care).



4. UNDERSTAND DISORDERS & TREATMENTS

Understanding mental disorders (i.e., anxiety, depression) and treatments.

What works in school?

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support



Framework for providing academic and behavioral support.

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention



Focuses on changing unhelpful cognitive distortions and behaviors.

Social Emotional Learning



Process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills.

Trauma Informed Care and PBIS



Approach that recognizes the impact of trauma and promotes positive behavior.

THE MTSS PYRAMID Tiers of SUPPORT

TIER 3: INTENSIVE INTERVENTION (1-5% of students)



- Intensive Individualized Support
- Increased Frequency & Intensity
- For Students with Chronic Academic or Behavioral Challenges
- Direct Instruction

TIER 2: TARGETED INTERVENTION (5-15% of students)



- Small-Group Interventions
- High-Yield Strategies
- More Individualized but in Groups
- For At-Risk Students
- Supplemental to Tier 1

TIER 1: UNIVERSAL SUPPORT (80-90% of students)



- Core Instruction for All Students
- Preventative Strategies
- Evidence-Based Curriculum
- Universal Screening & Progress Monitoring
- Positive Behavioral Supports



CONTINUUM OF PRACTICES

Evidence-Based Framework
Integrated Services
Continuous School Improvement
Multi-Level Teamwork



RAPID RESPONSE TO NEEDS

EARLY INTERVENTION
Rapid Response to Individual Needs
Academic, Behavioral, SE/MH Supports
Flexible, Proactive, and Individualized



DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

Regular Data Collection & Analysis
Universal Screening (3x Year)
Progress Monitoring
Decisions at Multiple Levels

What is Cognitive Behavioral Intervention?

CBI is an evidence-based approach that helps individuals recognize and change harmful or ineffective patterns of thinking and behavior to improve emotional regulation and social skills.



1. THOUGHTS (Cognition)

Identifying and challenging negative or distorted thought patterns.
(Example: "Social media makes me anxious.")



2. ACTIONS (Behavior)

Replacing unhelpful habits with healthy coping mechanisms and structured routines.
(Example: Mindful breathing, planning tech breaks.)



3. INTERVENTION (Skill-Building)

Teaching practical skills to manage emotions, problem-solve, and navigate stress in an academic environment.

In schools, CBI supports students by reducing anxiety, improving focus, and mitigating the cognitive load imposed by modern distractions.

WHAT SEL LOOKS LIKE IN SCHOOLS

Understanding the Visible Impact of Social Emotional Learning



EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

Standardized curriculum teaching core SEL competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making.



POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Safe and supportive environments. Strong teacher-student relationships, restorative justice practices, school-wide behavioral expectations and positive reinforcement.



INTEGRATED PRACTICES

Weaving SEL concepts into academic subjects. Examples: discussing empathy in literature, collaborative problem-solving in mathematics and science.



FAMILY & COMMUNITY

Consistent messaging and collaboration. Parent workshops on SEL skills, partnerships with local organizations to support student mental health and well-being.

What does all of this look like in the classroom?

<https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/standards-instruction/educationliteracyinschoolsfinal.11.2018.pdf>

What does it mean to be a “trauma informed school”?



A trauma-informed school assumes that some students may have experienced significant stress (violence, loss, instability, disasters) and that this can impact attention, memory, emotional regulation, and trust. Instead of asking "What's wrong with this student?", staff shift to "What might this student have experienced, and what do they need to feel safe and ready to learn?"

The Role of ACES

The ACEs Study (1990s)



Survey of over 17,000 participants. Assessed childhood traumatic experiences.

Key Findings: Dose-Response Relationship



Higher ACE score correlates with increased risk for health and behavioral issues.

Associated Risks & Outcomes



Heart Disease

Depression

Smoking

Cancer

Obesity

HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS THE BRAIN

@PSYCHOTHERAPY.CENTRAL

Prefrontal Cortex

Rational thinking - regulates emotions such as fear responses from the amygdala - with PTSD this has a reduced volume



Hippocampus

Responsible for memory and differentiating between past and present - works to remember and make sense of the trauma. With consistent exposure to trauma, it shrinks.

Amygdala

Wired for survival, when active, it is hard to think rationally. The more hyperactive the amygdala is, the more signs of PTSD are present.

@PSYCHOTHERAPY.CENTRAL

What are the best “trauma - informed” practices?



Provide support from the bus stop to the classroom and beyond



Be aware of triggers



Show compassion before judgement



Provide safe spaces to share and express feelings



Help students develop a growth mindset



Use restorative practices that minimize punitive reactions



Build relationships



Meet students where they are



Don't ignore red flags



Make sure colleagues are taking care of themselves

Who's providing all this additional support?



Classroom
teachers



School
Counselors



School
Psychologists



School/Family
Liaisons

Food for thought:

What responsibility should schools have in supporting students' mental health, and where should the limits of that responsibility lie?



What's the big deal with Artificial Intelligence?

Generative AI (GenAI) is transforming K-12 education, offering unprecedented tools while raising critical new questions.



1. Personalized Learning

Customizing content and pacing to meet individual student needs.



2. Educator Support

Streamlining administrative tasks and enabling resource creation for teachers.



3. Academic Integrity

Navigating plagiarism, citation, and evaluation in the age of AI-generated content.

When AI goes bad.....



Facial Recognition Bias:

AI systems misidentifying individuals, particularly people of color, leading to wrongful arrests.



Chatbot Miscommunication:

AI chatbots providing harmful or inappropriate responses due to lack of context understanding.



Autonomous Vehicle Accidents:

Self-driving cars involved in accidents due to software errors or misinterpretation of surroundings.



Deepfake Technology:

Deepfake Technology: Creation of realistic fake videos used for misinformation or defamation.



Algorithmic Discrimination:

AI hiring tools favoring certain demographics, perpetuating bias in recruitment processes.



Surveillance Overreach:

AI surveillance systems infringing on privacy rights and civil liberties.

How prevalent is the use of AI among high school students?



GROWING ADOPTION.

High school students using GenAI tools rose from 79% to 84% (Jan-May 2025). 69% used ChatGPT for assignments in May.



MIXED OUTLOOK.

Parents (6/10) see benefits, 85% of admins see potential. **Key concerns:** Academic integrity, essential skills, skills, and teacher support.



Blocked Allowed

VARIED ACCESS.

55% of schools *do not* block GenAI tools. 45% report some restrictions. Minimal official, uniform policies exist.

Examples of Students Using AI in School



Personalized Tutoring

Adaptive learning platforms that provide custom instruction and feedback.



Research & Data Analysis

Employing AI tools to analyze large datasets, find relevant sources, and summarize complex information.



Content Creation Support

Using AI writing assistants to brainstorm ideas, improve structure, and check grammar.



Accessibility Aids

Leveraging speech-to-text, real-time translation, and other tools for equitable learning access.



What are educators saying?

California English Teacher: “I will not teach students to use AI tools. I will teach them to be critical and wary, and to ask who benefits when they cede their own intellectual growth. I will ask them to take on tasks that make their brains hurt, and stretch and grow. Like many of my colleagues the world over, I will do my best to prepare the young people in my life for futures in which they and their thinking, working minds still have worth.”

Georgia Teacher: “I believe that the endless possibilities of A.I. have added more vitality and creativity to my teaching, and I am thrilled to be teaching at a time when it’s still possible to shape how A.I. is used in the classroom. However, I believe that our core purpose in education should remain unchanged.”

What are students saying?

New York Student: “In my opinion, there are certain excusable uses for A.I. in assignments. Using A.I. to write you an entire essay is cheating. However, using Grammarly to help with spelling or to help you word a sentence better is not cheating.”

New Jersey Student: “I think teaching A.I. to students is a smart idea because as A.I. continues to develop it’s going to play a larger role in our lives and so it would be beneficial to learn how to utilize it as soon as possible.”

What are students saying?

Minnesota Student: “It’s my opinion that A.I. is similar to a painkiller. It can be helpful at first but eventually it becomes a crutch that you can’t remove. A.I. can definitely be used as a tool to assist you in doing something. However A.I. can become addictive and students may want to start using it for every assignment leading to its eventual full takeover of a student’s workload. Use of A.I. removes the student’s need to think, which is very dangerous. If students grow up without using their brains then they definitely won’t be able to use them later.”

RED FLAG WARNING: New Survey Data from the Center for Democracy and Technology

New survey data finds that nearly 1 in 5 high schoolers say they or someone they know has had a romantic relationship with artificial intelligence. And 42% of students surveyed say they or someone they know have used AI for companionship.

The more ways that a student reports that their school uses AI, the more likely they are to report things like 'I know someone who considers AI to be a friend,' 'I know someone who considers AI to be a romantic partner.'"

The surveys found higher levels of AI use in schools — defined as seven to 10 school-related uses for teachers, and four to six for students — correlates with increased exposure to data breaches, troubling interactions between students and AI and AI-generated deepfakes, or manipulated videos or photos that can be used to sexually harass and bully students.

Policy Considerations



Equitable
Access



Algorithmic Bias
and Fairness



Data Privacy for
students and
educators



Vendor and
tool selection



Professional Learning
Opportunities



AI Literacy and
curriculum integration



Continuous
Improvement

An Ounce of Prevention = A Pound of Cure



Preparation

*Integrate AI
Literacy*



Setting the Stage

*Address
Relevance
Questions*

*Have clear
expectations*



Process Focus

*Use two lane
assessments*

*Focus on process,
not product*



Outcome Measures

*Use standards-
based grading*



Student Agency

*Give students
agency and allow
for meaningful
expression*

Essential Question

How are we using AI and technology as tools to elevate the conditions and the experiences of education for students without sacrificing the human connection that we absolutely know is integral to learning?

Current Topics in K-12 Education

Session Three

Cora Stempel
Vassar LLI Spring 2026



Let's brainstorm. If you ran the world, what would you want New York State to require in order for students to graduate from high school?



Discussion Framework: Conceptual Approaches to High School Graduation.

STRUCTURING THE DEBATE



DIGITAL LITERACY & ETHICS

- **Core Competencies:** Navigating AI and Technology Systems.
- **Cyber Safety:** Data Ethics and Media Responsibility.
- **Safety Protocols:** Addressing Online Harassment and Bullying.



HUMAN CONNECTION & REASONING

- **Independent Thought:** Critical Inquiry and Problem-Solving.
- **Communication Skills:** Collaborative Dialogue and Expression.
- **Historical Context:** Understanding Social Responsibility.



HOLISTIC WELL-BEING & IMPACT

- **Student Well-Being:** Mental Health and Identity Support.
- **Student Voice:** Democratic Engagement and Advocacy.
- **Local Impact:** Service Learning and Community Connection.



Current Graduation Requirements: Credits



English 4



Social Studies 4



Science 3



Math 3



Physical Education 2



World Languages 1



Arts 1



Health 1/2

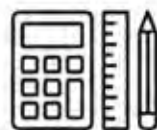


Electives 3 1/2

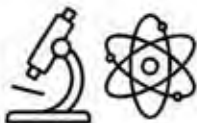
Current Graduation Requirements: Assessments



English Language
Arts Regents Exam
or Alternative



Mathematics Regents
Exam or Alternative



Science Regents
Exam or Alternative



Social Studies
Regents Exam or
Alternative



One Pathway (see [Multiple Pathways](#) for more info)

What are the approved Pathways and how are they assessed?



Arts



Career and
Technical
Education
(CTE)



Career
Development
of Occupational
Studies (CDOS)



Civics



Humanities



STEM



World
Languages

One Example: Domains of Civic Readiness



Civic Knowledge



Civic Mindsets



Civic Skills and
Actions



Civic Experiences

Civic Knowledge vs. Civic Participation Points



Civic Knowledge Pts.	Civic Participation Pts.
4 Credits of social studies	1.5 High School Civics Project (limit two times during grades 9-12)
1.5 Mastery level on Social Studies Regents Exam*	1* Service-Learning Project (minimum 25 hours) and reflective civic learning essay/presentation/product*
1* Proficiency level on Social Studies Regents Exam*	1 Middle School Capstone Project (Grades 7 and 8 are only eligible for this point)
.5* Proficiency level in an elective course that promotes civic engagement*	.5* Extra-curricular participation or work-based learning experience (minimum 40 hours) and an essay/presentation/product*
.5* Advanced social studies course(s)*	
1 Research Project	4 Civics Capstone Project

*Students may receive these points more than once.

Sample Extra-Curricular Activities



Peer or Community Tutoring

Mentor students in
academic subjects



Service & Community Outreach

Support local
organizations like
soup kitchens or SPCA.



Academic & Debate Clubs

Schools clubs
Participate in
activities like Model
UN and Mock Trial.

Example Two: CDOS Credential

Two Options



Option One:

- Career Plan
- Achievement of standards
- CTE Hours (216/54)
- Complete Employability Profile



Option Two:

- Passing score on a state approved CDOS assessment.

What if my child can't pass all the Regents exams?

All New York State students are eligible to appeal a **lower** score on a Regents Exam if they meet the following criteria:



- Taken the Regents Exam under appeal at least two times.
- Have at least one score on the Regents Exam under appeal within the point range appropriate for the appeal (see below).
- Taken advantage of academic help provided by the school in the subject tested by the Regents Exam under appeal.
- Passed the course for which the appeal is being sought.
- Been recommended for an exemption to the graduation requirement by the student's teacher or Department chairperson in the subject of the Regents Exam under appeal.

Regents Exam Appeal Point Ranges

Standard Appeal:	60 - 64
ELA Only (with *):	55 - 59
Low Pass Safety Net:	52 - 54

So, what now and why change?

In 2019, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures was formed.

Members engaged in an inclusive process of gathering input, and reviewing both research and policy.

The work resulted in the identification of four priority areas:



Multiple Pathways to graduation



Assessment Flexibility



Understanding of meaningful,
"life ready" credentials



Culturally responsive curriculum,
instruction and assessment



New York State PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE



A New York State high school graduate who is **culturally responsive** builds strong, respectful relationships, valuing diverse perspectives as essential to a rigorous, inclusive learning community. New York State students who embody cultural responsiveness and academic readiness—demonstrating creativity, critical thinking, communication, reflection, and global awareness—will be prepared to learn, grow, innovate, and contribute meaningfully to society. These graduates will be equipped with the interpersonal and intellectual skills needed to thrive in an interconnected, ever-evolving world.



Academically Prepared

Demonstrates a strong foundation in the NYS learning standards and is equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve success in college, careers, civic engagement, service, and life.



Creative Innovator

Utilizes imagination, curiosity, and flexible thinking to solve problems creatively, and develop new ideas and products, while adapting to evolving circumstances and challenges.



Critical Thinker

Analyzes information thoughtfully, evaluates evidence critically, and identifies patterns and connections between different pieces of information (across multiple content areas) to address complex issues and navigate the world with insight.



Effective Communicator

Articulates ideas clearly and confidently through speaking, writing, and the use of different types of media for various purposes, while engaging with diverse audiences and actively listening to different perspectives.



Global Citizen

Acts responsibly and ethically within local, global, and digital communities, employing civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets to promote global sustainability and contribute positively to a culturally diverse, democratic society.



Reflective and Future Focused

Engages in self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth, sets meaningful goals, uses social awareness to maintain supportive relationships, and demonstrates responsible decision-making that prioritizes social, emotional, and mental well-being.

What is the “Culturally Responsive - Sustaining Framework?”

The **CR-S framework** helps educators create:

- student-centered learning environments
- that affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities
- prepare students for rigor and independent learning
- connect across lines of difference
- elevate historically marginalized voices
- and **empower students as agents of social change.**

The framework is grounded in four principles:



Welcoming and
Affirming
Environment



High Expectations
and Rigorous
Instruction



Inclusive
Curriculum and
Assessment



Ongoing
Professional
Learning

What Changes Will We See?



Move to one graduation credential with optional seals and endorsements.



Diploma credit requirements must include: civic responsibility (ethics); cultural competence; and financial literacy education.



Ensure greater access to Career and Technical opportunities.



Move to a model that organizes credit requirements, including content area credit requirements into larger categories (e.g., mathematics and science courses could be included in the “STEM” category).



Require teacher prep programs and professional development plans to include training in culturally responsive practices and revise the state’s learning standards.

What's the timeline?



Phase One: 2024-2027

Release Portrait of a Graduate rubrics. New credit requirements. Re-formatted learning standards. Add Financial Literacy & Climate Education.



Phase Two: 2027-2029

Sunset diploma assessment requirements. Redefine seals and endorsements. Finalize rubrics for prioritized learning standards. Disseminate best practices.



Phase Three: 2029

New transcripts with proficiency required in standards and Portrait of a Graduate. New assessments aligned to prioritized learning standards.

New Instructional Requirements (March 2026)

Financial Literacy:

- Requires instruction in each grade band
- Includes instruction in budgeting, credit and debt management, earning and risk management and saving.
- Starts in the 2026-27 school year

Climate Education:

- Requires instruction in each grade band
- Includes instruction in the causes, impact and solutions to climate change
- Starts in the 2027-2028 school year

PLAN: Performance Based Learning and Assessments Network



Career & Technical Education and Work-Based Learning: School networks and regional hubs that are implementing high-quality career and technical education and work-based learning in ways that prepare students for success in the workplace;



Inquiry-Based Approaches with Learner Profiles: School networks that use inquiry-based pedagogical approaches and assessments, designed around a learner profile, to measure students' individual performance on specified objectives; and



Project-Based Learning and Performance-Based Assessment Tasks: School networks that use a project-based learning approach and practitioner-developed performance-based assessment tasks to determine student progress.

Examples of Performance Based Assessments



Science Experiment:
Lab report presentation



Multimedia Presentation:
Historical figure/event



Original Play/Skit:
Perform a literary work.



Business Plan:
Pitch to judges



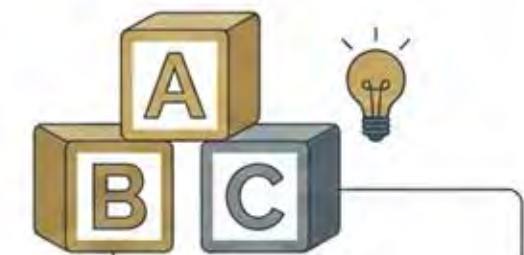
Community Service Project:
Design, implementation, and
impact documentation



Short Film/Documentary:
Relevant social issue.

Essential Question

Who do we want our students to be and how will changes in New York graduation requirements influence their academic, social and emotional development?

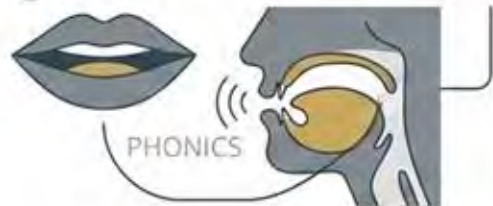


What do you remember about

WHOLE LANGUAGE



how you were taught to read?



The Literacy Wars

The “literacy wars” refer to a long-running debate in education over how children should be taught to read. The conflict is mainly between two approaches:



PHONICS-BASED INSTRUCTION

Emphasizes teaching the relationship between letters and sounds (decoding words step by step).



WHOLE LANGUAGE (OR BALANCED LITERACY)

Focuses on meaning, context, and exposure to complete texts, encouraging children to recognize words and develop reading naturally.

The Literacy Wars.....continued

LUCY CAULKINS AND THE "UNITS OF STUDY"

Rooted in whole language philosophy.

- 🌀 **1980s–1990s:** "workshop model" first developed.
- ⚙️ **Early 2000s:** The first formal Units of Study were published for writing.
- ⚙️ **2010s:** The program expanded to include reading units and became widely adopted across U.S. school districts.
- ⚙️ **Late 2010s–early 2020s:** The curriculum faced increasing criticism during the broader "literacy wars," with researchers arguing it did not include enough systematic phonics.
- ⚙️ **2022–present:** Units of Study were revised, adding stronger, more explicit phonics components and decodable texts to better align with the "science of reading."

THE "SCIENCE OF READING"

Refers to research from Cognitive Psychology, Linguistics, and Neuroscience that explains how people learn to read.

In brief, it shows that reading is not a natural process—it must be explicitly taught. Effective instruction typically includes:

- 🎤 Phonemic awareness (hearing and manipulating sounds in words)
- 🔠 Systematic phonics (connecting sounds to letters)
- ➡️ Fluency (reading smoothly and accurately)
- 🧠 Vocabulary and comprehension
- 🗣️ Oral language (speaking and listening skills)
- ✍️ Writing (integrating encoding with decoding)

How have state Departments of Education responded?

Between 2019 and 2024, at least 23 states passed legislation specifically referencing “the science of reading.”

Like the use of cell phones in schools, this is a bi-partisan issue.

In May, 2024 NY Governor Hochul signed Education Law 818, requiring annual reports from every public school district on the use of best practices in literacy instruction in kindergarten through third grade. These practices are outlined in the regulation and are aligned with the pillars of the Science of Reading.

In 2025 the NYS Education Department published “Best Practices in P-3 Literacy Instruction,” part of its state-wide Literacy Initiative.

SUNY New Paltz offers a “micro- credential” in the Science of Reading.

Kentucky’s success story: Investment in teacher training and coaches has led to documented improvements.

What are we hearing from the field?



69%

have either **adopted** or are **piloting** new curriculum or programs



84%

of educators are “familiar” with the **Science of Reading**



Only **28%**

Only **28%** reported SoR as the primary approach to literacy instruction.



60%

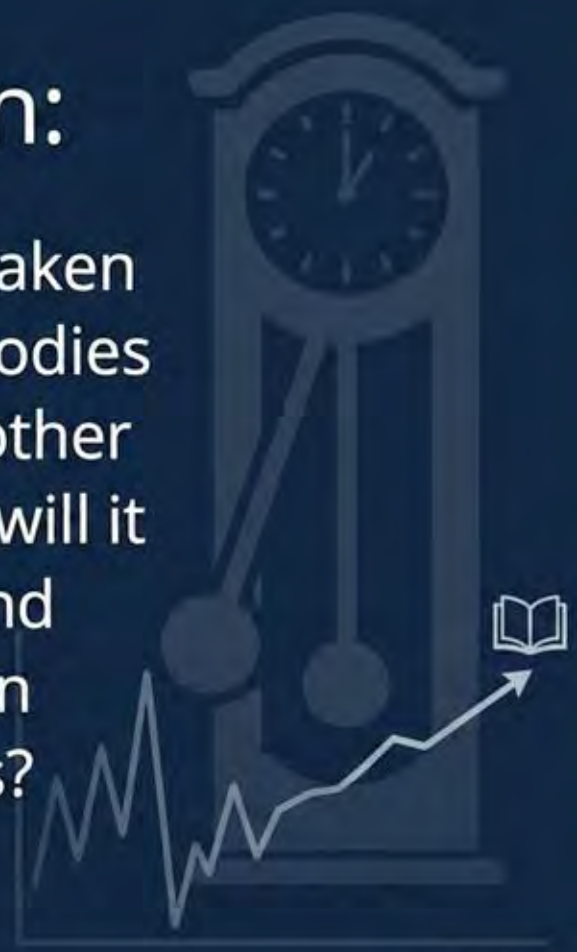
have completed a **micro-credential**



Teachers expressed need for training well beyond “learning a new curriculum.”

Essential Question:

Will the most recent actions taken by educators and legislative bodies across the country be yet another swinging of the pendulum or will it result in lasting change and significant improvement in student literacy outcomes?



Final thoughts:

It is the best of times and the worst of times in public education. On one hand, educators have unprecedented access to technology, research, and innovative teaching methods that make learning more engaging, personalized, and inclusive than ever before. Schools are increasingly focused on supporting students' social and emotional growth alongside academics, preparing them for a complex, fast-changing world. Yet at the same time, teachers and students face significant challenges—resource gaps, burnout, policy pressures, and widening inequities that can make the work feel overwhelming. This tension defines the current moment: a system full of promise and possibility, yet still grappling with deep, persistent obstacles that demand thoughtful solutions.