

## **N.J. could become first state to enact media literacy curriculum for K-12 students**

Advocates say the measure seeks to help students who are bombarded with information from social media and news outlets learn how to discern whether the sources are credible.

Students in a New Jersey elementary school. The state could become the first in the country to require public schools to teach media literacy to K-12 students to combat misinformation.

JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer  
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New Jersey lawmakers want to help students at every grade level learn how to figure out fact vs. fiction.

The state could become the first in the country to require public schools to teach media literacy to K-12 students to combat misinformation. A bipartisan bill approved last month by the Legislature would take effect immediately if signed into law by Gov. Phil Murphy.

Advocates say the measure seeks to help students who are bombarded with information from social media and news outlets learn how to discern whether the sources are credible. They want school librarians and media specialists and teachers to help develop standards for information learning.

“It’s really hard [for students] to navigate,” Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt (D., Camden), one of the bill’s sponsors, said Wednesday. “We need them to find their resources.”

Under the bill, the state Department of Education would be required to implement literacy curriculum standards for what students must learn. That includes researching, using critical thinking skills, and learning the difference between facts and opinions and primary and secondary sources.

“With this bill, we will change the landscape of education in New Jersey,” said Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, president of the [New Jersey Association of School Librarians](#), which backed the bill. “It’s going to change how we teach.”

During a career spanning nearly four decades, Polites said she noticed changes in students once they began relying more on online information. Although she assigned them to read news articles, students often repeated misinformation from their social media feeds during discussions, she said.

“The lines get blurred. We have to establish some boundaries of what is true and what is not,” said Dziedzic-Elliott.

After she became the leader of the New Jersey chapter of the nonprofit advocacy group Media Literacy Now, Polites said, the literacy bill took on more meaning after a mob supporting Donald Trump stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, protesting the outcome of his defeat by Joe Biden. Besides false claims that the presidential race and other elections around the country were stolen, misinformation spread during the pandemic about COVID-19 vaccines as well.

“I never thought things would get to where we are,” said Polites, who teaches freshman composition at [Rowan University](#). “I didn’t think that elections would be under threat.”

With the media literacy curriculum, Polites said, students would learn how to conduct research, analyze information, determine credible sources, and ask questions to better reach their own conclusions. She believes the information is needed to help them become civically responsible adults.

“This is how we can address the mis- and disinformation,” Polites said. “It doesn’t mean minds will be changed.”

Although many schools teach media or information literacy, New Jersey would become the first to implement it statewide beginning with kindergarten, according to Erin McNeill, president and founder of [Media Literacy Now](#). Illinois, for example, requires it only for all high school students, she said.

“The New Jersey bill is a big opening,” McNeill said. She hopes other states will follow suit.

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