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The use of screens in Maine schools has gotten out of control and is reducing the achievement of our students, exposing them to addictive and potentially inappropriate content, and is throwing away taxpayer funds that for something shown by the scientific evidence to reduce rather than enhance student achievement. At a time when Maine schools are falling further and further behind in performance, Maine needs to take action to review technology use to make sure technology initiatives that were intended to improve our children's education is not having the opposite effect.

I have two children in public school in Saco, one is age 6 in 1st grade and one is 12 in 7th grade. Apart from school, we only allowed very limited screen access because we have seen that both of them do better when learning and other activities are not screen based. Also, all scientific evidence at this point shows that as instructional screen time increases, there is a proportional decrease in learning, achievement and test scores.

However, at school almost all of their time is required to be spent looking at a screen. My first grader is looking at a screen almost all day in every class. Instruction in the classroom is on a large screen rather than looking at a teacher or book. Reading is practiced on an ipad, not a book. Math is on an ipad. Music and art use large screens for instruction, even gym is taught by following along to YouTube videos on a large screen rather than directly. Time before school, indoor recess, and after school before dismissal is spent watching non-educational movies. She comes home with red eyes and headaches and has been losing ground in keeping up with grade level.

My 7th grader is required to do most of her work on a laptop that she looks at all day at school and then brings home to stare at while doing homework. There is almost no safety limitation implemented on what internet content she can access on the laptop, other than a few "blacklisted" web sites everything on the internet that is not specifically prohibited is accessible. For example, she appears to have full access to all content on YouTube which like most similar online platforms is designed to be addictive. There is a "curfew" when the computer is supposed to turn off, but seems to be easily turned back on without any passcode or permission needed. They are required to use commercial websites and software that collects their personal information and sells it. On at least one occasion, my daughter has been instructed by teachers to lie about her birth year to sign up to access a program the school is using that children her age are not supposed to be able to use.

There is no software parental control or monitoring over how the laptop is used at home. The only way for parents to control usage of the laptop is to physically continuously watch her screen. We can't limit her to use the laptop to homework except by sitting next to her and watching for the entire time she is doing homework. If we ask her school not to send the laptop home, she would have to wear a red tag all day at school that is stigmatizing and typically indicates a serious rule violation.

We do not allow her to have a smart phone to limit her exposure to addictive internet and social media content, but nearly every other student has had one since 4th or 5th grade which the school allows them to use throughout the school day. Not only are they allowed access during school hours but for many aspects of the school day, such as passes to use the bathroom, the school expects students to scan QR codes with their phones. Students typically use their phones to watch internet content in class and at all of the times when they would normally be socializing. Her peers report regularly using screens to watch internet content until hours after midnight every night.

The current use of technology in Maine schools is harming Maine's children.