

HB78 INTRODUCED



1 HB78
2 JPUQCNY-1
3 By Representatives Ross, DuBose, Lamb, Mooney, Rehm, Kirkland,
4 Shaver, Fidler, Givens, Reynolds, Faulkner, Kiel, Sells,
5 Stadthagen, Baker, Collins, Hulsey, Holk-Jones, Colvin
6 RFD: Education Policy
7 First Read: 13-Jan-26
8 PFD: 02-Dec-25



4 SYNOPSIS:

5 This bill would require the Department of Early
6 Childhood Education to develop guidelines for the
7 appropriate use of screen time in child-care
8 facilities, prekindergarten, and kindergarten.

9 This bill would require the guidelines to define
10 what constitutes "high-quality programming" and set
11 limits on the amount of screen time that may be used in
12 early childhood education settings, depending on the
13 age of the child.

14 This bill would require the Department of Early
15 Childhood Education to develop guidelines for healthy
16 screen time practices for children and make the
17 guidelines publicly available at no cost to parents and
18 guardians.

19 This bill would require the Department of Early
20 Childhood Education, in collaboration with the
21 Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the State Board
22 of Education, to create a training program on the
23 appropriate use of screen time for teachers and other
24 staff members who supervise children.

25 This bill would require each licensed child-care
26 facility to implement the guidelines and training
27 requirements as a condition for licensure by DHR.

28 This bill would require certain prekindergarten



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classrooms and each public kindergarten classroom to implement the guidelines and training requirements.

This bill would also require DHR to oversee the implementation of this act for licensed child-care facilities, the Secretary of the Department of Early Childhood Education for prekindergarten classrooms, and local boards of education for kindergarten classrooms.

A BILL
TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

Relating to early childhood education; to add Article 4, commencing with Section 26-24-40, to Chapter 24, Title 26, and Sections 16-40-15 and 38-7-7.1 to the Code of Alabama 1975; to require the Department of Early Childhood Education to develop guidelines and training for appropriate screen time use in early childhood education settings; to provide limits on the use of screen time in licensed child-care facilities, certain prekindergarten classrooms, and public kindergarten classrooms; to require certain teachers and staff members to annually undergo training; to require the Department of Early Childhood Education, the Department of Human Resources, and the State Board of Education to implement the guidelines and training requirements for the early childhood education programs under their jurisdiction; to condition licensure of child-care facilities on compliance with screen time



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guidelines; and to require the Department of Early Childhood Education to issue free guidelines to parents and guardians about healthy screen use for children.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

Section 1. (a) This act shall be known and may be cited as The Healthy Early Development and Screen Time Act.

(b) The Legislature finds and declares the following:

(1) Birth through five years of age is a child's most critical period of rapid brain development, language acquisition, and social-emotional growth.

(2) Published peer-reviewed research demonstrates that excessive screen exposure in children under three years of age is associated with delayed communication skills, impaired problem-solving, and reduced social interaction.

(3) National and international pediatric authorities, including, but not limited to, the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend little to no screen time for children under two years of age and no more than one hour per day of high-quality, adult-supervised screen use for children who are two through five years of age.

(4) High-quality educational media used interactively with adult participation may provide some benefit, but should not displace physical activity, caregiver interaction, or sleep.

(5) It is the intent of the state to provide parents, child-care facilities, early childhood educators, and health care professionals with clear, research-based screen time guidelines to safeguard children's healthy development.



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Section 2. A new Article 4, commencing with Section 26-24-40, is added to Chapter 24 of Title 26, Code of Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

Article 4

§26-24-40

For the purposes of this article, the following terms have the following meanings:

(1) ADULT-SUPERVISED USE. Media engagement in which a parent, guardian, or caregiver is actively present and guiding and discussing the media content.

(2) DEPARTMENT. The Department of Early Childhood Education.

(3) EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM. a. All of the following:

1. A licensed child-care facility, as defined in Section 38-7-2 which serves children five years of age and under.

2. Prekindergarten operating under Article 2.

3. Public kindergarten.

b. In addition to regular school day programs, the term includes any after-school, extended day, or summer program provided by an entity described in paragraph a.

(4) HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMMING. Media content specifically designed for early childhood education, as determined by the department in Section 26-24-41.

(5) SCREEN TIME. Time spent using digital visual media devices, including, but not limited to, televisions, computers, smart phones, and other visual media devices.



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§26-24-41

(a) (1) The Research and Evaluation Team within the department shall develop guidelines for determining what constitutes "high-quality programming." The guidelines shall be based on current evidence-based research and practices related to screen time use. The department may consult with the Department of Human Resources and the State Board of Education in developing the guidelines.

(2) In setting the guidelines, the department shall consider, but not be limited to, the following factors:

a. The target audience of the program, and whether it is age-appropriate in an early childhood education setting.

b. The pacing of the program, with a preference toward slow-paced programming.

c. Whether the programming is free of violence.

d. Whether the programming is free of advertisement that the department determines is harmful to children.

(b) Each early childhood education program shall implement screen time standards as follows:

(1) For children under two years of age, screen time is prohibited. For purposes of this subdivision, the term "screen time" does not include live, interactive video communication, such as a video call with a child's family.

(2) For children two through four years of age:

a. Screen time may not exceed more than 30 minutes per day, nor 90 minutes per week, with preference given to interactive group viewing that promotes discussion and social interaction; and



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b. Individual screen time is prohibited.

(3) For all childhood education programs:

a. All screen time must meet the department's standard for high-quality programming and be actively supervised by staff; and

b. Background television and passive screen time is prohibited.

§26-24-42

(a) The Research and Evaluation Team within the department shall develop research-based guidelines on healthy screen time practices for children from birth through five years of age. The guidelines shall be based on current evidence-based research and practices related to screen time use. The department may consult with the Department of Human Resources and the State Board of Education in developing the guidelines.

(b) The guidelines shall emphasize:

(1) The importance of play, reading, physical activity, and caregiver-child interaction.

(2) The risks of excessive screen use on children, including developmental delays and behavioral impacts.

(3) Strategies for setting screen-free routines in the home.

(c) The department shall make the guidelines publicly available at no cost to parents and guardians in the state.

§26-24-43

(a) The department, in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources and the State Board of



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Education, shall develop training relating to the appropriate use of screen time in early childhood education programs, what constitutes high-quality programming, and alternatives to screen time. The training may be tailored to each specific type of early childhood education program.

(b) Each early childhood education program teacher or other staff member who closely supervises children shall annually complete the training.

(c) The department, the Department of Human Resources, and the State Board of Education may adopt rules to implement and administer the training required by this section.

§26-24-44

(a) Compliance with this article shall be monitored and enforced by the following entities:

(1) For child-care facilities licensed by the Department of Human Resources (DHR), by DHR pursuant to Section 38-7-7.1.

(2) For prekindergarten programs operating under Article 2, by the department pursuant to subsection (b).

(3) For public kindergarten, by the local school principal pursuant to Section 16-40-15.

(b)(1) In addition to the standards established pursuant to Article 2, each prekindergarten operating under Article 2 shall implement and abide by a screen time policy that meets the requirements of this article.

(2) The secretary of the department shall monitor prekindergarten compliance with this article as he or she deems necessary, provided that the secretary must:



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a. Include a screen time policy and usage requirements in the Office of School Readiness Program Guidelines;

b. Require prekindergarten teachers to annually complete the training required by Section 26-24-43; and

c. In the event that a prekindergarten is not in compliance with this section, prioritize technical assistance and additional training with the relevant staff members. If noncompliance continues, the department may authorize corrective action plans.

Section 3. Section 16-40-15 is added to the Code of Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

§16-40-15

(a) Each local board of education shall adopt a screen time policy that provides guidance on the appropriate use of screen time in kindergarten classrooms. The policy shall:

(1) Meet the requirements of Article 4, Chapter 24 of Title 26, with respect to kindergarten classrooms;

(2) Notwithstanding Section 26-24-41, allow kindergarten students to use screen time to complete required kindergarten assessments;

(3) Require kindergarten teachers to annually complete the screen time training created pursuant to Section 26-24-42; and

(4) In the event that a kindergarten classroom is not in compliance with this section, prioritize technical assistance and additional training with the relevant teacher. If noncompliance continues, the local board of education may authorize corrective action plans.



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(b) The local school principal shall oversee compliance with this section for the kindergarten classes under his or her purview and, if necessary, implement any technical assistance or corrective action.

Section 4. Section 38-7-7.1 is added to the Code of Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

§38-7-7.1

(a) In addition to the standards for licensing established pursuant to Section 38-7-7, each child-care facility shall implement and abide by a screen time policy that meets the requirements of Article 4, Chapter 24 of Title 26 as a condition for licensing under this chapter.

(b) The department shall monitor compliance with this section as it deems necessary, provided that the department must:

(1) Include a child-care facility's compliance with screen time policy and usage requirements in the Alabama Quality STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System;

(2) Review compliance during any inspection under Section 38-7-11;

(3) Require staff who supervise children to undergo the training created pursuant to Section 26-24-43; and

(4) In the event that a child-care facility is not in compliance with this section, prioritize technical assistance and additional training with the relevant staff members. If noncompliance continues, the department may authorize corrective action plans.

Section 5. This act shall become effective on January



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253 1, 2027.