



SYNOPSIS:

This bill would require the Department of Early Childhood Education to develop guidelines for the appropriate use of screen-based media in early childhood education programs, which includes day care centers, day care homes, group day care homes, night care facilities, prekindergarten, and kindergarten.

This bill would require the Department of Early Childhood Education, in collaboration with the State Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the State Department of Education, to develop screen time standards for early childhood education programs.

This bill would require the standards to address age-appropriate screen time limits, guidelines for what constitutes high-quality programming, and best practices for screen time in early childhood education programs.

This bill would require the Department of Early Childhood Education, in collaboration with DHR and the State Board of Education, to create a training program on the appropriate use of screen time for teachers and other staff members who supervise children.

This bill would require day care centers, day care homes, group day care homes, and night care facilities to implement the guidelines and training



requirements as a condition for licensure by DHR.

This bill would require certain prekindergarten classrooms and each public kindergarten classroom to implement the guidelines and training requirements.

This bill would 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.

This bill would also authorize the Department of Early Childhood Education, DHR, and the State Board of Education to adopt rules.

A BILL
TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

Relating to early childhood education; to add Article 4, commencing with Section 26-24-60, 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, in collaboration with the State Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the State Department of Education, to develop standards and relevant annual training requirements for appropriate screen time use in early childhood education settings; to require each state agency to implement the guidelines and training requirements for the early childhood



education programs under their jurisdiction; to condition licensing of certain child-care facilities on compliance with screen time guidelines; and to authorize the Department of Early Childhood Education, DHR, and the State Board of Education to adopt rules.

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 all of 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 time.

(5) It is the intent of this state to provide parents,



caregivers, and educators with research-based guidelines and standards regarding screen time to safeguard children's healthy development.

Section 2. A new Article 4, commencing with Section 26-24-60, is added to Chapter 24 of Title 26, Code of Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

Article 4

§26-24-60

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 that serves children five years of age and younger.

2. Prekindergarten programs operating under Article 2.

3. Public kindergarten programs.

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

(4) HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMMING. Screen-based media programs and platforms used in early childhood education programs.

(5) LICENSED CHILD-CARE FACILITY. All of the following:



a. A day care center as defined in Section 38-7-2.

b. A day care home as defined in Section 38-7-2.

c. A group day care home as defined in Section 38-7-2.

d. A night care facility as defined in Section 38-7-2.

(6) SCREEN-BASED MEDIA. Visual media devices including, but not limited to, televisions, computers, smart phones, and tablets.

(7) SCREEN TIME. Time spent using screen-based media. The term does not include live, interactive video communication, such as a video call with a child's family.

§26-24-61

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

(b) The guidelines shall emphasize all of the following:

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

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

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

(c) The department shall publish the guidelines on the department website at no cost to the public.

§26-24-62



(a) Screen-based media in early childhood education programs:

(1) May not be unreasonably used as a substitute for teacher-led instruction, reading, hands-on learning, or outdoor play;

(2) Must meet the department's screen time standards as provided in Section 26-24-63; and

(3) Must be actively supervised by staff.

(b) Background television and passive screen time is prohibited in early childhood education programs.

(c) This article shall not apply to any of the following:

(1) The screen time of any student acting pursuant to the student's Individualized Education Program, Section 504 plan, or Individualized Health Plan.

(2) Screen time by any kindergarten student necessary to complete required diagnostic tests and assessments.

(3) Screen time by any student enrolled in classes offered as part of a virtual school or virtual program approved by a local board of education.

(d) The department, the State Department of Human Resources, and the State Board of Education may adopt rules to implement and administer this article.

§26-24-63

The department, in collaboration with the State Department of Human Resources and the State Department of Education, shall develop screen time standards for early childhood education programs which are based on current



evidence-based research and practices. The standards shall include the following:

(1) Age-appropriate screen time limits, provided that no screen time may be allowed for students under two years of age.

(2) Guidelines for determining what constitutes high-quality programming. In establishing the guidelines, all of the following factors must be considered:

a. The target audience of the program and whether the program 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.

(3) Best practices for screen time in early childhood education programs.

§26-24-64

(a) The department, in collaboration with the State Department of Human Resources and the State Department of Education, shall develop training on screen time standards provided in Section 26-24-63 and alternatives to screen time. The training may be tailored to each type of early childhood education program.

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



§26-24-65

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

(1) For child-care facilities licensed by the State Department of Human Resources, by the State Department of Human Resources 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 and reflects the screen time standards established pursuant to Section 26-24-63.

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

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

b. Require prekindergarten teachers to annually complete the training required by Section 26-24-64; and

c. In the event that a prekindergarten is not in compliance with this section, prioritize additional training with relevant staff members. If noncompliance continues, the department may establish or enforce a corrective action plan.

Section 3. Section 16-40-15 is added to the Code of



Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

§16-40-15

No later than the 2027-2028 school year, each local board of education shall adopt a screen time policy that provides guidance on the appropriate use of screen-based media in kindergarten classrooms. The policy shall:

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

(2) Require kindergarten teachers to annually complete the screen time training created pursuant to Section 26-24-63; and

(3) If a kindergarten teacher is not in compliance with this section, require the local school principal to first provide additional training for the noncompliant teacher. Continued noncompliance shall be considered a violation of the Alabama Educator Code of Ethics, and the principal may proceed with disciplinary action as adopted by the State Department of Education, including corrective action, with approval from the local superintendent of education.

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 day care center, day care home, group day care home, and night 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 incorporate a screen time policy that meets the requirements of Article 4, Chapter 24 of Title 26, in the department's minimum standards for licensing and approving day care centers, day care homes, group day care homes, and night care facilities, as defined by this chapter, and monitor compliance with this section as the department deems necessary, provided that the department must:

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

(2) Require staff who supervise children to undergo training established pursuant to Section 26-24-64; and

(3) If a child-care facility listed in subsection (b) is not in compliance with this section, prioritize additional training through the Department of Early Childhood Education with the noncompliant staff members. If noncompliance continues, the department may adopt or enforce a corrective action plan.

Section 5. This act shall become effective on January 1, 2027.