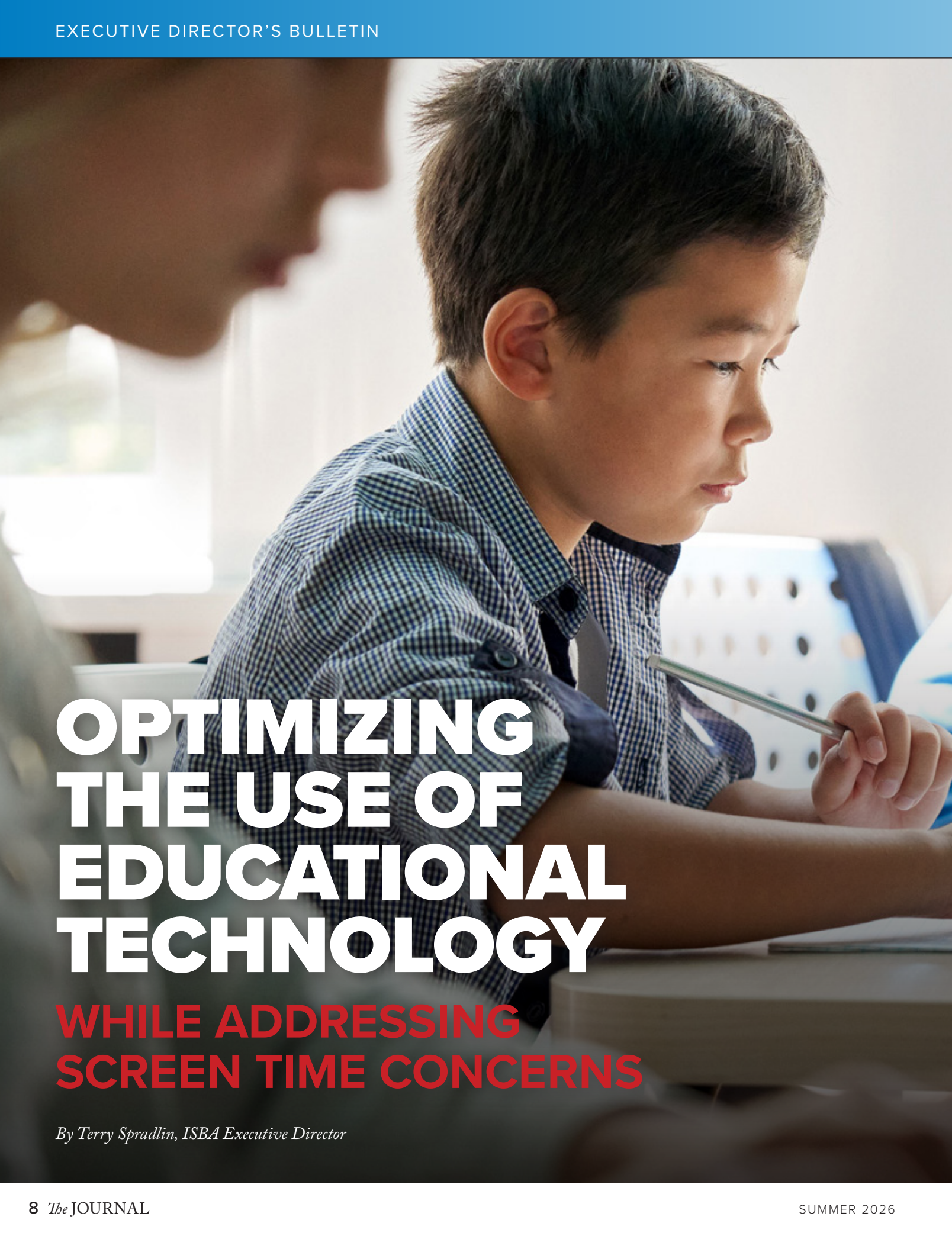




OPTIMIZING THE USE OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

**WHILE ADDRESSING
SCREEN TIME CONCERNS**

By Terry Spradlin, ISBA Executive Director



The Indiana School Boards Association and our partner organizations are in full gear conducting the annual summer seminar series to provide continuous learning and professional development opportunities for our members. Summer also marks a time for ISBA's

Awards, Nominating, and Legislative Committees to gather to do important governance work of the association. The Legislative Committee comprised of 20 board members, two from each of ISBA's 10 regions, will convene for an in-person meeting in late July to consider current and emerging K-12 education policy issues to develop 2027 Legislative Priorities. What budgetary, instructional, and/or governance issues are of highest priority to your school district today and how can the Indiana General Assembly work to support your mission to elevate student achievement outcomes? I welcome your input and suggestions at: tspradlin@isba-ind.org. Any input received will be presented to the Legislative Committee for review when it meets.

Without question, given that the 2027 session is a budget session, school funding will be a top priority. Similarly, as the property tax reform law (SEA 1-2025) continues toward full implementation, its impact on school districts and other local units of government is becoming increasingly challenging. Meanwhile, I am hearing speculation of another round of property tax cuts may be considered. In response, ISBA will continue to advocate for replacement revenues like the option to raise local income taxes provided to county and municipal governments. Furthermore, I anticipate more discussion around improving and elevating work-based learning, apprenticeships, and career advising programming for secondary students.

While all these issues are significant, perhaps the topic presently receiving the most attention at the state and national levels is the impact of technology screen time on children. Representative Jake Teshka, House District 7, submitted a request to the Legislative Council of the Indiana General Assembly to assign an evaluation of technology use in classrooms to the Interim Study Committee on Education.

While this request was declined, his request has generated much discussion and media coverage. At the federal level, Congress has held hearings on the issue and the U.S. Surgeon General in May issued an advisory on the harms of screen use. The emergence of the debate on screen time impact on children comes on the heels of the passage of Senate Enrolled Act 78 (Public Law 107-2026), which imposes a “bell-to-bell no cell” ban of the use of non-school sanctioned wireless communication devices during the school day.

As school districts work to implement a “no device” policy or a storage policy to comply with the “bell-to-bell no cell” ban for the upcoming school year, a heightened attention is now turning to the impact of device screen time on students. The backdrop to this conversation is the Information Age world we live in and the rapid workforce changes that are being prompted by the artificial intelligence revolution. A key question has become, “Is the school-issued device (laptop, Chromebook, or iPad) an essential learning tool or a non-essential student distraction?” Similarly, another question being posed is, “Have classroom teachers become overly dependent on devices as a core instructional technique?” As these questions are examined by policymakers, parents, and educators, there is increasing media coverage across the nation on a

growing backlash on screen time usage by children. Headlines are spotlighting efforts of parents calling for “screen breaks” or all out bans on school-sanctioned devices in the classroom. Let us look at the pros and cons of 1:1 device use and consider the perspectives of our school leaders and classroom teachers.

SCREEN TIME CONCERNS

Emerging concerns about the reliance on school-issued devices by students posit that the devices are a distraction to students during class, students misuse them by searching or finding inappropriate online content (e.g., unfiltered YouTube videos), they result in excessive screen time by students in school and out of school, and that heavy screen time on devices contributes to mental health issues.

In May, the U.S. Surgeon General’s Office and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a new advisory, “Surgeon General’s Warning on the Harms of Screen Use,” that speaks to the harmful effects of excessive screen time for children and adolescents including poor sleep, anxiety, depression, and diminishing academic performance. The advisory also states that excessive screen time is also associated with other physical



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health risks, including poor dietary habits. The advisory cites research that too much screen use and harmful content can interfere with language development, cognitive skill building, and cognitive capacity.ⁱ It adds that increased screen-related distraction (“technoference”) may reduce opportunities for social interaction, particularly in younger children.ⁱⁱ Adolescents who use media during face-to-face interactions tend to have lower feelings of mental well-being.ⁱⁱⁱ (page 16: U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory: Surgeon General’s Warning on the Harms of Screen Use). A stated purpose of the advisory and companion tool kit is “to provide a straightforward summary of the latest research findings and with recommendations to translate this information into action to better protect America’s children and adolescents from screen harms.”^{iv}

An Indianapolis Star opinion column (Sadia Khatri, April 12, 2026) suggests that in some elementary classrooms, technology use is offered as a reward. There is also a growing concern of curriculum mirroring gamification – where learning turns into a game in which students prioritize leveling up and earning points. Jeremy Forest Price, an assistant professor at the Indiana University-Indianapolis School of Education, commented to the columnist, “It sets up an expectation that free time is associated with screen time. One of the dangers of gamification is that kids learn that fast is better and thinking is bad...it often teaches kids that learning is something to be conquered rather than explored.”^v

1:1 DEVICE BENEFITS

Schools and educators must find the essential balance of technology integration in the classroom to ensure safe, supportive, and beneficial uses of technology for students. In a letter submitted on January 13, 2026, to the leadership of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, a coalition of library, non-profit leadership, and education organizations (including the Consortium of State School Boards Associations) addressed the value of technology in schools and the importance of continuing federal support for education technology and connectivity. The coalition contends that “It is essential to distinguish between largely unsupervised, entertainment-driven technology use at home and the intentional, monitored, and carefully curated use of technology in schools — where digital tools are employed to support learning and prepare students for future academic and workforce demands.” The letter goes on to say, “Classroom use of digital tools, aligned to curriculum, guided by educators, and governed by locally developed school district privacy and security policies and related state and federal

laws, is fundamentally different from a student’s unsupervised or entertainment-based device use.” The coalition suggests that rather than efforts to broadly prohibit access to education technology, schools and parents should focus on equipping students with the skills to use technology responsibly and safely.

When implemented with fidelity, a literature review indicates that classroom technology benefits include:

- ✓ Digital literacy and technological skill development
- ✓ Student engagement in active learning
- ✓ Differentiated instruction opportunities for students
- ✓ Self-directed, accelerated learning for gifted students
- ✓ Special needs and ELL students (e.g., text-to-speech and speech-to-text applications)
- ✓ Postsecondary education and workforce preparation

WHAT DO SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS SAY?

Amy Korus, Superintendent, Whitko Community Schools, told InkFree Press that in her school district, “We recognize that technology is an essential tool for preparing students for college, careers, and daily life, but we also understand that it is not the most effective tool for every learning situation. Our expectation is that technology should be used when it enhances instruction, not simply for the sake of using it. Ultimately, our stance is not to move away from technology entirely, but to ensure it is used intentionally, responsibly, and in ways that support student learning and well-being” (5/26/2026: <https://www.inkfreenews.com/2026/05/26/local-school-officials-share-concerns-benefits-of-technology-in-the-classroom/>).

After news broke of Representative Teshka’s request for a study, I asked the ISBA Board of Directors to gather input from their administrators and board colleagues on how 1:1 devices are used in classrooms and on the advantages and drawbacks of these initiatives. Many insightful comments were received, including:

- ▶ “Eliminating devices completely would create tremendous expense in the replacement of (digital) textbooks and materials widely used in schools... While continuing to use devices... it may require more extensive policy (development) and training in its use and application. Specific learning objectives would benefit expectations and implementation of technology as we move forward” per Deb Miller, Huntington County Community School Corporation school board member.

- ▶ “Artificial Intelligence (AI) is advancing rapidly and affecting nearly every profession. From what I learned at the COSSBA national conference in March, K-12 students need meaningful exposure to AI literacy and ethics now. If we get this wrong, the long-term impact on students’ futures could be far greater than the question of 1:1 devices alone” per Ryan Wall, ISBA Region 3 Director, and Huntington County Community School Corporation school board member.
- ▶ Lynn Brown, HCCS Secondary Professional Development Coordinator, commented, “Our elementary students take IREAD-3 and ILEARN assessments on a computer, and therefore need familiarity and comfort using the device to earn the best possible score. Reading a test on a screen is different from paper, and it is a skill that must be developed.”
- ▶ “The financial impact alone would be significant for school corporations. Moving away from technology would disrupt adoption cycles and create significant issues with the extensive use of digital curriculum. We currently rely on a wide range of eTextbook agreements and online (software) program subscriptions across math, science, English, and social studies — many of which are locked into multi-year contracts.

Walking away from those would be costly and impractical” per Brian Woods, Director of Operations, Charles A. Beard Memorial School Corporation.

- ▶ “I think the key at the high school level is finding the right balance. Technology should be used when it enhances learning, such as for research, collaboration, and developing digital skills but it shouldn’t replace meaningful, hands-on learning experiences. Incorporating both digital and traditional approaches can help students build a well-rounded skill set” per Danielle Carmichael, Principal, Knightstown H.S., Charles A. Beard Memorial School Corporation.
- ▶ “(A device ban) would move us further away from the reality our students are walking into. The world is not becoming less digital. It is becoming more dependent on it. Workplace readiness today is tied directly to comfort and skill with technology. A full step back from a 1:1 initiative would risk widening the gap rather than closing it” Jediah Behny, superintendent, Charles A. Beard Memorial School Corporation.
- ▶ “Franklin Township’s 1:1 device initiative is not simply a technology program — it is a foundational instructional model that support student learning, equitable access, and accountability readiness. Any legislative action regarding student device use must be crafted with input from educators, administrators, families, and disability advocates to ensure that guardrails protect student well-being without dismantling the instructional systems that students and teachers depend on every day. FTCSC teachers leverage technology to personalize the learning experience, assign standards-aligned practice, and monitor student progress in real time” per Franklin Township Community School Corporation’s Office of Teaching and Learning.

On May 15, the Fayette County School Corporation issued a press release and informed stakeholders regarding decisions it has made to shift how technology will be utilized in elementary classrooms beginning with the upcoming 2026-27 school year. The changes are based on the belief of the “power of relationships, hands-on learning, meaningful connection, and the impact a teacher can have in the classroom.” The plan calls for ending the issuance of a 1:1 school sanctioned device to Kindergarten and Grade 1 students. The district also indicates it is actively exploring screen time guidelines and best practices for other elementary



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– Jeremy Duncan, Superintendent, Fayette County School Corporation

grade levels to ensure technology use remains balanced, purposeful, and developmentally appropriate. Jeremy Duncan, superintendent of the district, states his support for this change by saying, “Children only get one childhood. We want our youngest learners spending more time talking, creating, exploring, building relationships, and learning directly from caring adults.” The press release concludes by stating that “Fayette County School Corporation appreciates the partnership of our families, teachers, and community as we continue working together to create learning environments that put students first.”

CONCLUSION

It is important for policymakers, when considering potential legislation to impose screen time restrictions or guardrails, to distinguish between personal devices and school-issued instructional devices. Parents must partner with schools to ensure safe, secure, and optimal use of school-sanctioned devices in the classroom and at home. School officials must assess current practices and ensure that educational technology is focused on student learning needs, guided by teachers, and built with evidence-based practices that prioritize active learning while preparing students for the digital age. It is important to continue to empower schools and districts to set acceptable use policies aligned to their instructional models and student populations.

To achieve these objectives, ISBA offers the following recommendations:

- ▶ **Creation of a blue-ribbon commission of school leaders and teachers to work with the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to develop and issue guidelines on screen time limits and best practices of technology use by grade level.**
- ▶ **Initiation of an IDOE and the State Department of Health public service campaign to inform parents of appropriate and acceptable use guidelines and to share warnings of the harms of overuse of technology and screen time.** This campaign should address the U.S. Surgeon General’s recommendations to model healthy behaviors and create family media use plans for family members to be present

in the moment with one another and use screen-free time to connect with children without distraction.

- ▶ **Expansion of 2026 IDOE legislation (House Enrolled Act 1408) to restrict social media use by children** by further addressing social media companies’ insufficient efforts to control and regulate content for minors. While beyond this recommendation, the American Federation of Teachers has gone so far to call on a “tech tax on Big Tech’s earnings” and on some business operations to ensure they pay their fair share for the adverse and disruptive consequences of this technology to American families, such as workers being displaced by AI.
- ▶ **State and local support with funding for educator training** in the optimal and effective integration of technology in the classroom while supporting digital citizenship.
- ▶ **Finally, district administrators and teachers should continue to assess the use and practice of technology in the classroom** to ensure its effective use as one of many tools to support teaching and learning. 🌟

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