

Curriculum Implementation Proposal:
Digital and Media Literacy in Middle School

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Curriculum Overview

In order to help middle school students become knowledgeable, responsible, and critical media and technology users, this proposal describes a Digital and Media Literacy curriculum. The program emphasizes teaching students how to assess online content, spot false information, participate in digital environments responsibly, communicate ethically, and produce meaningful digital content. Through project-based learning, group projects, and digital game-based learning opportunities, the program incorporates media literacy, digital citizenship, information literacy, and technology skills.

Online safety, cyberbullying, disinformation, artificial intelligence, digital footprints, and multimedia communication are among the subjects students will study. The program is designed as a semester-long course meeting two or three times a week for students in grades six through eight, and it can also be integrated into technology education, social studies, and English language arts. Because digital game-based learning has been shown to enhance engagement and learning outcomes when properly designed, research supports the use of interactive and game-based approaches in media education (Ishak et al., 2023).

The curriculum also deliberately incorporates cross-curricular links so that students apply digital and media literacy skills across academic contexts. In English Language Arts, students use media analysis and communication techniques when evaluating texts and producing multimedia presentations, while in Social Studies they apply research and information assessment skills when examining historical and contemporary events. Science instruction can incorporate discussion of artificial intelligence, data interpretation, and reliable scientific sources, and technology education can develop practical skills through the creation of digital material. Park et al. (2021) support this multidisciplinary approach, highlighting that digital,

media, and information literacy are interrelated skills that should be acquired across learning environments rather than taught in isolation.

Rationale and Context

Given that today's children are constantly exposed to social media, digital communication platforms, and online information, digital literacy is essential. Middle school students often consume a great deal of media yet frequently lack the skills necessary to assess authenticity, spot false information, or comprehend the implications of their internet use. Classroom observation and professional experience indicate that students frequently share incorrect information, have trouble recognizing bias, and have limited knowledge of digital privacy and cybersecurity. According to Park et al. (2021), digital literacy is a combination of media literacy, ICT literacy, and information literacy, all of which are essential for functioning in contemporary digital contexts, which underscores the need for a curriculum that integrates appropriate online communication, research technique, and critical thinking.

Ornstein et al. (2015) further clarify that curricula must adapt to social and technological change and equip students for civic engagement and real-world problem solving. This supports the inclusion of subjects such as digital citizenship, AI-generated material, and disinformation. Leung et al. (2026) add that teacher readiness is central to fostering media literacy and cybersecurity awareness, finding that professional development is essential for giving educators the tools they need to teach cybersecurity and digital safety effectively, which highlights the significance of continuous training in the implementation of this curriculum.

Detailed Proposal and Goals

The main objective of this curriculum is to help students become responsible digital citizens who can assess media critically, use technology ethically, and interact respectfully with

others online. Students will develop the ability to evaluate sources, spot false information, identify media bias, safeguard personal data, and produce ethical digital content. The learning objectives include improved digital communication, greater information literacy, stronger critical thinking, and heightened awareness of cybersecurity and online safety. Students will also demonstrate that they can use digital tools for collaboration and make ethical decisions in online settings.

The course is delivered as a sixteen-week semester course meeting two to three times per week, for a total of approximately forty class sessions. It is offered as a standalone elective in technology education and, where scheduling does not permit a separate course, as an embedded unit within English language arts or social studies. Each unit follows the same instructional sequence: a short direct-instruction segment introducing the concept, a guided practice activity, an applied task using real online material, and a structured reflection recorded in the student's digital portfolio. A full week-by-week breakdown of units, topics, and how each concept is carried out appears in Appendix A.

Assessment is distributed across the semester rather than concentrated at the end. Each unit closes with a short applied task, and the portfolio built across all sixteen weeks becomes the primary evidence of growth. The culminating assessment is a digital citizenship simulation in which students respond to a series of realistic online scenarios and justify their decisions, which allows the course to assess judgment rather than recall.

The curriculum incorporates differentiation techniques including scaffolded instruction, flexible grouping, visual supports, and student choice in assignments to support varied learners. Accommodations include extended time, speech-to-text tools, simplified texts, and multimodal instruction. Students who require individualized learning objectives or alternative assessment

formats will receive modifications, and these are planned at the unit level rather than improvised, so that every student encounters the same core concepts through an appropriate route.

Implementation Considerations

Successful adoption requires technology such as laptops or Chromebooks, dependable internet access, interactive displays, headphones, and multimedia editing tools. Teaching and learning will be supported by educational platforms including Google Workspace, Canva, Kahoot, Nearpod, and Common Sense Education materials. These platforms were selected because each supports a different part of the instructional sequence: Google Workspace and Canva for producing and sharing digital work, Kahoot and Nearpod for the gamified checkpoints that sustain engagement, and Common Sense Education for its ready-made, age-appropriate digital citizenship lessons.

An estimated \$37,000 will be spent on equipment, software, professional development, and educational materials. District finances, federal grants, and community partnerships are among the possible funding sources, and the professional development share of that budget should be protected rather than reduced first if funding is constrained.

The success of implementation depends substantially on professional development. According to Leung et al. (2026), effective media literacy instruction requires raising teachers' knowledge of cybersecurity through organized training, and instructors will therefore need preparation in cybersecurity, AI literacy, digital citizenship, and instructional technology integration. Ongoing professional growth will include collaborative planning time, coaching sessions, and workshops scheduled across the year rather than delivered as a single orientation. This distributed model matters because teachers are being asked to teach content that changes continually, and a one-time training would be outdated within a school year.

Integrating family and community involvement is another crucial factor in successful implementation. Because children use media outside the classroom, schools should offer opportunities for parent and guardian education on subjects including online safety, social media awareness, and cybersecurity practice. Workshops, educational publications, and family digital literacy events can all help achieve this. Leung et al. (2026) note that strengthening cybersecurity awareness requires a wider educational ecosystem that includes educators and stakeholders outside the classroom, and involving families helps students apply digital literacy skills in real situations while reinforcing consistent standards for safe digital use.

Evaluation Plan

Combined formative and summative methods will be used to evaluate student learning. Formative assessments include reflections, exit tickets, discussions, and media analysis assignments. Summative assessments include digital portfolios, presentations, research projects, and simulations centered on digital citizenship. Student progress will be gauged through improvements in critical thinking, source evaluation, ethical digital behavior, and engagement with digital tools.

The efficacy of the curriculum itself will be assessed using student performance data, teacher feedback, parent input, classroom observations, and engagement metrics. Annual curriculum review meetings that examine this data, integrate new technology, and modify teaching methods as necessary will support sustainability.

Ongoing evaluation will also concentrate on equity and access, not only on overall effectiveness. This entails determining whether the curriculum benefits all student groups equally, including English language learners, students with disabilities, and students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Data disaggregated by subgroup will be examined to identify any

discrepancies in participation or achievement, and instructional strategies, modifications, and resources will be adjusted if gaps are found. This ensures that the curriculum is inclusive and responsive to the needs of every student in the school community.

Integration of Course Readings

Four academic sources informed this curriculum. Ishak et al. (2023) found that learner-centered design enhances student motivation, engagement, and academic success in digital game-based learning, which shaped the addition of gamified activities such as interactive quizzes, digital simulations, and group problem-solving exercises. I agree with their conclusion that interactive and relevant instruction supports learning more effectively than lecture-based delivery.

Park et al. (2021) describe digital literacy as a blend of media, ICT, and information literacy, which influenced the curriculum's multidisciplinary design and its guarantee that students acquire critical thinking and media analysis skills alongside technical ones. Ornstein et al. (2015) argue that curricula must adapt as society and technology change, which directly shaped the inclusion of real-world problems such as disinformation, artificial intelligence, cyberbullying, and digital citizenship.

Leung et al. (2026) emphasize the significance of teacher professional development in cybersecurity and media literacy education. Their conclusions reinforced the necessity of structured teacher training and shaped the implementation strategy, supporting the view that curriculum design, teacher readiness, and confidence in teaching cybersecurity content are all components of successful digital literacy instruction.

AI Critique Section

Artificial intelligence can help generate ideas for curricula, but it cannot replace classroom-specific knowledge or instructor expertise. One drawback is that AI-generated lessons frequently fail to differentiate instruction for varied learners, such as English language learners or students with learning difficulties, and cannot accurately build the scaffolding, accommodations, and culturally responsive instruction that students actually need.

A second drawback is AI's inability to fully comprehend the social, emotional, and cultural conditions of a particular classroom. Middle school students confront specific difficulties such as cyberbullying, social media pressure, and exposure to false information, which require teacher knowledge and responsiveness rather than generic content. AI was used at an AIAS Level 3 ethical level in preparing this proposal, meaning it assisted with organization, drafting, and brainstorming but was not the final decision-maker; the author reviewed, revised, and modified all content to ensure accuracy, appropriateness, and alignment with student needs.

A third drawback is the oversimplification of complex ethical, cultural, or developmental issues surrounding digital media use. Topics such as misinformation, algorithmic bias, and online identity require careful discussion that accounts for the developmental stage of the students and the specific cultural and social environment of the classroom. AI-generated content may present these subjects in a generic or falsely neutral manner, which can restrict meaningful conversation or fail to push students toward sufficiently critical thinking. Teacher mediation is therefore essential to adapt the material, pose challenging questions, and guide students toward analysis that reflects real-world complexity.

References

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Appendix A

Semester Timeline and Delivery of Course Concepts

The following timeline shows how the Digital and Media Literacy course is delivered across a sixteen-week semester meeting two to three times per week. Each unit follows the same instructional sequence of direct instruction, guided practice, applied task, and recorded reflection.

Timeline	Unit focus	How the concepts are carried out
Weeks 1–2	Foundations of digital and media literacy	Course orientation, baseline assessment of student media habits, and introduction to the difference between consuming and evaluating media. Students begin a digital portfolio that runs the length of the course.
Weeks 3–5	Evaluating online content	Source evaluation, lateral reading, and identifying media bias. Students analyze paired news items on the same event and defend their assessment of each in a structured discussion.
Weeks 6–7	Misinformation and artificial intelligence	How misinformation spreads, how AI-generated content is produced, and how to recognize it. Gamified checkpoints and interactive quizzes are used at this stage to sustain engagement.
Weeks 8–9	Digital citizenship and online conduct	Cyberbullying, respectful online communication, and ethical participation. Students draft a class code of conduct for digital spaces and justify each provision.
Weeks 10–11	Privacy, digital footprints, and cybersecurity	Password practice, privacy settings, phishing recognition, and what a digital footprint reveals. Students audit their own footprint using a guided protocol.
Weeks 12–14	Creating ethical digital content	Students plan and produce a multimedia project on a topic of their choosing, applying attribution, accuracy, and audience awareness.
Weeks 15–16	Presentation and summative assessment	Portfolio review, project presentations, and a digital citizenship simulation used as the culminating summative assessment.