

November 15, 2016

Open letter to the American Academy of Pediatrics

Regarding your recent statement on “New Recommendations for Children’s Media Use” Oct. 21, 2016



Parents Across America is very disappointed in the AAP’s revised recommendations for children’s media use. Our main concern is that the focus of your analysis and recommendations is entirely on family and home practice, and fails to take into consideration or even acknowledge the rapidly expanding use of digital devices and screen time that our children are exposed to in school. This approach strikes us as shockingly narrow and out of touch with reality, and a real disservice to children and families who look to you, our children’s doctors, for help and support to safeguard our most vulnerable ones.

While we acknowledge that parents must work harder to monitor our children’s use of technology at home, and accept that responsibility, we believe that schools, school districts, states and the federal government are requiring ever-increasing technology time with far too little oversight of the effects of these devices and programs on children’s health, and even less monitoring of their academic effectiveness. Driving this effort are educational publishers, software marketers, and others working to monetize schooling and gather and use private student data for their own benefit.

We worry that omitting any mention of school-based screen time may imply that doctors think in-school use is somehow safer than home use, yet we know that screens, like cigarettes, pose significant health risks regardless of where they are used. Furthermore, the lack of reference to school screen time may actually mislead parents into assuming doctors consider all in-school digital media use as high-quality, yet we know that these programs vary widely in quality and effectiveness.

PAA has collected extensive research, information and opinion about the growing danger to children of excessive screen time (<http://parentsacrossamerica.org/children-risk-paa-reports-detailing-dangers-edtech/>). Your findings are completely consistent with ours. We learned that excessive screen time may:

- interfere with children's brain development
- impact children's mental health
- undermine learning
- increase sitting time which can cause many physical problems
- negatively impact sleep
- contribute to screen addiction
- result in eyestrain and potential myopia, macular degeneration, and blindness
- expose children to excessive radiation
- encourage constant testing and data collection without adequately informing or obtaining permission from students or parents, undermining student privacy, and
- benefit corporations without improving education.

In light of these very real risks, we are frustrated that your recommendations ignore the role schools play in this area, and leave parents without the support of the very professionals whose interest in children's health and well-being should have resulted in strong support for our challenge to the growing misuse and overuse of technology in the school setting.

We ask that you address the additional risks of screen and media time in school, and report publicly on this critical area. We also hope that you will reconsider your overall recommendations in light of the reality of the rapid increase of children's in-school exposure to digital devices.

Thank you.

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Parents Across America

PAA is a non-partisan, non-profit grassroots organization that connects activist parents from all backgrounds across the United States to share ideas and work together to improve our nation's public schools. PAA is committed to bringing the voice of public school parents – and common sense – to local, state, and national education debates.