

- SUBJECT:** Incorporating digital citizenship into 6th grade social studies
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 12 ayes — Dutton, Lozano, Allen, Allison, K. Bell, Bernal, Buckley, Huberty, K. King, Meza, Talarico, VanDeaver
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — M. González
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Andrea Chevalier, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Heather Sheffield, Decoding Dyslexia and Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA); Chloe Latham Sikes, Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA); Dena Donaldson, Texas AFT; Oscar Rodriguez, Texas Association of Broadcasters; Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Beaman Floyd, Texas Impact; Suzi Kennon, Texas PTA; Molly Weiner, United Ways of Texas; Linda Litzinger; Thomas Parkinson)
- Against — None
- On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Fuat Aki, Eric Marin, Monica Martinez, and Melody Parrish, Texas Education Agency)
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code sec. 28.002(z) requires each school district to incorporate instruction in digital citizenship into the district's curriculum, including information regarding the potential criminal consequences of cyberbullying.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 129 would require students enrolled in grade level six to complete instruction in digital citizenship as part of a school district's social studies curriculum. The bill would expand the definition of "digital citizenship" to include:
- media literacy and the ability to identify credible sources of

information;

- digital ethics, etiquette, respectful discourse with people who have differing opinions, safety, security, digital footprint, and the identification of rhetoric that incites violence based on a person's race, religion, or political affiliation; and
- cyberbullying prevention and response.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2021-2022 school year.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 129 would help students learn to navigate the sometimes treacherous waters of social media and the internet by requiring instruction in digital citizenship. Students would benefit from learning about the real-life consequences that can come from online activities, including the danger that misinformation and hateful rhetoric can sometimes lead to violent actions.

Because young Texans have grown up with social media, it is often wrongly assumed that they have the sophistication to think critically about information they see online. The digital space is part of their community and it is critical that they learn how to prevent and respond to cyberbullying, to conduct themselves respectfully in online environments, and to identify credible sources of information.

The bill would appropriately incorporate lessons about digital citizenship into the 6th grade social studies curriculum because that is a time when many students begin to use the internet and social media independently of their parents, teachers, or other responsible adults.

While some have expressed concern that discussions of digital citizenship could result in discrimination against unpopular views, the bill specifically requires that students be taught to have respectful discourse with people who have differing opinions.

CRITICS
SAY:

CSHB 129 contains an overly broad definition of digital citizenship that would inappropriately place educators in the position of deciding what is good or bad content on the internet, possibly leading to discrimination against unpopular sources of information and views. It should be the responsibility of parents, not the public schools, to monitor their children's online behavior and use of social media.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board fiscal note, CSHB 129 would have no significant fiscal implication to the state, but schools districts and charter schools would likely have additional costs if 6th grade social studies materials needed to be replaced outside of the regular textbook adoption cycle.