



June 16, 2022

The Honorable Miguel Cardona  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

When schools use social media to communicate with students, they are contributing to the decline in mental health of children and teens. For this reason, we are requesting a meeting with you to discuss releasing formal guidance to schools condemning the use of social media for student-facing communications.

The recent Surgeon General Advisory, “Protecting Youth Mental Health,” provides a resounding wake-up call about increased anxiety and depression among our youth — a trend accelerated by the pandemic. Surgeon General Murthy singles out the role of social media, saying, “these tools can pit us against each other, reinforce negative behaviors like bullying and exclusion, and undermine the safe and supportive environments young people need and deserve.”

Dr. Murthy also points to the role of popular culture and media (which children and teens often consume via social media), saying, “...too often, young people are bombarded with messages through the media and popular culture that erode their sense of self-worth — telling them they are not good looking enough, popular enough, smart enough, or rich enough.”

Internal industry research has also exposed the risks social media pose to teens’ mental health and emotional wellbeing, as exposed in a recent whistleblower report.

Social media companies’ business models are intentionally designed to keep users on their platforms for as long as possible and to keep them coming back again and again. Thus, if a student checks social media for information about a school event, they are likely to continue to scroll, sometimes for hours. These are habit-forming products that research shows negatively impact teen mental health. Therefore, when schools encourage use by communicating with students on these platforms, they are contributing to a decline in teen mental health.

### **Taking Away Parents’ Right to Protect Their Children from Social Media Harms**

Using social media to communicate with students unintentionally takes away a parent’s choice to protect their child’s mental health by eliminating or minimizing their child’s time on social media. Even if schools post notices or forums in multiple places, students may feel left out (e.g.,

89 South St. Ste. 403  
Boston, MA 02111  
(617) 896-9368  
[screentimenetwork.org](http://screentimenetwork.org)

when classmates discuss posts to which they do not have access). Children's feeling of exclusion is one reason parents feel pressure to allow their children to use social media. Schools should not contribute to that social pressure.

### **Violating Duty of Care**

Schools' legal obligation of duty of care requires them to take steps to reduce students' risk of reasonably foreseeable harm, including psychological injury. Given what we know about social media's impact on children's and teens' mental health, encouraging them to use social media creates a reasonably foreseeable harm, especially for children being bullied.

### **DOE's Leadership is Critical**

Action by the Department of Education, under your leadership, would make a huge difference in children's lives, and would help reverse the mental health crisis many American kids are experiencing.

We are available to meet with you to discuss this pressing issue, and would be glad to help create formal guidance for state and local K-12 educators and administrators. Specific guidelines for educators which would go a long way in addressing this issue include:

- Refrain from using social media for student-facing communication, including class work, homework-assignments, sports, club or team-related events and schedules.
- Ensure that educators are trained to not promote social media accounts and to avoid student-facing social media posts.
- Do not host school discussions/events on social media platforms (e.g. via Instagram Live).
- Offer paper schedules and flyers for all school events.

We hope we can count on you to act at this critical juncture.

Please contact Lauren Paer at [lauren@fairplayforkids.org](mailto:lauren@fairplayforkids.org) or Lisa Cline at [lisac@fairplayforkids.org](mailto:lisac@fairplayforkids.org) at Fairplay's Screen Time Action Network if you would like to discuss.

Below are real-life, illustrative examples of scenarios where schools are using social media to communicate with students. These are just a handful of examples collected during the most recent school year of this common practice.

**Exhibit A: Student town hall hosted on Instagram Live**



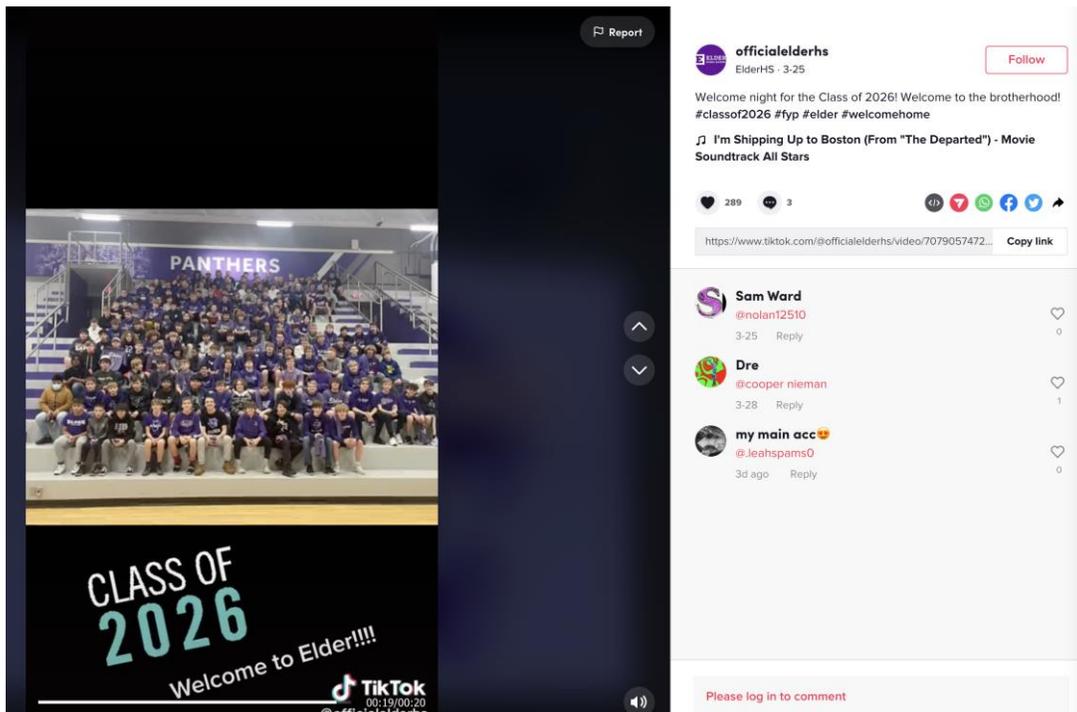
**Exhibit B: Students asked to fill out surveys on Instagram**



**Exhibit C: High school student dress schedule announced on Instagram**



**Exhibit D: Welcome event for high school freshman class announced on TikTok**





Sincerely,

**ORGANIZATIONS:**

Fairplay  
Becca Schmill Foundation  
Better Screen Time  
Center for Online Safety  
Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development  
Digital Media Treatment & Education Center  
Durable Human  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
EverySchool  
Exposure Labs, The Creators of The Social Dilemma  
Illinois Families for Public Schools  
Nature Club Kids  
Network for Public Education  
No App For Life  
Parents Together  
Screen Sense  
STRIPED (Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders)  
Students Against Destructive Decisions  
Tech(nically) Politics  
TextLess Live More  
The Tech Oversight Project  
Wait Until 8<sup>th</sup>

**INDIVIDUALS:**

*(affiliations listed for identification purposes only)*

Amy Adams, MSW, PPSC, Co-Founder of Healthy Screen Habits

Nancy Bailey, PhD, Nancy Bailey's Education Website, Florida State University, author of *Losing America's Schools: The Fight to Reclaim Public Education*

Criscillia Benford, PhD, co-author of *Sensory Metrics of Neuromechanical Trust*

Blakely Bundy, MEd, Co-Director of Defending the Early Years

Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Professor Emerita at Lesley University, President of the Board Defending the Early Years, author of *Taking Back Childhood*



Emily Cherkin, MA Education, Lesley University, founder, The Screentime Consultant

Joseph Clement, MEd, Social Studies teacher, author of *Screen Schooled: Two Veteran Teachers Expose How Technology Overuse Is Making Our Kids Dumber*

Victoria Dunckley MD, Integrative Pediatric Psychiatrist, screen time expert and author of *Reset Your Child's Brain*, contributing author of *Internet Addiction in Children and Adolescents*, Fairplay's Screen Time Action Network Advisory Board member, Physicians for Safe Technology

Richard Freed, PhD, psychologist and author of *Wired Child*

Nicholas Freudenberg, DrPH, MPH, Distinguished Professor of Public Health at City University of New York

Douglas Gentile, PhD, Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University, author of *Media Violence and Children*

Kari L. Hamel, JD

Trudy D. Helge, PsyD, Psychologist at Kaiser Permanente

Melanie Hempe, BSN, author of *The Screen Strong Solution, Can Your Teen Survive—and Thrive—Without a Smartphone, Will Your Gamer Survive College?*

Brett Kennedy, PsyD

Emily Kim, Director of LGBTQ+ Initiative, Log Off Movement

Diane Levin, PhD, Professor of Human Development at Boston University, author of *Beyond Remote Control Childhood and War Play Dilemma*, Founder of [truceteachers.org](http://truceteachers.org) and [deyproject.org](http://deyproject.org)

Matt Miles, Social Studies teacher, author of *Screen Schooled: Two Veteran Teachers Expose How Technology Overuse Is Making Our Kids Dumber*

Kymerly Ozbirn, MEd, NCSP, School Psychologist, Santa Barbara Unified School District

Adam Pletter, PsyD, author of *iParent 101: Digital Parenting Guide for Modern Parents*

Melissa Quigley, MEd, School Psychologist, Co-Founder of TechWise SB

89 South St. Ste. 403  
Boston, MA 02111  
(617) 896-9368  
[screentimenetwork.org](http://screentimenetwork.org)



Delaney Ruston, MD, Creator of the films Screenagers and Screenagers Next Chapter

Jean Rystrom, Kaiser Permanente (Retired)

Joni Siani, MEd, Psychology, author and filmmaker of *Celling Your Soul*, Founder of No App For Life

Lavanya Sithanandam, MD, Medical Director at Park Pediatrics, Medical Director at Reach Out & Read

Clifford Sussman, MD, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Digital Use Disorder Expert

Sherry Turkle, Professor at MIT, author of *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* and *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*

Jean Twenge, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, author of *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*

Christopher Willard, Psychologist, author, Harvard Faculty