

State News Story on Media Literacy Legislation

SC students need better instruction on spotting bias, 'fake news' online, bill says

BY JOSEPH BUSTOS/ THE STATE

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COLUMBIA, S.C.

With the spread of misinformation, so-called “fake news,” and news streams that reflect the consumers’ political viewpoints, a state lawmaker and a Columbia media literacy consultant want students to be taught how to be critical of what they read and post online.

A bill sponsored by state Rep. Seth Rose, D-Richland, would direct the S.C. Department of Education to develop a plan for teaching media literacy in the state’s public schools after taking recommendations from an advisory panel.

The goal is to teach students how to think critically about what they see in the media and in social media, which has been used to propagate “fake news,” supporters say.

“From a global level, it would teach kids not to take what they see on social media as fact, to question the sources, and ask questions about what they’re seeing on social media,” Rose said.

“It would also teach them the dangers of social media – putting a picture out there, or writing a statement –

something that could haunt you the rest of your life even if you're at a young age. It would also include teaching kids about what they are seeing. What are people, advertisers, and others, political candidates, what words are they using, what are they trying to do to influence your decision making?"

When young people consume media, they should know to question who the author or producer is, ask if there is a hidden agenda or bias, and ask what techniques the media is using to convey its message, said Frank W. Baker, a Columbia media literacy consultant who supports the legislation.

Baker added that looking at popular culture and the news, "it's pretty clear today they (students) aren't thinking clearly about media messages."

South Carolina's education standards already includes references to teaching media literacy, according to state Education Department spokesman Ryan Brown.

The state's standards for college readiness and English language, visual and performing arts and social studies were updated in 2015, 2017 and this year, respectively, Brown said.

Brown said they all have references to teaching media literacy.

For example, as part of U.S. government standards, there is one standard calls for students learning about the roles of the media, political parties and interest groups and how they shape public opinion and the agendas.

"Media literacy is taught through multi-disciplines and therefore is included in multiple sets of standards," Brown said.

But Rose said what is being taught now isn't adequate as times have changed and as social media has become more prevalent. He added there needs to be education on fact-checking what is

read on social media platforms.

“It’s not adequate and it doesn’t touch the issue at all. It doesn’t even scratch the surface,” Rose said. “To say we’re doing this in social studies, it isn’t happening on the scale it needs to happen on. The bill is meant to start the discussion as we look at public education.”

Baker said there’s a need for increased media literacy education for young people and adults.

“They’re not getting the full story. If they’re following the news on Twitter or Instagram, they’re going to get a headline. They’re going to base their decisions on what could be an incomplete bit of information.”