



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION



SNAPSHOT 2019: The State of Media Literacy Education in the U.S.

INTRODUCTION

Decades of scholarship in the field of media literacy and numerous researchers, educators, and advocates have called for the widespread implementation of media literacy education (Considine, 1990; Thoman & Jolls, 2004; Hobbs, 2010; De Abreu, 2018). Since 2015, membership of The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) has grown from about 300 members to over 5,000 members, signifying a remarkable expansion of interest in and demand for media literacy education. Paired with increasing concerns about misinformation, media literacy has moved to the forefront of national attention. Defined as the “ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication” (NAMLE, 2014), media literacy education is an interdisciplinary field of study and way of teaching that cultivates attention to the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of media and actively prepares students and citizens for critical and creative participation in the digital age.

Despite general awareness of the persuasive nature and pervasive inclusion of media in our lives, media literacy education has not been formerly prioritized in U.S. education efforts. Yet, several recent trends indicating progress and development are important to mention:

GROWTH: Attention and interest in media literacy education is expanding, as evidenced by the significant growth of NAMLE’s membership, the increasing number of partner organizations involved in the annual U.S. Media Literacy Week, and the expansion of collaboration and partnerships globally.

INCLUSION IN STANDARDS: A range of skills related to media literacy education are increasingly included in standards-based initiatives, such as the National Common Core State Standards and the National Media Arts Standards, as well as in the positional papers of numerous professional educational organizations including, but not limited to: the American Library Association, National Council for Social Studies, and National Council of Teachers of English.

LEGISLATIVE INVOLVEMENT: A growing number of states, including Washington and California, have introduced or passed bills and amendments to address media literacy education and digital citizenship in school based curricula. Moreover, discussions have started regarding the introduction of a national media literacy bill through the focused efforts of media literacy advocates across the country.

AWARENESS: The term “fake news” has come into common parlance, opening the eyes of many to the power of a deftly-constructed media message and bringing media literacy into the cultural conversation. Shifts in how politicians and elected officials use media, especially social media, as well as increasing insight related to privacy and data mining have heightened awareness about the need for citizens— meaning everyone— to be media literate.

Despite broad agreement about the need to ensure that people of all ages are equipped to understand and negotiate the influence of media in their lives, the United States does not devote any significant government effort, nor funding, for media literacy education research, training, or implementation. International communities, including Canada and the European Union, have made intentional efforts to prioritize media literacy education. In the U.S., the field has grown on the backs of nonprofit organizations, university scholars, and dedicated teachers and practitioners across a range of educational contexts throughout the country who seek to prepare their students, peers, and colleagues to engage thoughtfully in literacy as a social practice increasingly enacted via information and communication technologies and media. While funding initiatives have benefits and drawbacks, decades of grassroots advocacy has not been enough to establish media literacy education as a foundational or core dimension of schooling. This SNAPSHOT takes the position that students need media literacy education as a sustained, interdisciplinary component of schooling and its integration must be led by research-based, effective practices and trained practitioners. This SNAPSHOT is a step towards that goal.

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ABOUT THIS SNAPSHOT

The intention of this SNAPSHOT is to provide information that may be useful in facilitating the development of media literacy education across the country and helping the U.S. education system align with the media-rich world in which students, and all citizens, are immersed today. Together, we seek to reinvigorate curricula so it is relevant to students' lives and their 21st century education needs.

This SNAPSHOT does not, nor was it meant to, fully answer the question “What is the state of media literacy education in the United States?” This SNAPSHOT should not be interpreted as a representative research study. We chose the word “SNAPSHOT” intentionally to convey this report as a glimpse of the field and as a

step toward the future. The purpose of this SNAPSHOT is to inspire dialogue and create momentum to support research, training, practice, and policy efforts needed in order to grow the field of media literacy more fully as we enter 2020 and beyond.

SNAPSHOT information was gathered through an online survey launched during the 4th Annual Media Literacy Week in the United States— beginning November 2018

and closing at the end of the year. The survey was created by a small, volunteer team of members from the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) and disseminated through various related networks (e.g., NAMLE Twitter, NAMLE Facebook, etc.). Respondents included NAMLE members (45%), non-members (38%) and those that were not sure (17%).

The survey focused on gathering information in three areas:

COMMUNITY: Who are the people involved in media literacy education and what are their professional contexts?

TRAINING: How are those involved in media literacy

education developing the skills necessary to teach this topic?

RESOURCES: What specific materials, curricula, or organizations are being tapped to bring this topic to life in classrooms and other environments?

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CONCEPTUALIZING MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy education is a hybrid field with roots in many areas, including but not limited to: semiotics, film studies, cultural studies, educational technology, instructional technology, information literacy, and many more. Attempts to define or label media literacy have had the tendency to create confusion and limit meaningful dialogue about practice. At the same time, stabilizing the concept of media literacy is an important dimension of growing the field. NAMLE's Core Principles of Media Literacy Education (2007) bring together myriad definitions by conceptualizing media literacy education broadly as active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create so as to develop informed, reflective, and engaged participants essential to a democratic society.

It is important to recognize that conceptualizations of media literacy drive curriculum choices, professional development, teacher training, resource material selection and numerous other aspects. Moreover, even in schools or districts where media literacy is an established course or topic, the limits of time result in complex choices about

which topics to include, or which topics deserve the most time, impacting the content of media literacy learning. Finally, external factors, such as national curriculum reform efforts, standardized testing, and district-level administrative priorities, may influence conceptualization and enactment. Survey respondents' selections reflect these complex factors, including their own interpretations of the definition of media literacy.

In considering the goals of this SNAPSHOT, perhaps it is the recognition of media literacy as an “expanded concept of literacy” (CPMLE, 2007) that is most relevant to invite conversation. As Hobbs and Jensen (2009) explained a decade ago, “there is a need to support the work of those who are formulating, creating, refining, and testing curriculum theory and instructional methods, practices, and pedagogy in ways that connect to students' experience with mass media, popular culture, and digital media, supporting the development of their critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills” (p. 7). This need persists and this report is movement forward.

OBSERVATION 1

Who Responded?

We received 331 responses to the survey representing participants from 45 states and the District of Columbia, as well as international responses. Since our focus was to offer a snapshot of the United States, we omitted the 37 responses that came from the international media literacy community. However, those responses affirm media literacy as a field that transcends national borders. The 294 respondents from the United States reflect a host of professional backgrounds, roles, and contexts, illuminating media literacy as a complex, interdisciplinary field.

Together, this SNAPSHOT of the media literacy community reflects that we are broad, cross-curricular, and intergenerational. It tells us that most practitioners are self-taught, suggesting that degree program development, professional development, or other formalized training in media literacy education may be an essential requirement for growing the field. In conjunction with a snapshot showing primary professional roles, we invited respondents to share their specific job titles. These titles further demonstrate the incredible variation of professional identity, spanning from students to teachers, from artists to researchers. Yet, while our community snapshot indicates diversity regarding professional roles, backgrounds, identities, and contexts, we have much work to do in building a diverse community of practice.



AGE

Answered: 289 | Skipped: 5

45 – 54	30%
55 – 64	24%
35 – 44	23%
25 – 34	12%
65+	7%
Prefer not to Answer	3%

GENDER

Answered: 290 | Skipped: 4

Female	72%
Male	26%
Prefer not to Answer	2%
Other	>1%

TRAINING

Answered: 294 | Skipped: 0

Self Taught Learning	74%
Professional Development	43%
Academic Degree	43%
Badging/Certificate	>7%

CONTENT AREA

Answered: 286 | Skipped: 8

Library	24%
Higher Education	23%
Not Applicable	12%
Information and Technology	12%
English Language Arts	11%

Other content area selections in order of prevalence include: Social Studies, Career Technical Educator, Arts Education, Early Childhood, English as a Second Language, Health Education, Special Education, World Languages, Guidance.

Eighty-five percent of respondents identified as White or Caucasian with the remaining respondents comprising Black/African-American (5%), Hispanic or Latino (3%), Asian (2%), and other identities (5%). These numbers raise questions about visibility and inclusivity for practitioners of color. When we cross-reference snapshot information about race and ethnicity with data about the location of respondents, we noticed that most respondents live in U.S. cities in which a large portion of the population identifies as African-American (e.g., Philadelphia, 44% and New York City, 25%).

While more research is required to understand this unevenness in representation, government research reveals possible trends. For example, two 2016 reports sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, note disparities in representation of people of color among K-12 school personnel, including administrators and teachers (The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, p. 6), as well as an underrepresentation among faculty and leadership of color in institutions of higher education (Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education, p.37). Given the majority of survey respondents were from K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, the observed disparity may be anchored in larger social imbalances. Other possibilities include disparities in the distributive modes of the survey, comprising predominantly Twitter and Facebook.



EDUCATION	
Answered: 286 Skipped: 8	
Master's	64%
Doctorate	26%
Bachelor's	9%
RACE	
Answered: 290 Skipped: 4	
White/Caucasian	85%
Black/African American	5%
Prefer not to Answer	4%
Hispanic/Latino	3%
Asian/Asian American	2%
American Indian/Alaska Native/Other	>1%
ORGANIZATION TYPE	
Answered: 286 Skipped: 8	
Public Institution	62%
Private Institution	21%
Non-Profit	17%
ROLE	
Answered: 271 Skipped: 23	
University/College Educator	35%
High School Educator	18%
High School Librarian	9%
Other role selections in order of prevalence include: Middle school educator, civil society including NGO organizer, middle school librarian, elementary or primary school educator, university/college librarian, elementary or primary school librarian, public librarians, after school or out-of-school educator.	

GAP

Collectively, the demographics of respondents revealed two gaps; the first relates to race/ethnicity and the second to training and professional development. The demographics for race/ethnicity of respondents reveal much work is needed regarding outreach and representation, positioning attention to diversity as a top concern in growing the field of media literacy education. Investments in media literacy education initiatives at multiple levels and serving many groups and audiences are required.

Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated that they are self-taught in media literacy education. This information confirms existing scholarship that degree program development, professional development, or other formalized training in media literacy education are lacking. Developing media literacy as a core curriculum topic and twenty-first century pedagogy for inclusion across PK-20 contexts requires extensive revisioning of Teacher Education programs and the augmentation of professional development opportunities.

OBSERVATION 2

What Topics are Included in Media Literacy Courses or Programs?

Respondents selected up to ten topics from a list of 25 topics to provide insight regarding the scope and composition of media literacy courses and programs in 2018. As this is our first State of Media Literacy Snapshot, we do not have comparison data to determine if this list of topics would have been different in 2010 or 2015. On the following page we have provided a snapshot of the most and least selected topics.

The topics most often selected were information literacy (69%), agenda/bias (67%), and news literacy (67%), while issues that have been recurring concerns in media literacy for years—such as celebrity culture (16%) and violence (13%)—were not widely selected. This shift in focus is not surprising as many media literacy educators have expressed a new or renewed interest in media and information literacy among their colleagues and administrators given the rise of ‘fake news’ stories and misinformation in recent years. As most educators are addressing media literacy and related topics with limited instructional time, a reassessment seems to have taken place that favors issues related to information and news

literacy. The impact of this shift for media literacy teaching and learning is yet to be determined and requires further exploration.

Other frequently selected topics connect heavily with skills related to determining fact from fiction, identifying persuasive strategies, or engaging in the ethics of media use and creation, including: copyright and fair use (56%), advertising/consumer culture (54%), and credibility (54%). Topics related to media construction followed, including: body image/identity (35%), representation (33%), and children’s media (32%). Generally, these topics comprise attention to how media messages portray people, places, and ideas, specifically eliciting students’ abilities to identify narrow conceptions or stereotypes that may have real impacts on audiences, policies, and politics.

Less frequently selected topics include: ecomedia literacy/sustainability, regulatory, health literacy, violence, celebrity culture, and data mining/privacy/surveillance.

GAP

While snapshot information about most and least-selected topics provides some insight into subject trends in media literacy education, advanced research into practice is missing. Qualitative information about what is actually happening in classrooms, courses, and programs is needed in order to effectively advance media literacy in PK-12, higher education, and other contexts. Practitioners, advocates, policy makers, and the public at large alike need a deep understanding of the complex purposes and pedagogies involved in media literacy education, in conjunction with studies that describe practitioners’ experiences with media literacy and reports on effectiveness. Creating successful programs may require a holistic, integrated approach to media literacy education as part of traditional content areas to support overburdened teachers and a crowded curriculum.

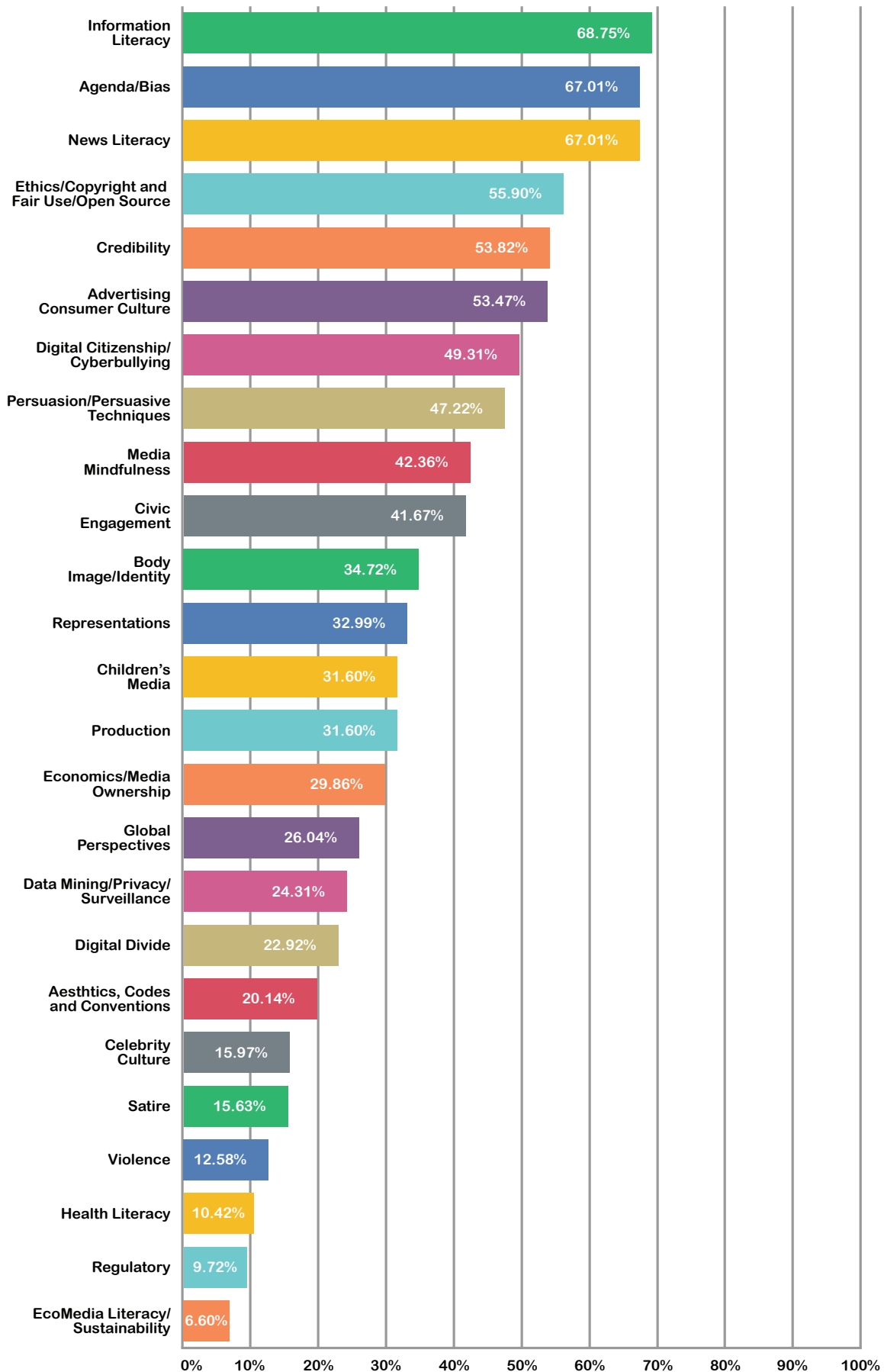
“

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Topics Included in Media Literacy Courses or Programs



OBSERVATION 3

In What Contexts is Media Literacy Included?

The presence and placement of media literacy continues to be an area of debate and interest. Respondents referred to varied placements for media literacy in their organizations and institutions. Thirty-eight percent of respondents reported media literacy is part of a standard content area course, while 24% shared it is a stand-alone subject. In 16% of responses, media literacy was described as part of an informal context, such as an advisory, after school program, or community event. In about 13%, media literacy was included as part of the

Library Curriculum, while about 9% collectively shared it is part of professional development, seminar or guest lecturing, or special events. Together, these varied placements suggest media literacy is valid and viable in a range of contexts and in addressing many purposes, from cross-curricular integration to professional development and community events. Media literacy, in turn, offers not only a subject of study, but also a way of teaching and learning that is meaningful across contexts.

GAP

The multiple contexts across and within which media literacy education is included and taught add to the challenge of scaling. Effective growth of the field requires comprehensive research and analysis of not only where media literacy education may be included, but also an investigation into the decisions that impact the inclusion and positioning of media literacy across its varied contexts.



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OBSERVATION 4

What Materials are being used in Media Literacy Education?

Since a core component of media literacy education is the analysis, evaluation and creation of media, then the resources that facilitate screening, streaming, downloading, reading, listening to, and playing with media, are central to any SNAPSHOT of the field. Consider, however, that the 300+ responses to the survey generated a list of over 500 resources. Over half the respondents shared at least two resources, and some as many as ten or more! The resource mentioned most frequently was NAMLE, perhaps as NAMLE was distributing the survey. The organization Common Sense Media was almost as frequently mentioned. The statement “self created materials” was the third most listed resource, reflecting that educators and practitioners are often creating and customizing resources to fit their specific needs. Several organizations providing free, quality resources were frequently mentioned including the Center for Media Literacy, Media Education Foundation, News Literacy Project, Newseum, and Project Look Sharp. Approximately two-thirds of all respondents mentioned at least one of these eight resources, without a pull-down

menu of options or other visual to guide their selection.

A few of the scholars that frequently focus their research and publications on the field of media literacy are clearly relied upon as resources as they were mentioned often, including Renee Hobbs, Henry Jenkins, Douglas Kellner, and Sonia Livingstone.

However, after the eight online resources and four scholarly authors mentioned above, there is minimal consensus across all remaining resources. The list runs the gamut from TED Talks to YouTube to over 50 different books, seven academic journals, several Twitter accounts, hashtags, and numerous websites. Resources may be categorized as: (1) media industry created and distributed, (2) education industry created and distributed, (3) personally created and used. This list of resources reflects a thriving field in which ample materials are available and useful, but it also reveals a lack of cohesion for accessing materials.

GAP

This snapshot reflects a gap in comprehensive curricular materials. In other words, there is a lack of a central, online repository of comprehensive, quality curriculum materials and lesson plans available for free to teachers and other professional educators. While innumerable resources are accessible across many modalities, to move from scattered implementation to frequent, integrated practice requires an all-inclusive curriculum containing not only content materials, but also scaffolded lesson plans with clear objectives and relevant assessments. Future initiatives or studies might solicit grade-leveled curricula for organization in a searchable database, beginning the process needed to develop a panoramic view of practice.

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Most educators are addressing media literacy and related topics with limited instructional time.

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OBSERVATION 5

What Challenges Impact the State of Media Literacy in the U.S.?

Our SNAPSHOT revealed that media literacy is not in all education environments, despite the availabilities of resources and the presence of people dedicated to bringing media literacy into their schools, colleges, and other educational contexts and programs. It is not included in all curriculum and most schools do not have a trained person focused on media literacy education to support implementation and learning. The disconnect between recognition of need and demonstration of action is vast and poses multiple challenges. We sought to bring attention to this disconnect by asking respondents to help us understand their biggest challenges. The two challenges cited most often actually have little to do with media literacy and everything to do with our education system. The top two challenges were “competing curricular requirements” (50%) and “lack of time” (45%). Competing curricular requirements may be tied to standardized, high stakes testing as that was not an option provided in the survey. Since the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and its successor, Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), K-12 schools have been pressured to meet external demands. In schools across the country, curriculum decisions focus on subjects that will be tested statewide and nationally. Media literacy may be an acknowledged need, but it is not on the list of subjects tested and therefore is simply not perceived as critical to school curriculum as other subject areas.

The next most common challenges were “lack of institutional understanding of what media literacy is”

(26%), “lack of content/curricular resources” (24%), “funding” (22%), and “lack of content area curricular training” (19%). It is worth noting that each of these areas impacts the other. For example, a lack of institutional understanding of what constitutes media literacy may lead to a struggle in finding appropriate resources or securing funding for courses, programs, and community endeavors. Or, although respondents provided hundreds of snapshot examples of resources (as discussed in Observation 4 above), putting those resources together into a meaningful curriculum and course of study requires a deeper understanding of the field and is time consuming, especially if the goal is to create learning modules that combine critical analysis and creative action/agency in a measurable way.

“ The disconnect between recognition of need and demonstration of action is vast and poses multiple challenges. ”

GAP

Overall, there is a lack of public understanding about what it means to be “media literate.” Media literacy education is not simply addressing “fake news” or teaching skills in using information and communication technologies. Certainly, those areas are a part of media literacy, but media literacy education comprises a broader, critical field of study and cross-disciplinary pedagogy anchored in cultivating critical thinking and reflective habits of mind about the messages we receive and create.

The challenges mentioned above (e.g. competing curricular requirements, lack of resources, and the need for content area training) represent repeated and consistent barriers to media literacy practice and praxis. They reflect conversations between media literacy educators across a range of contexts, including with colleagues and peers in schools and institutions and at regional and national conference gatherings. These challenges are the topics of journal articles and book chapters. Several of these topics have been referenced in earlier observations throughout this SNAPSHOT. They are core challenges in the field.

Many of these challenges reflect a lack of funding. However, funding is not a need unto itself. Funding is a need in service of other needs. To the extent that media literacy education has received funding, it has often focused on targeted projects, such as combating fake news or addressing cyber-bullying, and less on comprehensive media literacy education. Perhaps broad-based funding will become available once policies are implemented to support media literacy education and encourage high quality scalable media literacy programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this SNAPSHOT was to begin a conversation about the state of media literacy in the United States. While there has been growing interest and enthusiasm for media literacy education, a holistic, national effort is needed to advance the field.

This SNAPSHOT is an attempt to:

UNDERSTAND current practices of media literacy education across institutions, schools, organizations and communities.

FACILITATE general public awareness and discourse in media literacy education.

ENGAGE elected officials, tech companies, and others in the need to support efforts in media literacy education.

EMPOWER teachers to include media literacy in their curriculum.

IDENTIFY new developments and challenges.

AGGREGATE syllabi, assessment tools, activities, books, and other resources.

As we learned in this SNAPSHOT, there is much work to do in facilitating greater connections, visibility of practice, and voice in the community. The “gaps” discussed throughout this SNAPSHOT serve as guideposts for the recommendations listed below:

1 Expand training and professional development opportunities for media literacy instruction, particularly teacher training for both pre-service and inservice teachers in Colleges of Education, as well as training for teacher education faculty and others coordinating programs, including professional development, after school or out-of-school programs.

2 Outreach to diverse populations, specifically communities of color, to support their participation, scholarship, teaching or new program development.

3 Support inquiry into practice, such as small scale qualitative case studies and larger, comprehensive ethnographic examinations, in order to understand structures that invite or prevent media literacy practice, and develop a clearer picture of how practices are enacted and evaluated to life in classrooms and other environments.

4 Establish an online, central repository for the collection, curation, and aggregation of resources, including not only content materials, but also thoughtful and complete course designs and lessons for a variety of ages, grades, and contexts that include clear learning objectives, aligned assessments, and appropriate, relevant pedagogies.

5 Disseminate an annual survey to gauge changes, improvements, and challenges in research, practice, and assessment.

6 Advocate for public understanding, such as a visibility campaign, with goals to clarify the purpose and urgency of media literacy.

We recognize that there are already many positive initiatives, events, and actions taking place that address several of the recommendations stated above. For instance, public outreach and visibility are key aspects of U.S. Media Literacy Week, where coordinated regional events illustrate growing engagement in media literacy. Further, the biennial NAMLE Conference continues to bring together scholars and practitioners across diverse contexts in dialogue and sharing about professional development, teacher training programs, courses, and research. We look forward to supporting the promise and potential of media literacy, as well as tackling related challenges and struggles. Working with educators, organizations, media and technology companies, elected officials, and others interested in media literacy, we seek to intentionally advance the value, purpose, and pedagogies of media literacy education in order to best prepare today's students and citizens for a successful future.



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The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to media literacy as a basic life skill for the 21st century. For more information please visit www.NAMLE.net. NAMLE membership is free, join the movement today.

**Share your feedback.
Join the conversation.
#stateofmedialiteracy**

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APPENDIX

Survey Questions

- 1) Name
- 2) Organization Name/Institution
- 3) Organization Type
- 4) Job Title
- 5) Content Area
- 6) Education
- 7) City/State/Postal Code
- 8) Email
- 9) Age
- 10) Gender
- 11) Race/Ethnicity
- 12) Twitter Handle
- 13) Website/Blog
- 14) Are you a NAMLE Member?
- 15) What is your primary role?
- 16) Describe how media literacy has been or is currently included in your organization/institution?
- 17) What materials are you using to teach media literacy? Where did you receive media literacy educator training?
- 18) Which topics are covered within this course or program? Please limit your answer to no more than 10 topics.
- 19) What are your biggest challenges when incorporating media literacy into your classroom, institution, non-profit, or other organization?
- 20) Is there any other information you feel would be important to add?
- 21) If applicable, could you please share a link to your curriculum, syllabus or website?
- 22) Would you be open to a follow-up phone call about media literacy?





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