MEXICANOS PRIMERO
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EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

PREPARING NEW GENERATIONS FOR A DIGITAL WORLD

Digital citizenship and well-being, the next major challenge in education.

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The current generation of children and adolescents is the first to grow up in a hyperconnected environment. However, access to the internet and devices does not by itself guarantee responsible, safe, ethical, and healthy use of technology. This document outlines the benefits and risks of digital technology and highlights the importance of educational policy going beyond expanding access, recognizing the challenges students face and leveraging the potential of technology for learning and participation. It also underscores the need for comprehensive strategies in public policy and educational practice that train and support students, teachers, and families in developing digital citizenship competencies. It presents ideas to reflect on the current situation and initial proposals to move from an infrastructure-centered approach toward competency development, making digital citizenship the next major challenge in education.

Over the last decade, access to and use of digital technologies has grown exponentially. Two historic moments mark this change: first, the COVID-19 pandemic, which halted physical contact and accelerated the adoption of digital tools in areas where they had not previously been central, such as education; and second, the arrival in 2022 of mass access to artificial intelligence.

This growth in connectivity and familiarity with digital technologies has brought major benefits, such as the possibility of delivering and scaling educational services to places that were previously difficult to reach, or collaborating remotely with people across different latitudes. However, it has also generated new consequences and risks, many of which we are only beginning to understand.

Today, with more research and global forums for debate, we are starting to recognize both the opportunities and the risks of the digital world, and the importance of weighing advantages and disadvantages when deciding how to incorporate it into educational practice. However, the speed with which we adopt this new digital reality, and how far we go in maximizing benefits and reducing risks, depends on public policy makers and on those who educate at home and in schools.

The key is to promote use of digital technologies that contribute to children and adolescents' well-being, training them to become citizens capable of using them critically, responsibly, and safely, thereby helping build a more positive hyperconnected society for all.

A DIGITAL WORLD

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Between opportunities and risks in the digital world

Globally, digital technology has helped improve quality of life, facilitate immediate access to information, increase access to and functionality of health, finance, education, and government services, boost the economy, strengthen civic participation, and enable global collaboration across many fields.

In education, digital technologies have been shown to (Bitto Urbanova et al., 2023; Haleem et al., 2022):

- Expand access to learning opportunities in remote contexts.
- Enable personalization of teaching according to each student's needs.
- Help transform school into a more interactive and motivating space.
- Facilitate access to innovative educational resources.
- Help reduce teachers' administrative burden.
- Offer adolescents and young people opportunities to learn, develop future-ready skills, connect with others, and be entertained.

While access to technology has brought many benefits to society, it is also necessary to recognize usage risks that often go unnoticed. Various studies have shown that, among developing children and adolescents, prolonged use of digital technologies and platforms such as social media can affect different dimensions of their well-being.

It is important to note that these effects vary by age, level of socioemotional, physical, and cognitive development, context, and the type of guidance and use of technology.

The following table presents part of the international evidence available:

Dimension of well-being	Main associated risks
Socioemotional	Spending a lot of time on digital screens, especially in video games and social media, is associated with decreased socioemotional well-being, generating issues such as: ·Anxiety, depression, and emotional fatigue (Haidt, 2024; Vasconcellos et al., 2025; Sanders et al., 2024). ·Low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction (Capraro et al., 2025; Saiphoo et al., 2020). ·Behavioral difficulties such as aggression, hyperactivity, and conduct problems (Eirich et al., 2022; Vasconcellos et al., 2025). ·Loneliness and social isolation (Zhang et al., 2022). ·Addiction to device and social media use (Capraro et al., 2025).
Physical	Time online also changes users' physical activity, creating risks of: ·Sleep disturbances (Olivares-Guido et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). ·Sedentary behavior and obesity (Aghasi et al., 2020; Haghjoo et al., 2022). ·Eyestrain and related symptoms such as myopia (American Optometric Association, 2024; Fuentes, 2024). ·Postural problems and muscle pain (Young et al., 2022).
Cognitive	Cognitive development is also affected by excessive use of digital platforms. For example: ·Attention deficits and lower concentration (Moisala et al., 2016; Vasconcellos et al., 2025). ·Delays in language development (Madigan et al., 2020). ·Low academic performance due to excessive social media use (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2019). ·Misinformation due to difficulty detecting fake news and weak critical thinking (Save the Children, 2024). ·The use of AI for writing tasks affects brain activity by reducing memory and creativity (Kosmyna et al., 2025).
Other risks	There are also other risks linked to inadequate, unsafe, or unsupervised use, such as: ·Loss of privacy, data theft, and identity fraud (Stoilova et al., 2019). ·Exposure to inappropriate content such as violence, pornography, and hate speech (Digital Wellness Lab, 2025). ·Sexting and the non-consensual distribution of intimate content (García, 2024; Internet Watch Foundation, 2023; UNICEF, 2024). ·Cyberbullying, grooming, extortion, and criminal recruitment (Capraro et al., 2025; ConParticipación, 2025; INEGI, 2023; SIPINNA, 2018a). ·Unequal access to AI tools can reinforce educational inequalities (Brotto, 2025).

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Faced with this reality, we need to pause and reflect:

How can we leverage the opportunities of digital transformation without ignoring the risks it entails?

The answer requires stepping back to reflect in order to act: Embrace digital transformation while equipping our educational communities with useful resources, creating safe spaces for students inside and outside the classroom, and preventing risks.

Educators, mothers, and fathers: what do they say?

At KMBAL A.C. we conducted a consultation with 265 educators and more than 70 mothers and fathers from different regions of the country to learn their views on the use of digital technology.

Preliminary results show that **most see the use of digital technology as important and inevitable, but concern predominates along with a sense of not being sufficiently prepared to support their sons, daughters, and students toward responsible and beneficial use**.

Some of the most important data are shown in the following table:

Teachers responded:	
97%	Consider educating children and adolescents in the responsible and appropriate use of technology very important.
87%	Do not feel sufficiently prepared to address digital risks with their students.
40%	Feel concern or insecurity about their students' use of technology.
28%	Consider children and adolescents' use of technology risky.
1 in 4 schools	Has not considered it necessary to implement actions on this topic.

Parents responded:	
99%	Consider educating children and adolescents in the responsible and appropriate use of technology very important.
72%	Do not feel sufficiently prepared to guide their children's use of technologies.
60%	Feel fear and insecurity about their children's digital use.
41%	Perceive the use of digital technology as risky.
6 out of 10 families	Identify socioemotional changes in their children after device use at home.

(Full report available at https://www.kmbal.org/cibidigital)

The main risks that concern them include:

- Excessive screen time.
- Exposure to inappropriate content.
- Difficulty identifying false information.
- Cyberbullying and its effects on socioemotional well-being.
- Loss of privacy and contact with strangers.

These findings reflect the urgency of developing in girls, boys, and adolescents the competencies needed to use technology in a safe, ethical, healthy, and responsible way, which organizations such as UNESCO (2024) and the Council of Europe (2025) call **"digital citizenship skills"**.

In an environment where clicks, likes, and screens are part of daily life, it is not enough to know how to use technology; we must learn to use it well.

However, educators pointed out that they face obstacles to addressing these topics in school, mainly due to a lack of time and curricular space, as well as resistance from some mothers and fathers. In addition, both teachers and families recognized the need to learn about digital citizenship themselves, so they can better support girls, boys, and adolescents in more responsible and productive uses of technology, with benefits not only for individuals but also for communities.

What have we done in Mexico?

Mexico has made progress in access and connectivity, legal frameworks to protect digital rights, and reactive measures to address online risks.

However, most actions have focused on infrastructure or on containing symptoms of the problems, rather than preparing girls, boys, and adolescents to live and participate fully in a digital world.

1. Access and connectivity

According to the 2024 State Digital Development Index (IDDE 2024), **internet coverage has increased**, especially due to mobile data, expanding access even in rural and marginalized areas (CMD, 2024). In this regard, NNA are in the lead: In 2023, 81.2% of the population aged 6 or older used the internet, while in the 12–17 age group the figure rose to 92.4% and among youth 18–24 it reached 96.7% (INEGI & IFT, 2024).

However, these advances in connectivity coexist with significant gaps. Only 43.5% of households in Mexico have a computer, far below comparable countries such as the United States (83%), Chile (64.5%), and Argentina (61%).

Moreover, many schools also lack necessary equipment, and **educational use of the internet fell by 6%**, indicating that access does not necessarily translate into meaningful gains for learning and development (CMD, 2024).

2. Regulation and protection of digital rights

Mexico has advanced legally to protect digital rights and address online risks. For example:

- The General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents recognizes the right to **access ICT** and to receive protection from risks associated with digital technology use (SIPINNA, 2018b).

- The Olimpia Law categorizes digital violence as a crime and penalizes the non-consensual distribution of **intimate content and other forms of online harassment**.

- The Federal Law on Protection of Personal Data affirms that **privacy** is a human right and sets rules for governments and companies to safeguard citizens' personal information.

- States such as Querétaro, Guerrero, Tamaulipas, Jalisco, Sonora, Coahuila, and Nuevo León **have advanced laws and reforms to regulate the use of cell phones and other devices in the classroom**, seeking to reduce distractions and negative effects of inappropriate use (Barragán, 2025).

International experiences show positive impacts: in Portugal, schools applying the measure reported a 59% decrease in bullying and more than a 57% reduction in cases of indiscipline and fights in secondary schools (elEconomista.es, 2025). In France, a pioneer in banning cell phones in basic education since 2018, pilot programs in secondary schools showed more social interaction, physical activity, and concentration, and less bullying, leading to an expansion of the measure in 2025 (Chrisafis, 2025).

3. Education for the digital world

Some efforts have been made to develop digital and digital citizenship competencies.

- The New Mexican School recognizes the importance of learning about ICT.

- Platforms such as @prende.mx offer online courses on cybersecurity and digital competencies.

- Companies like Google for Education and Microsoft Education promote teacher training programs.

- Civil society organizations such as "Movimiento STEM+," "No Es Momento," and "CiBi Digital" by Kmbal A.C. promote topics such as science and technology knowledge, digital citizenship, and prevention of digital risks.

However, as shown above and confirmed by the Digital Development Index, digital capacities and skills remain low (CMD, 2024). **This indicates that progress is still needed both in the technical skills required for employability in the digital era and in digital citizenship competencies** such as critical thinking, media literacy, digital well-being, and responsible and safe participation.

Policy implications

This analysis reveals key opportunities for action in two priority areas:

1. Access

Although internet users have increased, especially via mobile devices, we must not forget that significant challenges remain that may be widening inequality in the use of technology.

Many schools still lack stable connectivity and sufficient computers, and only a minority of households have such equipment. In addition, the educational use of technology remains limited, preventing full leverage of its potential for learning.

2. Training

To accompany access opportunities and ensure that technology is used responsibly, safely, ethically, and healthily, **we can promote a coordinated effort between public policies and practical actions for training in digital citizenship and well-being**, responding to the needs of girls, boys, and adolescents, as well as those who accompany them: families and educators.

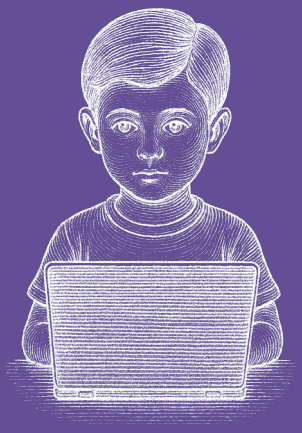
- Implement **age-differentiated regulations** that protect children's and adolescents' well-being while enabling the opportunities that digital technology offers.

- Promote **collective solutions in educational communities** that include:
  - **Training for children and adolescents** to develop digital citizenship competencies that allow them to navigate the virtual world critically, safely, and responsibly.
  - **Training for educators and mothers and fathers** in digital citizenship so they can model digital technology use and guide children.

- **Establishment of shared agreements and strategies** among families, schools, girls, boys, and adolescents that prioritize their well-being.

Clear regulations, a common understanding, and collective strategies are urgent to strengthen both risk prevention and the positive use of digital technology for education and citizenship.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY REFLECTION PROMPTS



A necessary reflection

Now is the time to pause and consider our stance on digital technologies. Their presence will not diminish, but we can decide how we receive and use them. We need to train active, critical digital citizens, capable of seizing opportunities and preventing risks.

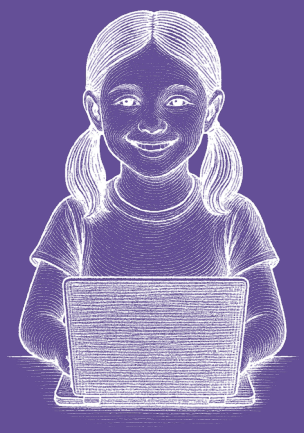
· *What is our position on the use of digital technologies, and what model of digital society do we want to build?*

From connectivity to competencies

Mexico has made progress in connectivity and in creating protective legal frameworks. However, access alone does not guarantee positive use. The major pending task is to develop digital and digital citizenship competencies so new generations can seize the educational and social opportunities technology offers while also reducing potential risks.

· *Are we ready to move from guaranteeing connectivity alone to building competencies that drive responsible digital citizenship?*

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY REFLECTION PROMPTS (CONT.)



A dilemma to analyze: the challenge of device use in schools

In Mexico, cell phones are the main means of access to the internet and digital technology. Their prohibition in schools can help reduce distractions and improve academic concentration. However, since they are the principal gateway to digital resources, banning them could limit opportunities for learning and practicing digital skills that are both inevitable and necessary for life today and in the future.

· ***How can we balance the need to reduce distractions with the urgency of preparing girls, boys, and adolescents to use technology in a critical, responsible, and productive way?***

Toward an integrated policy

Current measures have been mostly reactive and isolated. A systemic strategy is needed that links access, regulation, and training in digital citizenship, involving schools, families, and educational communities. Only then can we ensure that digital technologies contribute to individual well-being and to our society's growth.

· ***What concrete steps can we take as a country to build a comprehensive strategy for digital citizenship and well-being?***

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