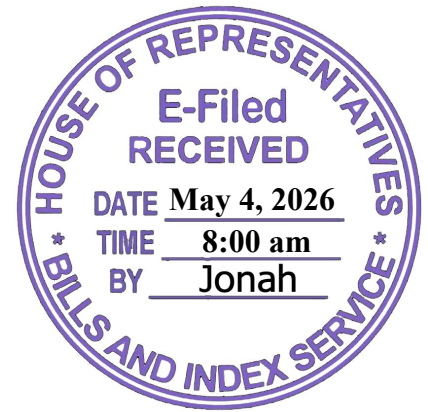


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session
House Bill No. **9024**



Introduced by: Congressman **BIENVENIDO M. ABANTE, JR.**

AN ACT
PROMOTING TRADITIONAL FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING IN
KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 6, PROHIBITING LEARNER USE OF
PERSONAL DIGITAL DEVICES DURING CLASS HOURS, AND LIMITING
SCREEN-BASED INSTRUCTION AS THE DEFAULT MODE OF TEACHING

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The early and middle elementary grades, Kindergarten to Grade 6, are critical years for building and consolidating the foundations of reading comprehension, writing, handwriting fluency, numeracy, study habits, and sustained attention.¹ These competencies require focused, repeated, and tactile learning experiences that are best developed through structured, print-based, handwriting-based, and developmentally appropriate instruction especially in the primary grades while progressively strengthening higher-order comprehension and problem-solving through the elementary years.²

While digital tools can support learning when used deliberately, the increasing presence of screens and learner-owned gadgets in the classroom may contribute to distraction and may crowd out time devoted to essential literacy and numeracy skills.³ Excessive or unregulated screen exposure during these formative years risks undermining the development of core competencies and classroom focus.⁴

¹ James, K. H., & Engelhardt, L. (2021). The effects of handwriting experience on literacy learning. *Psychological Science*, 32(10), 1524–1535. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8641140/>; Berninger, V. (2024, July 1). Handwriting: Beneficial to reading and often misunderstood. International Reading Research Conference. <https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/blog/2024/07/handwriting-beneficial-reading-and-often-misunderstood>.

² National Center on Improving Literacy. (n.d.). Research supporting foundational skills instruction in reading. <https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Research%20Supporting%20Foundational%20Skills%20Instruction.pdf>; Northwest Commons. (n.d.). Effects of print in early childhood programs. https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1116&context=education_masters.

³ Rivera, G. M. (2026). Screen time's effect on young minds. *The Kean Review*, 1(1). <https://digitalcommons.kean.edu/the-kean-review/vol1/iss1/2/>; Studocu. (2025, April 23). Impact of digital screen time on 6th graders' grades. <https://www.studocu.com/ph/document/um-penapлата-college/survey-of-philippine-literature/macatual-et-al-research-group/124679772>.

⁴ Al-Sharafi, M. A. (2023). Effects of excessive screen time on child development. *Cureus*, 15(6), e40608. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10353947/>; Hannan, L. (2025, April 30). Children's reading and writing develop better when trained by hand. *ScienceDaily*. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/04/250430142559.htm>.

Empirical studies and national assessments likewise reveal that many Filipino learners struggle with reading and mathematics skills in the elementary levels, reinforcing the urgent need for strengthened interventions and protected learning time across Kindergarten to Grade 6.⁵

This bill adopts a “screen-light” approach in Kindergarten to Grade 6 through two targeted rules: (1) it prohibits learner use of personal digital devices during class hours within school premises; and (2) it prohibits screen-based instruction as the default mode of teaching in Kindergarten to Grade 6. The measure is not a total rejection of technology. It allows limited exceptions for assistive technology, medical and safety needs, emergencies, and brief, teacher-directed screen use when reasonably necessary to achieve a specific competency.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



BIENVENIDO M. ABANTE, JR.

⁵ OECD. (2019). PISA 2018 Philippine National Report. <https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PISA-2018-Philippine-National-Report.pdf>; Inquirer News. (2023, December 5). PH students still among lowest scorers in reading, math, science: PISA. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1871182/ph-students-still-among-lowest-scorers-in-reading-math-science-pisa>.

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Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* — This Act shall be known as the “**Going Back to Traditional Education Act of 2026**”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* — It is the policy of the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality basic education and to make such education accessible to all.

Pursuant to the State’s authority to exercise reasonable supervision and regulation of all educational institutions, the State shall ensure that learners in Kindergarten to Grade 6 develop strong foundational skills, particularly reading and literacy, writing and handwriting fluency, numeracy, and sustained attention, through age-appropriate, print-based and handwriting-based learning, while preventing avoidable digital distraction and excessive or poorly managed screen exposure during instruction.

SEC. 3. *Coverage.* — This Act shall apply to all basic education schools and learning centers, whether public or private, offering Kindergarten to Grade 6, including alternative learning system (ALS) learning centers offering equivalent learning levels, subject to the reasonable supervision and regulation of the Department of Education (DepEd).

SEC. 4. *Definition of Terms.* — As used in this Act:

(a) “*Kindergarten to Grade 6*” refers to Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

(b) “*Personal Digital Device (PDD)*” refers to learner-owned smartphones, tablets, smartwatches with messaging or notification capability, handheld gaming devices, and other similar gadgets capable of screen interaction, excluding medically necessary devices.

(c) “*Class Hours*” refers to the official daily period of instruction and school-supervised learning activities, including remediation and school-supervised co-curricular learning time.

(d) “*Screen-Based Instruction (SBI)*” refers to teaching-learning activities where a learner’s primary engagement with content or tasks is through an electronic screen, including but not limited to watching or reading lessons on a device, answering activities on applications, or completing digital worksheets, whether online or offline.

(e) “*Non-Screen Instruction (NSI)*” refers to teaching-learning activities not requiring learner screen use, including but not limited to printed books or modules, handwriting-based tasks, pen-and-paper exercises, teacher-led discussion, manipulative learning aids, skills-based activities, and experiential learning.

(f) “*Assistive Technology*” refers to devices and applications used as reasonable accommodations to support learners with disabilities or special needs.

(g) “*Screen-Light Learning Plan (SLLP)*” refers to a school-level plan implementing this Act’s requirements and DepEd minimum standards, consistent with school-based management and shared governance principles.

SEC. 5. Prohibition on Learner Use of Personal Digital Devices During Class Hours (Kindergarten to Grade 6). – In Kindergarten to Grade 6, learners shall be prohibited from using Personal Digital Devices during Class Hours within school premises.

The prohibition shall not apply to:

(1) Assistive Technology required as a reasonable accommodation for learners with disabilities or special needs;

(2) medical or safety-related use as certified by school health personnel or as reasonably required under school safety protocols; and

(3) emergency communications, subject to school rules designed to prevent disruption.

DepEd shall prescribe minimum standards for the safekeeping, storage, retrieval, and parent or guardian coordination for Personal Digital Devices brought to school, consistent with child protection and due process in discipline.

SEC. 6. *Prohibition on Screen-Based Instruction as the Default Mode in Kindergarten to Grade 6; Limited Exceptions.* — In Kindergarten to Grade 6, Screen-Based Instruction shall be prohibited as the default mode of teaching for the delivery of core competencies, particularly in reading and literacy, writing and handwriting, and numeracy.

Screen-Based Instruction may be used only when all of the following are present:

- (1) the SBI is brief, targeted, and teacher-directed;
- (2) the SBI is reasonably necessary to achieve a specific learning competency that cannot be effectively achieved through NSI under the circumstances; and
- (3) the SBI complies with age-appropriate limits and safeguards prescribed in the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), including required breaks and attention and distraction safeguards.

DepEd shall establish minimum weekly protected time for:

- (1) print-based reading; and
- (2) handwriting-based learning activities, including pen-and-paper exercises and writing practice appropriate to grade level.

SEC. 7. *School-Level Implementation Through a Screen-Light Learning Plan.* — Each basic education school offering Kindergarten to Grade 6, whether public or private, shall adopt a Screen-Light Learning Plan consistent with DepEd minimum standards.

The SLLP shall cover at minimum:

- (1) classroom enforcement protocols for Sections 5 and 6;
- (2) procedures for device storage and safekeeping;
- (3) parent or guardian communication and partnership measures;
- (4) inclusion safeguards for learners requiring Assistive Technology; and
- (5) internal monitoring measures, including remediation supports for literacy and writing.

Private schools may comply through equivalent measures that meet or exceed the objectives and minimum standards under this Act and its IRR, as reflected in their SLLP.

SEC. 8. *Nature and Limits of DepEd Authority Over Private Schools.* — In implementing this Act with respect to private basic education schools, DepEd shall exercise only reasonable supervision and regulation to set minimum standards and ensure compliance.

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize DepEd to control the internal governance of private schools, including the management of their personnel, internal administration, and other matters beyond ensuring compliance with minimum standards under this Act and its IRR.

SEC. 9. *Monitoring, Compliance, and Corrective Action Plans (Administrative Model).* —

(a) **Monitoring.** — DepEd shall develop a monitoring framework for implementation of this Act that minimizes teacher administrative burden and focuses on learning outcomes and learner welfare.

(b) **Compliance Support.** — Where DepEd finds noncompliance, it shall primarily provide technical assistance and require the school to submit a time-bound Corrective Action Plan consistent with this Act.

(c) **Due Process.** — DepEd shall ensure notice and opportunity to be heard before issuing final findings of noncompliance and before requiring a Corrective Action Plan, consistent with administrative due process.

SEC. 10. *Teacher Support and Learning Resources.* — DepEd shall prioritize:

(a) the provision or facilitation of printed learning resources, including textbooks, workbooks, and learning modules for Kindergarten to Grade 6;

(b) teacher training on literacy, handwriting instruction, print-based strategies, and classroom management consistent with this Act; and

(c) research and monitoring tools to measure reading, writing, and numeracy outcomes in Kindergarten to Grade 6.

SEC. 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* — Within one hundred eighty (180) days from the effectivity of this Act, DepEd shall promulgate the IRR, which shall:

(a) set age-appropriate parameters, safeguards, and permitted exception types for Section 6;

(b) prescribe minimum standards for Screen-Light Learning Plans under Section 7;

(c) provide guidance on device storage and safekeeping under Section 5; and

(d) establish an administrative monitoring and corrective action framework under Section 9.

SEC. 12. *Appropriations.* —Such sums as may be necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. DepEd may realign existing appropriations, subject to applicable budgeting, accounting, and auditing rules.

SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.* —If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 14. *Repealing Clause.* —All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 15. *Effectivity.* —This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.