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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

To require a school that receives support under the E–Rate program of the Federal Communications Commission to allow parents of students attending that school to opt-out of screen-based instruction, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mrs. HOUCHIN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To require a school that receives support under the E–Rate program of the Federal Communications Commission to allow parents of students attending that school to opt-out of screen-based instruction, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Families' Option to Choose Unplugged Schooling Act'' or the ''FOCUS Act''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) A growing body of evidence finds that the large-scale digitization of classrooms has outpaced rigorous evaluation of the effects of that digitization, particularly on young learners, the foundational literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills of whom are still developing.

(2) Studies comparing reading and learning on screens as compared to paper have found that—

(A) for many children, especially in early and middle grades, screen-based instruction is associated with lower comprehension and weaker retention; and

(B) open-ended device use can reduce the ability of students to focus and sustain attention.

(3) The Office of the Surgeon General and other child health authorities have—

(A) warned about potential developmental and educational risks of excessive screen exposure for children; and

(B) recommended that schools limit screen use, especially for younger children, by favoring books, paper-based work, and other non-screen activities whenever possible.

(4) In many school systems, parents of younger children often have limited visibility into how much time their children spend on digital devices during the school day and limited practical ability to choose instructional models that are less reliant on screens.

(5) At a time when many school systems are facing concerns about declining literacy and numeracy, attention difficulties among students, and rising youth mental health challenges, it is important that Federal policy enables instructional practices in early and middle grades that—

(A) protect the developing brains and foundational skills of children;

(B) avoid unnecessary or excessive screen use in school; and

(C) respect the interest of parents in age-appropriate limits on digital exposure.

SEC. 3. EMPOWERING PARENTAL CHOICE TO OPT OUT OF SCREEN-BASED INSTRUCTION.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) COMMISSION.—The term ''Commission'' means the Federal Communications Commission.

(2) COVERED SCHOOL.—The term ''covered school'' means a school that receives support for eligible services under the Program.

(3) PROGRAM.—The term ''Program'' means the program set forth under subpart F of part 54 of title 47, Code of Federal Regulations, or any successor regulations.

(4) SCREEN-BASED INSTRUCTION.—The term ''screen-based instruction''—

(A) means any portion of curricular instruction during a school day in which a student is required to use an electronic device, including a laptop or tablet, whether individually assigned to the student or provided to the student for individual use during instruction, including through a shared device cart; and

(B) does not include instruction—

(i) that occurs in a dedicated computer laboratory separate from the regular classroom of a student, is limited to a scheduled block of time, and is used for a defined purpose, such as keyboarding, coding, or computer science;

(ii) that involves the use by a teacher of a single shared display device, such as a projector or classroom television, to present instruction to a class as a whole; or

(iii) provided through the use of assistive technology or an accommodation required under Federal or State law for a student with a disability.

(b) REQUIREMENT.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commission shall amend the rules governing the Program to provide for the following:

(1) As a condition of receiving support under the Program, a covered school—

(A) shall provide the parents of each student attending the covered school with an option for that student to receive instruction that is not screen-based instruction;

(B) may not penalize a student because a parent of the student selects the option provided under subparagraph (A);

(C) shall provide each student, for whom a parent selects the option provided under subparagraph (A), with a method of instruction that is not screen-based instruction that covers the same material taught through screen-based instruction; and

(D) shall file an annual certification with the Commission that the covered school is, and

will remain, in compliance with the requirements of this section, which the Commission shall make publicly available through an easily accessible and searchable database.

(2) A covered school shall not be required to document or monitor incidental use of electronic devices by a student for whom a parent has selected the option under paragraph (1)(A), if the covered school makes a good faith effort to comply with the requirements of this section.

(3) A covered school that makes a good faith effort to comply with the requirements of this section, and that promptly remedies any known violation of the requirements of this section, may not be subject to any penalty.

(4) A covered school shall have a reasonable amount of time, which shall be not more than 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act, to come into compliance with the requirements of this section.