Why Screen Time Matters

Never before has there been such a wealth of knowledge available to students right at their fingertips. The potential of the Internet to teach and inform, to enable communication and collaboration is exciting. Students must develop both technical skills and critical thinking skills to effectively utilize the information and take full advantage of credible Internet sources and opportunities. While the use of technologies as learning tools holds much promise, overuse for entertainment can have negative effects on children.

Computers, TV's, DVD players, cell phones, and other portable electronic devices are commonly used by children. Watching TV shows and movies and playing computer games are sedentary activities. Although some video gaming systems require some movement, most active video games do not demand a high enough intensity to achieve health benefits. See Appendix A for a glossary of screen terms.

Too much inactive, recreational screen time is linked to reduced academic achievement.[1] According to Statistics Canada, children with over 2 hours of screen time each day are twice as likely to become overweight/obese as those with an hour or less each day.[2] See Appendix E for full citations.

What is the Screen Smart Program?

The Screen Smart Program is designed to increase awareness among students and their families of how much time they spend in front of screens. In addition, it teaches children to manage screen time and encourages them to choose recreational activities that support good health. Reducing inactive screen time has many benefits, from improved health and well-being to better grades and school performance.

Various lifestyle factors contribute to the health of children. Screen Smart focuses on:

- Patterns of snacking and consuming sugary drinks while using screens
- Influences of media messages on those viewing screens
- Effects of excessive e-communications on social development

The Screen Smart Program complements other school initiatives like DPA (Daily Physical Activity) and Action Schools! BC, that engage children in physical activity and promote healthy and balanced lifestyles.

The Screen Smart Approach

Screen Smart encourages students to manage their screen time. They are asked to think about:

- The screens they use, and why they like them;
- The shows, games, and computer programs that are interesting and useful;
- The shows, games, and computer programs that are less interesting;
- Their favourite non-screen activities that improve well-being; and,
- The benefits of trading 30 minutes of recreational screen time for non-screen activities.

The program encourages students to participate in structured and unstructured active pursuits such as swimming, playing sports, hiking, and active games. The program also recognizes that non-active pursuits like reading, creating art, and playing music are also important activities to promote well-being.

1. ScreenSmart Program activities initiate new behaviour (exchanging sedentary for movement-based activities).

2. Students replace screen time with movement-based and other activities the student enjoys (supported by planning, observation, reflection and analysis).

3. Student enjoyment of new activities leads to repeated choice of movement-based and other acitivities.

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1. Pagani et al (2010); Hancox et al (2005); Swing et al (2010).
2. Statistics Canada, 2004.