Our Mission

Common Sense is the nation’s leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Letter from Our Founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Common Sense: The Solution for the Digital Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A Powerful Platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Common Sense Media: Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Common Sense Education: Educate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Common Sense Kids Action: Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Common Sense Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Common Sense in the News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2016 Financial Highlights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Staff Leadership and Board of Advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Regional Councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Regional Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Our Distribution Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Our Foundation Partners and Donors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Friends,

From digital citizenship to digital privacy, 2016 was a year of tremendous progress for Common Sense as we continued to pursue our mission to improve the lives of kids and families.

I’m incredibly proud to share this report with you, which shows in detail the great strides our organization has made in the places that matter most to children—at home, in the classroom, and within centers of government where policy decisions are made every day.

Today we reach more than 68 million people through our web and partner platforms with our extensive library of over 29,000 ratings and reviews. A portion of this growth is from our new Latino community, who come to us for advice and media recommendations.

Our work in schools continues to gather momentum. Over half a million educators relied on Common Sense’s edtech ratings and teaching strategies to help them discover the best digital tools for teaching. And 18 million students developed critical skills to support safe and responsible use of technology for learning and life using our award-winning K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum. Recognizing the need to prioritize student privacy, our Education team created resources to help teachers and administrators decode complex privacy policy language in digital educational products.

Through our Census reports and groundbreaking research, we are leading the national conversation about media and best practices around technology use. In May we released Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding Balance, a report that sparked a national dialogue about the consequences of our “always on” lifestyle.

We subsequently launched our #DeviceFreeDinner campaign, with PSAs debuting during prime-time Olympics coverage. This multiyear public-awareness campaign will challenge families to put down their devices at the dinner table and spend quality, face-to-face time together, as we lead a movement to define new cultural norms.

Though our commitment to families hasn’t changed in our 14 years, the work of Common Sense is more important than ever, and we are rising to face this new challenge. This year, we will integrate news literacy into our K-12 digital citizenship curriculum. In addition, through Common Sense Kids Action, we will build on our California Kids Campaign, our first-ever California Voter Guide and the Kid’s Bill of Rights, to motivate people to take action and be a voice for children on key policy issues.

I am beyond proud of what we accomplished in 2016, but I’m even more excited about the future. As media continues to evolve in unexpected ways, our core mission remains relevant. Now more than ever, we shape the conversation that families, educators, and policymakers have around media and technology in ways that will make the world better for our children.

Thank you for your support and for making our work possible.

James P. Steyer, founder and CEO
We Rate
Common Sense Media helps tens of millions of families make smart media choices. We offer the largest, most trusted library of independent age-based and educational ratings and reviews for everything kids want to watch, play, read, and learn. We partner with the leading media and technology companies to put our tools and content into the hands of over 68 million people, providing them with the confidence and knowledge to navigate a fast-changing digital landscape for kids.

We Educate
Common Sense Education gives educators and students the digital learning resources they need to harness technology for learning and life. Our K–12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum is taught in over 50% of schools in the U.S., equipping millions of young people with skills to become responsible digital citizens. Our advanced Common Sense Education ratings and teacher-training platform help over half a million teachers better use new educational tools, apps, and technologies to enhance their teaching and propel student learning.

We Advocate
Common Sense Kids Action is building a movement dedicated to making kids America’s top priority. We work on federal, state, and local levels with parents, advocates, and leading policymakers to help ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive in our rapidly changing world. Our Common Sense Legislative Ratings and advocacy tools leverage our unique membership base of parents and teachers in all 50 states to empower families and provide kids with a powerful voice.
A Powerful Platform:
Leveraging our reach and impact to drive systemic change

Common Sense Media
68M users per year

Common Sense Education
500K teachers
50% of U.S. schools

Common Sense Research
3.5B impressions

Common Sense Kids Action
Advocates in all 50 states
11K actions taken

Learning Ratings
Common Sense Kids Action
Latino Families Outreach
Privacy Evaluation Initiative

2012
2014
2015
2016
How do we raise the next generation of media-savvy kids?
“I found tons of resources and unbiased reviews to help me make wise decisions for my children, and have a newfound confidence in my decisions about their technology use and media exposure. It’s nice to be able to do a quick search of the website instead of having to personally preview every show or movie I’m interested in for them. Also, I like being able to browse for good content that I may not have come across in my routine. I’m now able to be more creative and productive as a parent in the digital age.”

— Rebekah Perrin, mother of a 2-year-old and a 6-month-old
Common Sense Media helps parents make informed media and tech decisions for their families.
Our 2016–2017 Highlights

Helping Families Make Smart Choices in the Digital Age
As the “always on” world of media and technology rapidly evolves, Common Sense Media continues to serve as a trusted guide for families. In 2016, we added 2,600 ratings and reviews of movies, games, apps, TV shows, websites, and books to expand our library to 29,000 titles. We also answered parents’ tough questions about raising kids in a digital age with over 600 advice articles and 300 videos tackling timely topics such as fake news and internet-connected toys. We cemented our position as the gold standard for media and technology ratings and advice by licensing our content to top cable providers and popular platforms such as Xfinity and Apple TV with deeper program-guide integration, allowing families to make informed media decisions with the click of a button. We signed new syndication partners including the Washington Post, the New York Times, and CafeMom for a total of 50 partners that carry our advice content about parenting in the digital age. We also launched in retail with a branded curation of the best family movies in 100 Target stores nationally.

Welcoming New Members and Audiences
As we have expanded and diversified our content library, we have broadened our demographic reach to millennial and Latino audiences, including piloting outreach to low-income Latino populations. We completed the second year of our Connected, We Advance partnership with Univision, which allowed us to reach Latino audiences through broadcast as well as on the ground, including by sharing our Spanish-language resources at education fairs across the country, reaching new audiences hungry for guidance and advice. Our distribution partner Comcast invited us to bring important information and resources to its Latino audience with its launch of Xfinity Latino. This year we also launched successful syndication partnerships that allowed us to serve Spanish-speaking parents with our culturally and linguistically relevant resources.

Leading the National Conversation Around Media and Tech
We pair original research with actionable tips and advice to help families establish healthy media and tech habits. This year’s reports led us to launch #DeviceFreeDinner, our multiyear public-awareness campaign to encourage families to put down their devices during dinnertime and enjoy the benefits of family conversation. With significant initial support from media partner NBCUniversal, we aired PSAs in prime time during the 2016 Rio Olympics. Since the launch, more media companies and partners have joined to amplify the campaign.

What’s Next for Common Sense Media
As our media and digital landscape continues to change, Common Sense will remain an indispensable resource for parents. We plan to expand our #DeviceFreeDinner campaign, actively scale our membership, grow Common Sense Latino, and broaden our reach to underserved audiences through new partnerships.

Our Impact: Media-Savvy, Empowered Kids
In 2016, we inspired millions of families to embrace healthy media habits and use media and technology wisely.

- Families are equipped with 29K ratings, 600+ advice articles, and 1.5K video tips and reviews
- Latino families have access to expanded Spanish-language resources
- Families across America are joining the #DeviceFreeDinner movement
- 50 syndication partners distribute our advice content to help families make smart media choices
What happens when school communities are equipped for the 21st century?
“After teaching Common Sense Education Curriculum to my ninth-graders, they’re more conscious of their reputation in regard to how they present themselves online and how what they say might impact somebody else and make them feel. I think it’s really important that all of us invest in the future of our youth, to have this conversation and understand: What does it mean to be a digital citizen?”

— Donald Saint-Germain, ninth-grade English teacher
Common Sense Education empowers educators to help students harness the power of media and technology for learning and life.
Our 2016–2017 Highlights

Empowering Students to Become Responsible Digital Citizens

In a world that has become increasingly reliant on technology, it’s imperative that students learn how to use media and technology responsibly and effectively with strong critical thinking skills. That’s why in 2016, Common Sense Education served over 18 million students with our award-winning Digital Citizenship Curriculum. The curriculum includes comprehensive resources for students, such as lesson plans, digital games and interactives, and assessments. Students learn to make smart and ethical choices online, and the program addresses real challenges to help schools navigate cyberbullying and other digital dilemmas.

Helping Educators Select High-Quality Digital Content

We’ve learned that teaching with technology can level the playing field and be effective with all kinds of learners with the right strategies in place. Common Sense Education is supporting teachers in discovering high-quality digital teaching products with almost 3,000 editorial reviews and 9,500 teacher reviews of edtech tools. Whether they are looking for the best math app for fifth grade or a collaborative writing tool for high school English, teachers use our comprehensive lesson plans, tips videos, and other advice-focused content to make informed decisions about the digital learning tools they use in their classrooms to propel student learning.

Guiding Teachers Through the Digital Shift

Common Sense Education is uniquely positioned to support district leaders and classroom educators as they make the shift to using digital technology in the classroom by providing in-depth professional training for classroom educators. In 2016, we trained over 25,000 of these educators with our professional development training, which includes in-person workshops, conference presentations, webinars, and online tutorials.

What’s Next for Common Sense Education

With demand for our digital citizenship program and edtech ratings growing, Common Sense Education will launch a Premium Membership offering in 2017 for schools that are interested in taking their technology use to the next level. We will also develop and integrate privacy evaluations into our core edtech product ratings to allow educators to select and implement products that protect student privacy as they enhance student learning.

Our Impact: The Next Generation of Leaders

In 2016, we helped create a positive school culture around learning and leadership with far-reaching results:

- 3M iBook downloads of our K-12 curriculum
- 9M Digital Compass games completed by students
- A global network of 500K+ educators and administrators
- 18M students (and counting!) are safe and savvy online and in life
What happens when kids become our nation’s top priority?
“I want better living conditions for my kids, for my kids’ friends, for my kids’ neighbors, for every child in California. ... Through Common Sense, I extend my network. We work together as a team with community leaders, with parents, and with caregivers to unite our voices. ... We’re so grateful to Common Sense for giving us the opportunity to magnify our voices, to unite them to advocate for our children.”

— Dr. Irella Perez, Common Sense Kids Action Community Organizer
Common Sense Kids Action is building a national movement to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed.
Growing Our Community of Parent Advocates

In 2016, Common Sense Kids Action continued to grow and leverage our advocate base to be a truly powerful voice for kids and influence policy and legislative action at the state and federal levels. We launched a suite of online tools to help advocates connect directly with elected officials about the issues that matter most to them. To enhance these efforts, we also launched a grassroots effort, the California Kids Campaign, featuring 20 parent organizers working in key districts throughout the state to mobilize parents around legislation that affects kids and families.

Expanding Access to Opportunity for All Kids

Common Sense Kids Action advocates for access to technology so that every student can graduate high school as college- and career-ready. We worked to ensure that every child has access to broadband and training to use the internet in a safe, ethical, and responsible way by advancing our federal “Broadband at School and at Home” agenda. We helped to modernize the federal Lifeline program to include broadband with discounted telephone service for low-income consumers, supported implementation of the ConnectHome program on the ground in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., to ensure low-income kids have access to high-speed internet to do their homework, and created model digital citizenship and media-literacy legislation that passed in a number of states across the country.

Influencing Policy on Kid-Partisan Ballot Initiatives

We launched the Common Sense Legislative Ratings program in 2016 to cut through the noise and give kids a clear and powerful voice in politics. Independent and nonpartisan, we rate bills as “For Kids” or “Against Kids” based on their potential effects on the lives of kids and families. The California Kids Campaign released the first-ever Common Sense Voter Guide in June 2016 to help parents understand and make informed decisions about 17 statewide ballot propositions.

What’s Next for Common Sense Kids Action

We have a bold agenda for the coming year: to protect student data privacy, expand digital citizenship education across all 50 states, overhaul California’s multipronged early-childhood system, connect every classroom and home to high-speed internet, and more. With these efforts, we will make sure every child has the opportunity to thrive in our rapidly changing world.

Our 2016–2017 Highlights

Our Impact: Each of Us Can Be a Voice for Kids

In 2016, Kids Action created new tools and made sure the voices of our advocates were heard across the country to spearhead a wide variety of kid-partisan legislative victories.

- A new legislative ratings program engaged new parent and educator advocates
- Published the first Common Sense Voter Guide
- Launched 25 new digital advocacy campaigns to pass 37 “pro-kid” laws
- Thousands of individual actions taken across all 50 states
How do we lead a national dialogue about the impact of media and technology on children’s lives?
The Common Sense Census: Plugged-In Parents of Tweens and Teens
This Common Sense Census was the first-of-its-kind nationally representative study since 2010 and included more than 1,700 parents of children age 8 to 18, who shared candidly about their own media use and their perceptions of their kids’ engagement with media and technology. The survey found interesting contradictions: Parents use over nine hours of screen media a day, yet overwhelmingly believe that they are good role models for their kids. The findings also created a comprehensive picture of parent strategies for mediating, monitoring, and managing media issues for their children.

What’s Next in 2017
Spring 2017 — News and America’s Kids
Groundbreaking research examining how kids age 10–18 receive and perceive the news.

Summer 2017 — Watching Gender
A new research brief on parents’ and kids’ attitudes toward gender as it’s reflected in movies and on television and how media stereotypes impact kids’ development.

Fall 2017 — Common Sense Census: Zero to Eight
The third installment of the Zero to Eight Census examines the role of media in young children’s lives from birth to age 8.

Research is the foundation of everything we do. The Common Sense Research program not only informs our parent advice content and educational programs, but also frames an important national dialogue about how media and technology influence children’s well-being.

Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding Balance
This research brief examined the latest scientific research about problematic media use, articulating its pervasiveness, forms, and possible impacts on kids’ well-being and development. In addition, a poll of over 1,200 parents and teens revealed the ways that the omnipresence of mobile devices is changing family life and the nature of parent-child relationships. The survey results found that half of teens and over one-quarter of parents feel they’re addicted to their mobile devices. Along with the survey, the research brief offered a fresh, comprehensive review of addiction, distraction, multitasking, and other issues associated with problematic media use in the U.S. today.

Connection and Control: Case Studies of Media Use Among Lower-Income Minority Youth and Parents
This ethnographic study explored the media lives of lower-income minority families, drawing from personal interviews and providing a window into how technology integrates into kids’ lives and affects their well-being. Among other findings, the report showed how media is used to make space from, and create connections to, family. The report was a substantial addition to a research space where qualitative work is often lacking and provided insights that add meaning to our quantitative work.

Parent Census: Nearly 1B online impressions
Technology Addiction: 2B impressions in just 3 days
Over 10M print and broadcast impressions
Over 850 news outlets covered the Census in the first week of its release, including:

AP  CNN  Forbes  NBC
npr  TIME  The Washington Post
In 2016, Common Sense received extensive media coverage for our organizationwide efforts to help kids thrive.
Common Sense in the News

Our research made headlines by highlighting issues central to kids’ healthy development and drew the attention of major media partners to amplify the message and scale our reach. Other topics earning major coverage included our policy and advocacy efforts, our advice on screen time, and our national PSA campaign, #DeviceFreeDinner.

The New York Times
Bridging a Digital Divide That Leaves Schoolchildren Behind

POLITICO
Child-advocacy group launches rating system for legislation
Politico, March 3, 2016

San Francisco Chronicle
An army for kids: SF nonprofit vows to boost their clout
San Francisco Chronicle, March 22, 2016

ABC Good Morning America
Teens and Tech: Inside Online Bullying
Good Morning America, April 2016

Los Angeles Times
The plan to get every California kid into preschool
Los Angeles Times, April 13, 2016

EdSurge
How Do Edtech Products Rate on Safety? Common Sense Education Platform Names the Good and the Not-So-Good
EdSurge, June 27, 2016

The Washington Post
Can you survive a device-free dinner?
Washington Post, August 5, 2016

CNN
TV rating system not accurate, little help to parents, study says
CNN, August 23, 2016

Business Insider
Facebook’s new app for high schoolers raises privacy concerns
Business Insider, August 24, 2016

USA Today
Docs update screen advice, say toddlers can FaceTime
USA Today, October 21, 2016

TIME
Parents Spend As Much Time on Screens As Teenagers
Time, December 5, 2016

NPR
Real Parents, Real Talk About Kids And Screens
NPR, December 6, 2016
2016 Financial Highlights

Sources of Funds — $19.1M

2016 Expense Distinction

YOY Comparative Sources of Funding

*2014 contribution to Major Gifts campaign
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Regional Events


The 2016 Los Angeles Luncheon featured USC Annenberg School of Journalism director Willow Bay, Hearst Magazines Chief Content Officer Joanna Coles, and Warner Bros. Entertainment Worldwide Corporate Communications and Public Affairs Executive Vice President Dee Dee Myers.

The 2016 Common Sense Media Awards featured special guest, former chairman of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission Tom Wheeler.

Bill Nye, host of Emmy Award-winning show Bill Nye the Science Guy, was honored at the 2016 Common Sense Media Awards for making science cool and engaging for a generation of kids.

The 2016 Common Sense Media Awards honored scientist, comedian, and author Bill Nye; founder of the Wear Orange campaign Nza-Ari Khepra; and PS1x library media specialist Marie Belle Vargas. Also pictured are Common Sense founder and CEO Jim Steyer and special guest, former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julián Castro.
Our Distribution Partners

Common Sense is proud to partner with leading media, retail, and technology companies that share our commitment to improving the lives of kids and families by providing our resources at the point of decision. Through the distribution of our ratings, reviews, articles, and videos, our partners help us empower families and achieve our mission.
Our Foundation Partners and Donors

We gratefully acknowledge our generous donors and foundation partners, whose support helps us to deliver our free parent resources and educational curriculum to millions of families and schools across the country and around the world.

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