

Mobile Phone Companies And Big Tech Getting Sued For Killing Our Kids

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More than 40 school districts across America are suing social media giants Facebook, Snapchat and TikTok for 'creating a youth mental health crisis'

- School districts allege that the companies have knowingly harmed children
- They are seeking damages for the larger mental health services needed
- [READ MORE: Children who use social media are more insecure, says study](#)

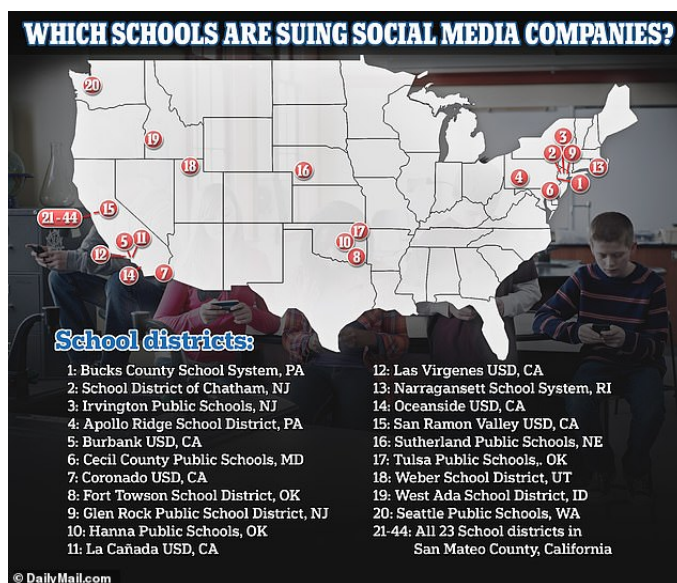
By [LUKE ANDREWS](#)

More than 40 school districts across ten US states are suing social media giants including [Facebook](#), [Snapchat](#) and TikTok over claims they 'knowingly caused harm to children' with their 'malicious' algorithms.

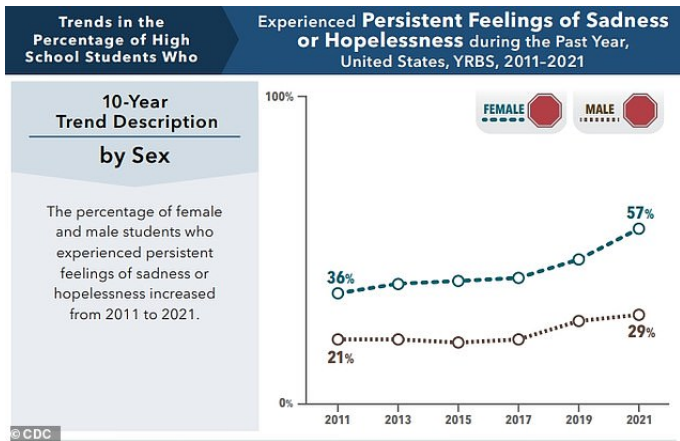
Schools are seeking damages for the larger mental health teams they now need to handle the crisis. They also point out that social media has fueled a rise in dangerous trends, such as the 'Blackout Challenge' where children strangle themselves.

Instagram, owned by Facebook, has been repeatedly pummeled for [promoting self-harm content](#) while other platforms have been accused of [making children insecure](#) — especially teenage girls.

Critics say, however, that the lawsuits are unlikely to be successful, suggesting it will be too hard to prove that social media companies caused the mental health crisis. They suggest that schools cannot sue sources of 'social ills' that cause damage to their property.



The above map shows the location of the school districts that have filed lawsuits against social media companies seeking damages for the expanded mental health services they are providing



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- Poor mental health levels in American children are now at record levels. The CDC has found 57 percent of girls in high school are now struggling with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Among boys, the level is 29 percent

al media companies have responded to the lawsuits saying there are already parental controls available on their platforms.

They also say that they are continuing to work hard to remove content promoting suicide, self-injury and eating disorders.

America's youths are in crisis, experts say, especially teenage girls where the number saying they are feeling sad or hopeless persistently has rocketed from 36 to 57 percent within a decade.

The proportion saying they were seriously considering attempting suicide has also risen to 30 percent compared to 19 percent a decade beforehand.

Experts have blamed multiple factors for the uptick including overbearing parents and disruptions caused by the Covid pandemic.

They have also suggested that social media could be a major cause because it encourages people to compare themselves to others, addiction and 'FOMO' or fear of missing out.

Teenagers are more vulnerable to this, they said, because they tend to be far more concerned about what others think of them.



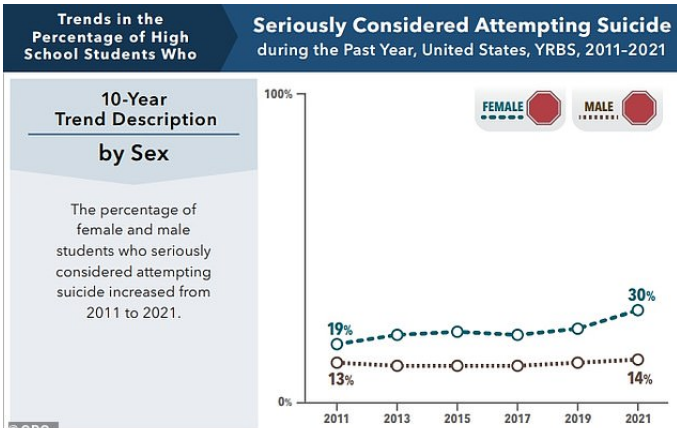
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School districts say that social media is harming children and they are seeking damages for the larger mental health services they now need (stock image)



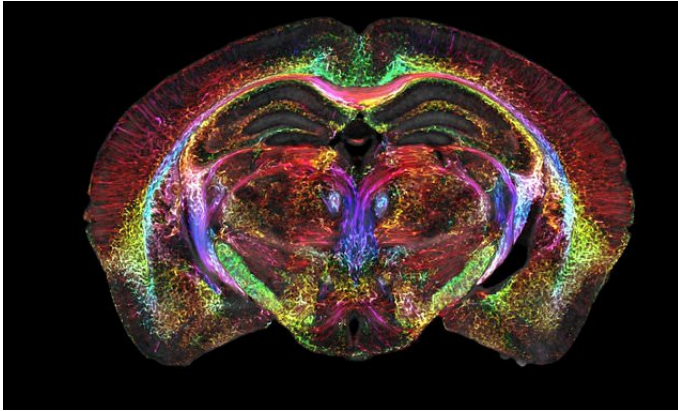
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There has also been an uptick in the number of high school girls considering attempting suicide, the CDC said, rising from 19 to 30 percent

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Filing the latest lawsuit last week at the Federal District Court in San Francisco County, Frantz law group said: 'We allege that Meta, TikTok, Snap, YouTube and other social media companies have engaged in reckless and negligent misconduct that has caused a mental health crisis among our youth.'

'Social media companies are and have been well aware of the harm they cause.'

'It must stop, and we will fight to hold these social media companies accountable for choosing profit over the mental health and safety of children and their families.'

The litigation involves 16 schools across nine states including six in California, three in Oklahoma, and one each in Maryland, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Nebraska, Utah, Pennsylvania and Idaho.

[Social media makes children insecure, study finds](#)



[Youngsters see regions in the brain that control feelings of reward and punishment become overreactive compared to their peers who are not always online.](#)

It says that children's ability to succeed in school is being seriously affected by mental health problems triggered by social media.

They add that many children and students are often subject to harmful and exploitative content viewed online.

Schools are seeking damages from social media companies, although an amount is yet to be revealed.

Seattle Public Schools, one of the largest in Washington, became the first to sue social media companies over children's mental health in early January.

Legal actions have since snowballed with two districts in New Jersey and one in California joining before a 109-page suit was filed by all 23 districts in San Mateo County, near San Francisco.

In San Mateo, schools are seeking damages over the 'devious lick' challenge, which saw children make off with soap dispensers, exit signs and even microscopes from schools before posting the videos on social media.

This suit points to rising rates of mental health problems among teenagers saying the rising popularity of social media 'tracks precisely' to the decline in mental health.

But lawyers are warning that the suits are unlikely to get far because it will be hard to prove that the mental health crisis was caused by social media.

Dr Eric Goldman, co-director of the High Tech Law Institute at Santa Clara University in California told [Law.com](#): 'Think about all the things that are social ills that manifest themselves on school property—drugs, political discord, domestic violence.

'Can schools sue all the potential sources of those social ills for nuisance? Can they sue the drug dealers for nuisance? Can they sue the gang organizers for nuisance? None of that makes sense.

'It's a social problem that needs to be dealt with through traditional law enforcement means—not with school districts usurping legislatures to make their own policy and enforcement.'

He added: 'It's my position that it's unlikely that the school districts have standing to claim the harms that are really attributed to students' personal lives.

'One way of thinking about it is school districts ought not to be filing these lawsuits because they aren't the right parties in interest.'

He added that so many schools were likely bringing the action because they were not being asked to cover any upfront costs.

'If the plaintiffs' lawyers are getting a cut of the economic upside, then they want to line up as many school districts as possible,' he said.

Antigone Davis, head of safety at Meta, which owns Facebook, responded by saying: 'We want to reassure every parent that we have their interests at heart in the work we're doing to provide teens with safe, supportive experiences online.

'We've developed more than 30 tools to support teens and their families, including tools that allow parents to decide when, and for how long, their teens use Instagram, age verification technology, automatically setting accounts belonging to those under 16 to private when they join Instagram, and sending notifications encouraging teens to take regular breaks.

'We've invested in technology that finds and removes content related to suicide, self-injury or eating disorders before anyone reports it to us.

'These are complex issues, but we will continue working with parents, experts and regulators such as the state attorneys general to develop new tools, features and policies that meet the needs of teens and their families.'

A Snap spokesperson said: 'Nothing is more important to us than the wellbeing of our community.

'At Snapchat, we curate content from known creators and publishers and use human moderation to review user-generated content before it can reach a large audience, which greatly reduces the spread and discovery of harmful content.

'We also work closely with leading mental health organizations to provide in-app tools for Snapchatters and resources to help support both themselves and their friends. We are constantly evaluating how we continue to make our platform safer, including through new education, features and protections.'