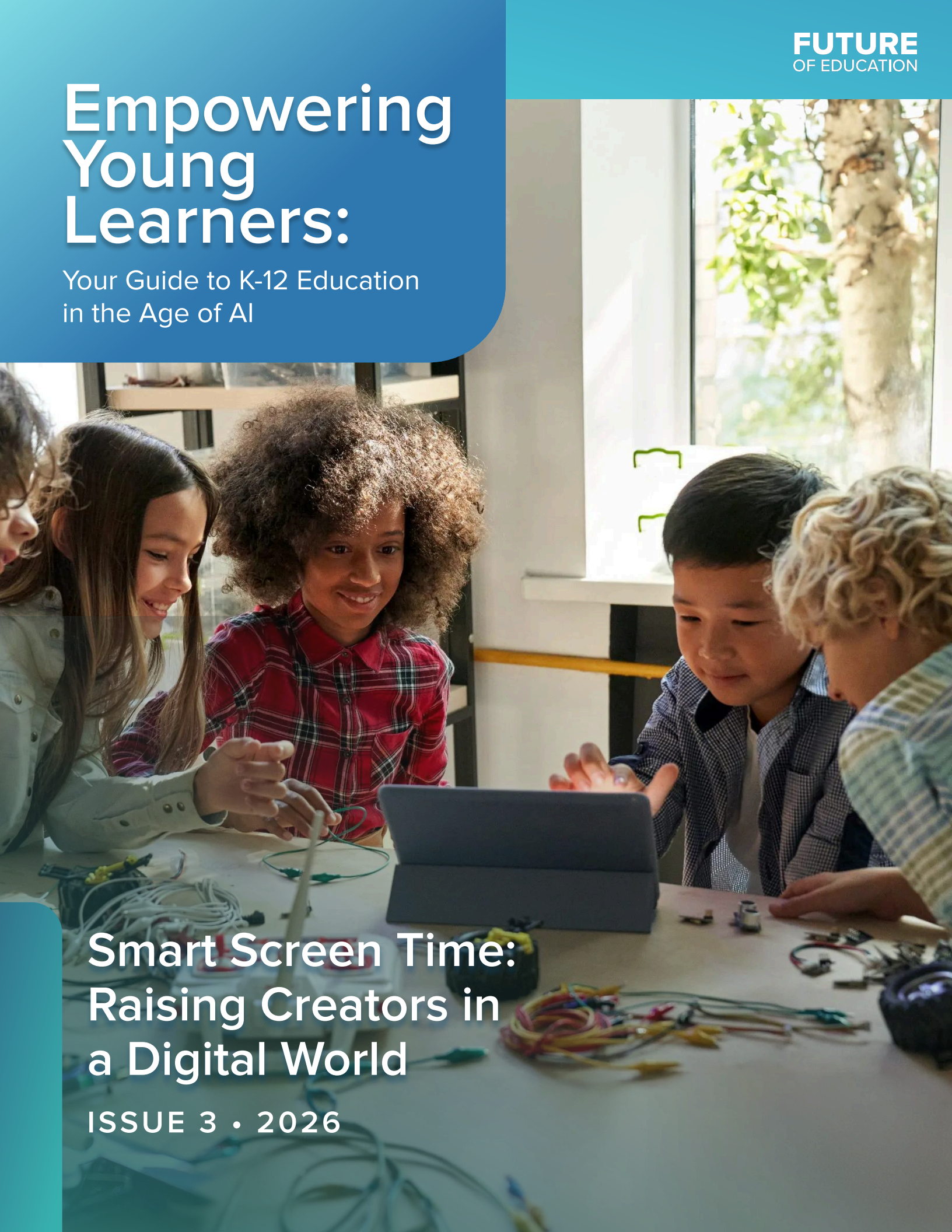


Empowering Young Learners:

Your Guide to K-12 Education
in the Age of AI



**Smart Screen Time:
Raising Creators in
a Digital World**

ISSUE 3 • 2026



Hello Parents!

Let's be honest: too much screen time isn't great for our kids. Devices at the dinner table. "Five more minutes" turning into an hour. Screens becoming the default answer to boredom.

These concerns are real.

But screens aren't going away. So our goal can't be to simply limit technology - it's to help kids use it to **create, build, and learn**. Done right, technology becomes one of the most powerful tools we have to motivate and engage our kids. This toolkit helps plant the seeds for growth, shifting kids from passive consumption to active creation:

- Creativity over scrolling
- Building over consuming
- Curiosity over passivity

Build the habits now. Watch them grow.

“Screens aren't going away. The question is whether our kids will just consume content or use technology to bring their own ideas to life.”

From MacKenzie's Bookshelf

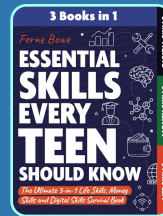
These books offer practical ideas for navigating screen time, building independence, and helping kids thrive in a digital world.



Own Your Screen Time

by Kara Coleman

This shame-free workbook helps teens understand how apps, games, and social platforms compete for their attention. The interactive exercises and real-world examples build digital awareness, critical thinking, and healthier habits that put kids back in control of their choices.



Essential Skills Every Teen Should Know

by Ferne Bowe

This practical guide prepares teens for real-world success. Covering everyday life skills, financial know-how, and digital responsibility, it equips ages 13–18 to solve problems, make informed decisions, and confidently navigate both online and offline challenges.



The Screen Time Solution

by Emily Cherkin

This parent-focused book offers a practical, judgment-free approach for families who want a healthier relationship with technology. Rather than focusing on restrictions alone, it helps parents create clear boundaries, strengthen family connections, and make more intentional decisions about digital life.



Apps, Sites & Games That Turn Kids Into Creators

Not all screen time is equal. Some screen habits leave kids with a device glued to their hands and scrolling for hours without much to show for it. Positive screen time helps kids build age-appropriate skills by creating, solving problems, and learning.

Grades K - 5

- [ScratchJr & Scratch](#) – Create stories and animations while learning the fundamentals of coding through play.
- [Tynker](#) – Build games and solve coding challenges that develop logic, creativity, and problem-solving skills.
- [BrickIt App](#) – Reimagine your LEGO collection by discovering new builds and creative possibilities using pieces you already have.



Grades 6 - 8

- [Code.org](#) - Explore how coding and AI work while learning to think critically and create with technology.
- [CapCut](#) – Produce videos and creative projects using intuitive editing tools for storytelling and design.
- [Code Combat](#) - Learn to code through gameplay, using strategy and problem-solving to progress through challenges.

Grades 9 - 12

- [Blender](#) – Design 3D models, animations, and digital assets used in games, films, and creative projects.
- [Brilliant](#) - Strengthen math, logic, and coding skills through interactive, hands-on problem solving.
- [Suno](#) - Create AI-powered images and videos to bring ideas and stories to life.



“One thing we've seen is that the best learning experiences come when people are actively engaged in designing things, creating things, and inventing things – expressing themselves”

*Mitchel Resnick,
LEGO Papert Professor of Learning Research at MIT*



[America 250: Click, Explore, Celebrate](#)

Looking for screen time that's more engaging AND timely? America 250 offers digital experiences that help bring history to life for kids and families. Start by exploring what's happening nationwide, then dive into your state for local and virtual ways to learn, create, and celebrate - right from your screen.

- Interactive map of events across the U.S. and its territories
- Links to national initiatives and online activities
- Easy ways to explore, learn, and celebrate from anywhere



Summer **MISSION: POSSIBLE**

Summer often means more free time *and* more screen time. Challenge kids to spend more of that time creating, building, and bringing ideas to life.

The mission, should they choose to accept it: **Create more than you consume.**

Use the checklist on the next page to keep track of your successful challenges. →



1. Get Started

Print the "Summer Mission: Possible" challenge list found on the next page.

2. Choose Your Challenge

Select activities from each difficulty column (easy, medium, hard) to stretch your child's skills.

3. Make a Plan

Decide when, where, and with whom they will create. Include simple, experiential rewards.

4. Track Progress

Check off each completed challenge along the way to see how far they've come.

5. Celebrate

Finish strong! Celebrate what your child created and who they became in the process.

Partners

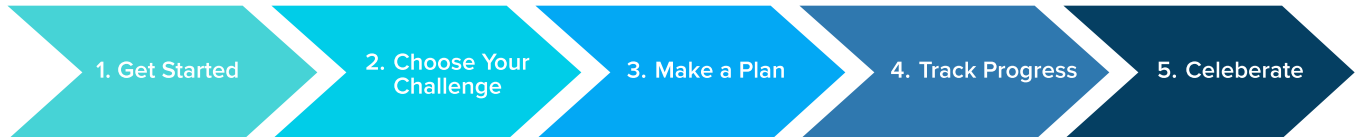
Eager for more? Check out our partner programs & summer camps below!



Summer **MISSION: POSSIBLE**

This is the mission, should you choose to accept it:

Create more than you consume.



Easy Challenges

Start Here + Build the Habit of Creating

Target:

- Create a “choose your own adventure” story
- Design a new level of your favorite video game
- Grow and care for a virtual plant or pet
- Build a digital vision board for your dream life
- Create a song or playlist that tells the story of your summer
- Design a toy version of yourself
- Reimagine the ending of your favorite movie or book
- Create a meme page around something you love
- Build your own emoji set or sticker pack
- Use AI to generate and illustrate a short comic strip
- Create a daily “1-minute learning” video series

Medium Challenges

Build Skills + Share Your Ideas

Target:

- Build a website about something you love
- Create a podcast with friends
- Start a family Substack or summer newsletter
- Design a fantasy sports league (baseball, soccer, etc.)
- Create a science or explainer YouTube show
- Produce and share social media content for a local non-profit
- Design a new LEGO kit and instructions
- Create a digital version of a classic game
- Write and illustrate a short comic book or graphic novel (with AI assist)
- Create a mini online course teaching something you know
- Run a virtual book club or interest-based community
- Build a personal portfolio site of your creations

Hard Challenges

Real-World Impact + Ownership

Target:

- Start a small online business (product, service, or digital goods)
- Design and prototype a new invention
- Launch a podcast with consistent weekly episodes
- Create a full album, musical, or storytelling project about your summer
- Build and launch a fully functional website or app
- Create a brand and marketing campaign for a cause you care about
- Develop a game from concept to playable version
- Partner with a local organization to solve a real problem
- Build an AI-powered tool or assistant for students or families
- Launch a YouTube channel with a clear niche and content strategy
- Organize a virtual event, competition, or showcase

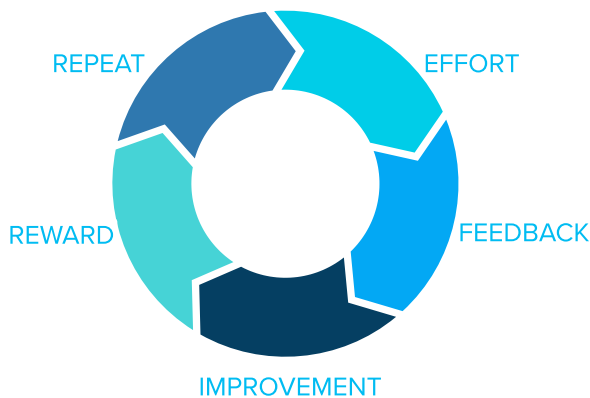
Are Video Games a Blueprint for Motivation?

Many parents worry that video games take up too much of their kids' time - and those concerns are understandable. But games are also built on clear goals, instant feedback, and constant progress. That's why kids stick with them.

The solution? Build on kids' gaming passions. When learning taps into that same drive, engagement follows.

Why Gaming Works

Part of what makes games so hard to put down is that they create a simple, effective loop:



They keep players engaged through:

- Clear goals
- Visible progress
- Immediate feedback
- Safe failure

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic (internal):

Doing something because it's enjoyable or meaningful

Extrinsic (external):

Doing something for points, a reward, or outcome

The key: Games use both. Rewards - especially those tied to quality time, personal choice, and meaningful privileges - ignite engagement. Small wins build momentum, and visible growth keeps it going.

“Motivation is not something you ‘do’ to a child. It is a natural impulse that arises when children feel they have a sense of control over their lives.”

— Ned Johnson co-author Self-Driven Child

Smart Screen Time Starts With A Plan.

If you've ever felt frustrated by constant screen-time negotiations, you're not alone. Screens can easily become the default response to boredom or quiet moments. A plan helps families be more intentional.

This summer, help kids **create more than they consume**. Build a smart screen time plan together.

What Is Smart Screen Time?

Smart screen time focuses on creating, learning, and problem-solving, not endless consumption.

- Create (build, design, produce)
- Learn (develop new skills and knowledge)
- Think (solve problems, explore ideas)

Why Should You Make a Plan?

Screen-time battles are exhausting. When kids help create the rules, they're more likely to follow them. Collaborate to design a shared plan to:

- Give kids a sense of ownership.
- Shift focus from limits → purpose.
- Turn screen time into a tool for growth, not a habit.
- Reduce daily conflict and negotiation.

How to Build Your Plan

Keep it simple. Focus on six areas:

- 1. Goals** – What do you want technology to help you do? Select goals that are specific and achievable.
- 2. Projects** – What will you create or learn? Example projects include: build a tower defense game, write and produce four songs, create a stop-motion animation short film. Use the Summer Mission challenge for ideas.
- 3. Time** – How much time do you need to make progress? Reframe screen time from a maximum timeframe (which might make it feel like a limited resource) to a helpful tool.
- 4. Rules** – What boundaries help your family stay intentional?
- 5. Celebration** – How will you recognize progress? Celebrate the small wins and the big successes on a daily or weekly basis.
- 6. Show Off** – Screen your movie, play your music, present something you designed or coded - show off whatever you're proud of from your hard work this summer!

Use the template on the next page as your child's Summer Screen Plan.



My Summer Screen Plan

Goal: Use technology with purpose to learn, build, and create.

This summer I/we will:

My Plan In Action

What will you create or learn this summer? List what you're doing, who it's with, and the time needed to reach your goals (in days or weeks).

What I'm Making:	Project Crew Members:	How Much Time I'll Need:
Ex: Build a game	MacKenzie, Stacy	6 hours each week

Our Family Guidelines

I/we agree to:

- Create before you consume` _____
- No devices during meals _____
- _____ _____

Celebrate Small Wins

Every day/week (circle one), we will share:

- Something we learned
- Something we built
- Something we're proud of

Show Off Your Work

We will celebrate and share our projects on: _____

Want to explore big ideas about the future of education and stay connected with a growing community of changemakers? Follow MacKenzie for fresh insights, updates, and behind-the-scenes looks at how real change is happening in education.



INSTAGRAM

Inspiration, real talk, and highlights from innovative classrooms



FACEBOOK

An engaging Future of Education parent community



SUBSTACK

Essays on learning, purpose, and what school could be



PODCAST

Education innovators and leaders share insights on learning



WEBSITE

Events near you, the latest news, and ways to get involved