

ccfc

campaign for a commercial-free childhood

Annual Report July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020





Dear Friend,

Let's face it. It's hard enough raising children right now without powerful industries deliberately trying to make parenting harder.

With families juggling remote work and school, and worrying about their finances and staying healthy, the last thing they need is technology that works against them. But far too often, that's what they get.

The video games and social media children use to connect to their friends are deliberately designed to keep kids hooked as long as possible. The video platforms children turn to for entertainment recommend anything—including inappropriate and harmful content—to keep kids watching. And the EdTech platforms that should be a lifeline for learning during the pandemic far too often provide a superficial education, while increasing screen time even more and putting children's privacy at risk.

At CCFC, we recognize that now, more than ever, parents need help navigating—and turning off—the overwhelming world of children's digital media. In the following pages, you'll read about our efforts to support families to ensure that, even during a pandemic, kids get the offline, commercial-free time they need to thrive.

But we also recognize that creating a healthy media environment for all children is going to take a lot more than just educating caregivers. That's why, as you'll see, we're standing up to behemoths like Google and TikTok and demanding they do better by children. It's why we're leading the way in Washington in advocating for better policies and regulations to protect children online. And it's why we've created the only grassroots network of parents and professionals working to create a healthier childhood by reducing children's screen time.

Over the past 8 months, we've heard a lot of pundits say that now is the time to put our ideals aside, and just focus on helping families get through each difficult day. We don't agree. We believe that by working together, we can both navigate the now AND work towards the future our children deserve.

Thanks, as always, for standing with us and making our work possible.

Angela Campbell, JD
Board Chair, CCFC

Josh Golin
Executive Director, CCFC





Monumental Changes at YouTube

For twenty years, CCFC has held corporate marketers accountable for interfering with children’s play, relationships, and education. This year, we achieved our biggest victory yet.

For years, Google ignored the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), illegally collecting data from children under 13 on YouTube without parental consent. Google uses the data it collects from the platform—browsing activity, web searches, location data, every video watched or liked, and more—to predict the most engaging content and persuasive ads in real time. It’s completely unethical and unfair to use this technology to manipulate kids into wanting—and nagging their parents for—stuff. Google claimed they didn’t have to comply with the law because, according to their Terms of Service, kids under 13 weren’t allowed to use the platform. And yet, Google clearly knew children used YouTube when they boasted to advertisers that it was the “new Saturday morning cartoons!”

So in 2018, CCFC took action, filing a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) complaint that documented how Google knowingly profited off of illegal data collection and put kids at risk. And last September, we got results.

Google was forced by the FTC to pay a record-breaking \$170 million fine and limit data collection to eliminate all behavioral advertising on child-directed channels. As a direct result of CCFC’s advocacy, the number one kids’ website in the world has significantly less surveillance and kid-targeted behavioral advertising.

And we didn’t stop there. Once the settlement forced Google to admit what everyone knew—that kids were all over YouTube—we secured even more protections for children. Working with Senator Ed Markey and our friends at the Center for Digital Democracy, we got Google to pledge that kids won’t see ads on YouTube for video games or food and beverages, and to promise they won’t show kids commercials that use sex or violence as selling points.

As Google continues to make these much-needed changes to their platform, we continue to engage with the company to ensure that kids are truly protected when they use YouTube.

Our Work on Capitol Hill

If you’ve followed CCFC’s work in recent years, you’ve probably heard us talk about COPPA, or the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act. This 20-year-old law empowers parents to protect their children’s privacy, restricts what data can be collected from kids, and limits how that data can be used. It’s also the only federal law that protects children’s online privacy.

COPPA has never been more important. Today, particularly during the pandemic, children spend more time than ever online, potentially generating hundreds of thousands of data points that can be used to shape their behavior and make them vulnerable to targeted ads. That’s

why Big Tech and corporate marketers want to see COPPA gone or weakened, so they can reach parents’ pocketbooks through a young, vulnerable online audience.

Last summer, the FTC announced it was undertaking an early review of COPPA—years before it was required. The questions the FTC posed during this review read like an industry wish list. So we did what we do best: organized.

Working with our friends at the Center for Digital Democracy, we led a campaign demanding that COPPA be strengthened, not weakened. We were joined by an incredible coalition of advocates, ranging from the American Academy of Pediatrics to UnidosUS and Color of Change. And in April, a bipartisan coalition of six senators joined CCFC in urging the FTC to conduct in-depth studies of Big Tech and EdTech platforms before making any changes to COPPA.

The FTC’s COPPA review is still ongoing, and we continue to meet regularly with the Commission to ensure that this essential law is protected.



CCFC’s Josh Golin testifies at the FTC’s panel on the COPPA rule in Washington, DC, in October 2019.

“Children are a uniquely vulnerable population that deserve heightened privacy protections. The FTC should take extreme caution not to weaken—either purposefully or inadvertently—privacy protections under COPPA.”

– Letter to the FTC from Senators Markey, Blumenthal, Durbin, Hawley, Cassidy, and Blackburn in support of our work

Supporting Parents on the Frontlines

When Action Network member Emily Harrison received her 3rd grader's report card this spring, it read, "Could not assess student's learning. Did not participate due to concerns about excessive screen time."

Before she became a parent, the Asheville mom of two boys, ages 6 and 9, never imagined the lengths she'd go to limit her children's technology use. But everything changed when she was trying to find a way to support her older son's behavior at home and school. Based on a friend's recommendation, she read Action Network Advisory Board member Victoria Dunkley's book *Reset Your Child's Brain*. Very quickly, she realized that excessive screen use in school was affecting her son's behavior. "I have to protect my kids from anything that can negatively impact behavior in the classroom," she explained. "Kids of color are more likely to be suspended and punished. The screens weren't helping." The book's suggestions worked to support her son and, enlightened, she emailed Dr. Dunkley, who introduced Emily to CCFC and our Action Network.

Bolstered by her peers in the Network and armed with the resources she needed, she turned her attention to advocating for her older son, who was spending up to 2 hours per day on screens in the classroom. Her advocacy paid big dividends—and not just for her own children! Once her son switched from an iPad to real books for school reading time, other children started to choose real books, too. "It only took one person to change it up."

When Emily built the case to the State of North Carolina about the mandated iStation K-3 reading assessment (which collected her children's data without parental consent), CCFC was there. "I don't think I would have uncovered the information I needed as quickly without CCFC." Her school district pulled the assessment from schools in the spring.

To continue to help her kids and others across the school district, she began to share resources, dive more into the research, and started a listserv for parents. At first, most parents didn't know there were options around tech. Many parents were receptive to pushing back and some started asking for paper assessments. And during the pandemic, she continues to grow the movement. "Screens were a problem before the pandemic. Coronavirus hasn't made screens safer. I don't need to add to the danger in my kids' lives—there's enough already."



Our Screens in Schools Action Kit



















When it comes to technology in the classroom, the research is clear. Excessive use of educational technology (EdTech) undermines children's learning and threatens their privacy.

That's why in February, we launched the Screens in Schools Action Kit. The Action Kit aims to empower concerned parents and educators to inform others about the trouble with EdTech and advocate in their schools. It guides parents through questions to ask and provides everything they need to take action: templates for letters to school administrators, handouts for PTA meetings, petitions, opt-out forms, fact sheets, and more. For educators, it shines light on policies and pedagogy (including success stories from teachers and administrators) that support students and offers ways to stand up to administrations and systems that invest in technology over students and teachers. And for everyone, it offers an extensive resource list that spells out the problem with the overuse of screens in schools.

As Screen Schooled authors and Action Kit contributors Matt Miles and Joe Clement write, "It took the work of many people to create a world in which our children are exposed to an unhealthy mindset about screen time. It will take the work of even more dedicated people...to create healthier kids, and to undo some of the damage already done." The Action Kit provides tools for dedicated advocates and for those new to the issue to make sure schools prioritize the wellbeing of children in a tech-saturated world.

Making Headlines

CCFC's advocacy routinely makes headlines around the world, giving us an incredible power to shape the conversation around kids, media, and commercialism. During the past year, our advocacy was featured in more than 200 articles. Here's just a few of the highlights.

	Online preschool is winning more support, but is that a good thing? 7/9/19
	Critics seek tough punishment for YouTube over kids' privacy 7/8/19
	Flaw in Facebook's Messenger Kids Exposed Children to Unauthorized Chats 7/23/19
	YouTube isn't for kids. But kids videos are among its most popular, study finds 7/25/19
	Google to pay \$170 million to settle charges it violated kids' privacy law on YouTube 9/4/19
	Google, YouTube To Pay \$170 Million Penalty Over Collecting Kids' Personal Info 9/4/19
	Popular YouTube Toy Review Channel Accused of Blurring Lines for Ads 9/4/19
	Facebook Deal with FTC Went Too Far, Privacy Groups Tell Court 10/15/19
	Major consumer groups ask FTC to look into 'predatory' data collection of children 12/5/19
	YouTube overhauls advertising, data collection on kids content 1/7/20
	Toy Commercials Are Being Replaced by Something More Nefarious 2/2/20
	Stuck at home with young kids because of the coronavirus? Here's what to do—and not to do 3/21/20
	New York Attorney General Looks Into Zoom's Privacy Practices 3/30/20
	Advocates Worldwide Call to Protect Children From EdTech Exploitation 4/16/20
	Tech companies are adding new parental controls amid a virus-fueled surge in screen time 4/17/20
	TikTok Broke Privacy Promises, Children's Groups Say 5/14/20
	TikTok accused of breaching US child privacy regulations 5/14/20
	U.S. senators urge probe of TikTok on children's privacy 5/29/20

Our Brand New Website

CCFC has been on the cutting edge of advocacy for kids' online privacy since the dawn of social media. Our website, on the other hand... not so much. That is, until this year!

Last November, we unveiled a beautiful, brand-new website that tells a whole new story of childhood: what it is, what it should be, and what kids really need to thrive in the digital age. In addition to our new look, the new CCFC site has some pretty nifty features, including a blog full of advice from our experts, a resource library with helpful tools for parents and caregivers, and a timeline of two decades of our groundbreaking advocacy!

If you haven't had the chance to check it out (or you just want to see it again!), visit us online at commercialfreechildhood.org.

Creating Community During COVID

In 2019, our Children's Screen Time Action Network didn't just grow 25% to over 1,000 members (!). From the creation of new screen time resources for caregivers and educators, to a special Action Network Live! series on COVID-19, the Network has also led the way in ensuring that children get the offline time and play they need.

In the past year alone, we added 42 new resources to our library. Many members also joined our six volunteer-led work groups, which have produced high-impact projects—like our Screens in Schools Action Kit—that make a difference and provide members with meaningful networking opportunities. And because we want to be in conversation with young people about technology, we added two teen seats to our dynamic Advisory Board.

Meanwhile, our acclaimed series Action Network Live! (like our March 26 event, pictured above) connected people all over the world to leading screen time experts and advocates.



"It's nice to know I'm not going it alone. The Action Network is not a one size fits all organization that prompts a single approach to screen time and kids. There is a place for everybody to get involved and to learn more, to learn what questions parents and advocates need to be asking about technology."

- Emily Harrison, Action Network member

Our Pandemic Response



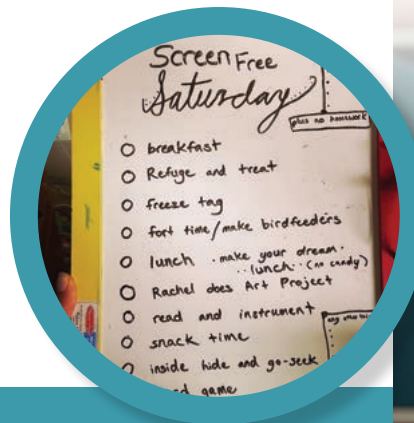
Touch-Free, Screen-Free Summer Games was one of 9 new screen-free resources that we created to support families during quarantine.

Navigating tech during the pandemic has been challenging for all of us. That's why we created a curated list of recommended, evidence-based resources to help schools, families, and advocates sort through all the information with peace of mind.



Action Network Live! One of our most popular webinars, "Social Distancing for Early Educators," had over 1,000 attendees and provided educators and parents with child development-based advice on navigating pandemic lockdowns with young children.

Screen-Free Saturdays gave families a much-needed weekly opportunity to unplug, reconnect, and recharge.



We Were Built For This Moment

The pandemic has changed nearly everything about our lives. But children's needs have stayed the same—and so has CCFC's mission. That's why, since working from home beginning in March, our staff of 7 was able to immediately shift to meet the needs of families all across the country.

We released—to rave reviews!—a series of webinars for families and educators navigating screen time issues during quarantine. Our webinars attracted thousands of people from all over the country and responded to their actual questions about technology and the pandemic.

As schools and businesses closed, we also transformed Screen-Free Week into Screen-Free Saturdays, a weekly invitation to unplug and reconnect with loved ones during quarantine. Participant Liz of Boston said, "Going screen-free for the day was like taking a vacation; I put my phone and laptop where I couldn't see them, and was almost immediately able to tune in to what I wanted to do with my time. My interactions with my kid and my husband were more fun, and I felt rested at the end of the day. It also made me aware of how many times I turn to a device – it's like a moldy security blanket. I feel like I can breathe better after a Screen-Free Saturday!"

Additionally, we recognized that screen time increased during the pandemic, endangering the hands-on childhood play that kids deserve. So we created new resources, like our guides to No-Touch, Screen-Free Summer Games, 55 Nature-Related Screen-Free Activities, and even a Screen-Free Saturdays cookbook template to help children get the safe, offline play they need!

And of course, with children online more than ever for school and entertainment, our watchdogging has never been more important. We organized an international coalition calling on governments, schools, and companies to prioritize student privacy, and filed a groundbreaking complaint against TikTok, the most popular app for young people during the pandemic.

CCFC was built for this moment because we understand what kids need to thrive—and it's not an online-only life. That's why CCFC's unique blend of advocacy—helping families unplug AND holding Big Tech accountable—is more important than ever.

At some point this pandemic will end. But unless we act now, in whatever way we can, the trends of digital dependence, erosion of privacy, and increasing isolation will continue. That's why CCFC exists.





Black Childhood Matters

CCFC's work is grounded in the belief that all children deserve time and space to grow, learn, and explore—and in America, Black children have been denied this time and space again and again. At every turn, Big Tech and corporations perpetuate racist systems. Black children are targeted with ads for alcohol, nicotine, and unhealthy food significantly more than their white counterparts, and YouTube algorithms recommend anti-Black videos to children trying to watch singalongs. Additionally, schools are deeply segregated, and those serving young Black children are more likely to focus on screen-based academics over the open-ended, play-based learning that kids need. CCFC's insight into these inequities demands action.

As we mourn the loss of more Black life and feel outrage at systems that perpetuate racism, we stand in solidarity with our Black supporters, colleagues, friends, loved ones, and neighbors who have been doing the same for longer than we have had to understand. If we are to create a world that truly meets kids' human needs, we must recognize and oppose the depths of anti-Black racism in our media, in our education system, in our economy, in our policing, and in ourselves.



Thank You to Our Volunteers!

The work we accomplished this year was some of CCFC's best yet—and we certainly couldn't have done it without our dedicated volunteers! Our all-volunteer Work Groups at the Children's Screen Time Action Network have collaborated tirelessly, creating dynamic screen time resources. We are so grateful to volunteer leaders Mindy Holohan, Seth Evans, Dr. Brett Kennedy, Tracy Markle, Rhonda Moskowitz, Sveta Pais, and Teodora Pavkovic for their tireless work organizing. Thanks to Alhasan Almashyakhi, our Screen-Free Week site looks better than ever; and Aliza Kopans and Celine Bernhardt-Lanier have offered invaluable insights as youth members on our Action Network Advisory Board. Volunteer Amy Warren represented CCFC by hosting a table at an Open Streets event in Wichita, Kansas, and Holly Mawn and Amanda Holliday offered great help to Screen-Free Week planning. We are so grateful for the hard work of our volunteers!

Taking on TikTok

CCFC is the leading watchdog of the children’s media and marketing industries. We monitor the top apps and platforms used by children and share our findings with regulators. Last May, we took on one of the most predatory and popular apps in all of Silicon Valley: TikTok.

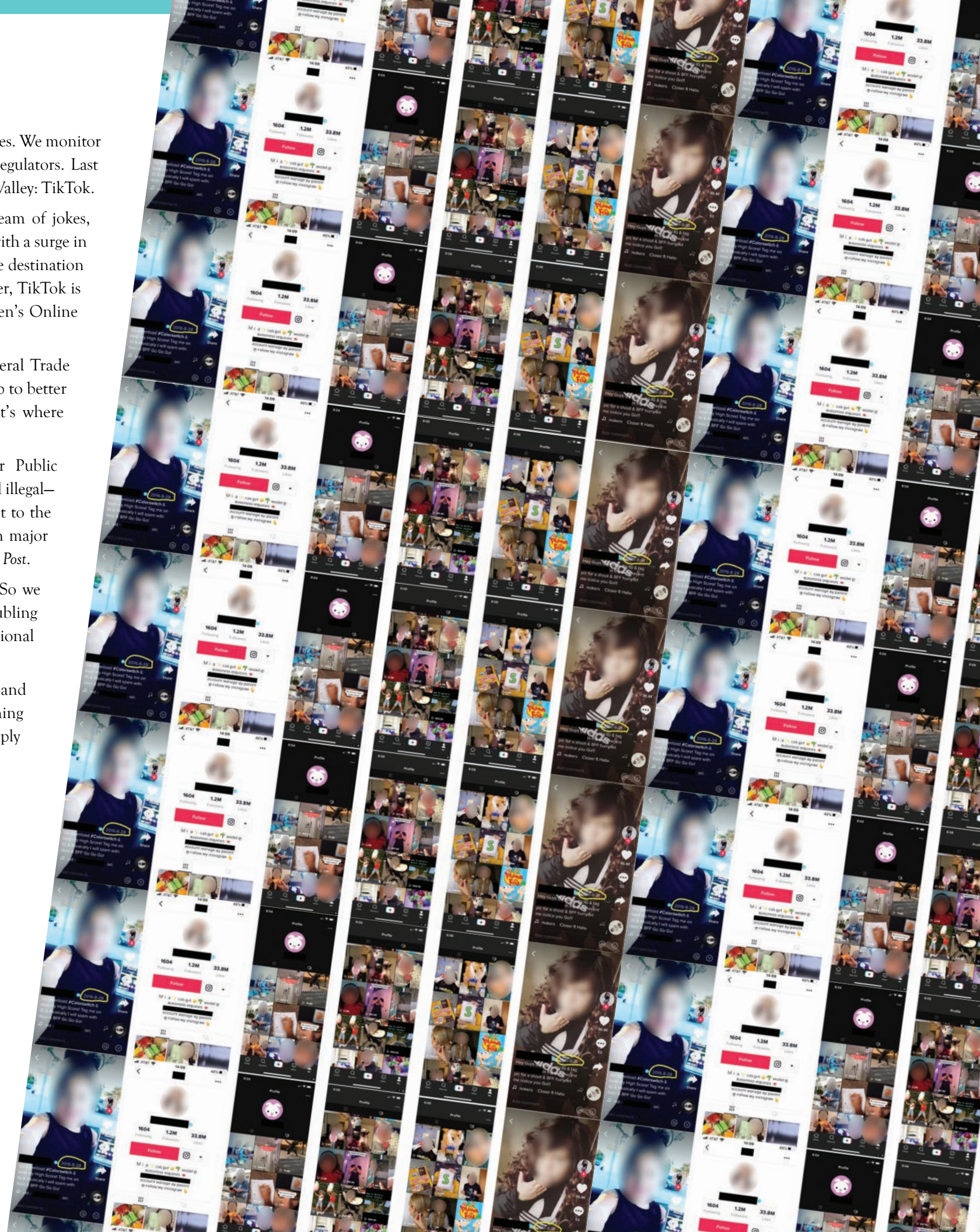
TikTok is a short-form video platform known for its (literally!) endless stream of jokes, dances, and “challenges,” served to users on a personalized home page. And with a surge in usage during the pandemic, it now rivals YouTube as the most popular online destination for young people. Although the app is supposed to be for anyone 13 and older, TikTok is notoriously popular with kids as young as 8—a clear violation of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act.

TikTok is no stranger to violating children’s privacy law: in 2019, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) fined TikTok and required a series of changes to the app to better protect children. But a year later, TikTok was still flouting the law. That’s where CCFC stepped in.

Working with the Center for Digital Democracy and the Institute for Public Representation, we investigated TikTok and uncovered a host of troubling—and illegal—practices that put kids at risk. We documented these practices in a complaint to the FTC that was supported by 20 leading consumer groups and was featured in major media outlets around the world, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

But we knew the facts alone might not be enough to get the FTC to act. So we educated members of Congress from both sides of the aisle about TikTok’s troubling disregard for kids’ privacy. As a result of these efforts, three separate Congressional letters were sent to the FTC in support of our complaint!

As of this writing, the FTC’s investigation of our allegations is ongoing, and rumors are swirling about a possible TikTok sale. No matter who ends up owning TikTok, we won’t stop demanding changes until they take real steps to comply with the law and protect children.

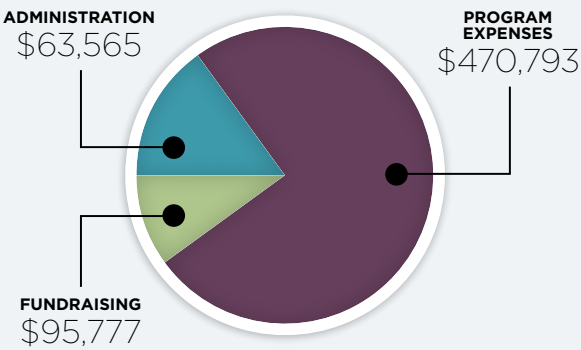


CCFC Financials

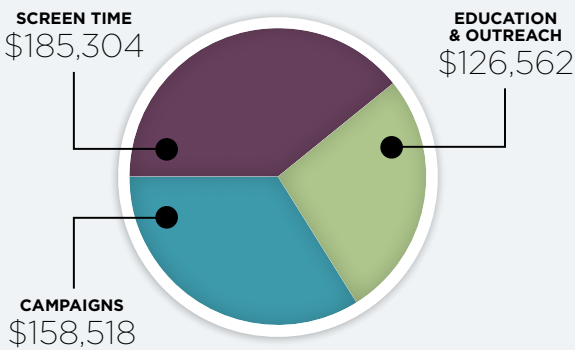
INCOME

Grants	\$ 184,711
Individual Donations	\$ 444,174
Honoraria and Book Sales	\$ 112
Paycheck Protection Program	\$ 88,308
Total FY20 Income	\$ 717,305
Expenses	\$ 630,150
Net Increase/(Decrease)	\$ 87,155
Beginning Reserves	\$ 325,943
Net Assets FY20	\$ 413,098

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$630,150



PROGRAM EXPENSES: \$470,793



CCFC is fiscally-sponsored by TSNE Mission Works. All of CCFC's financial information can be accessed through TSNE's form 990.

Our Supporters

We are incredibly grateful for CCFC's supporters, who are actively building a world where all kids get the commercial-free time and space they deserve. Below are our donors for FY20 (July 2019 – June 2020), without whom our work would not be possible.

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\$25,000 - \$49,999

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Up to \$100

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independent and
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Our Mission

**CCFC educates the public about commercialism's impact on kids' wellbeing
and advocates for the end of child-targeted marketing.**



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