



Smartphones in the Classroom:

What States are Doing to Confront These Digital Distractions



*Because Our Children
Are Watching*

July 2024

Introduction

Across the country there has been growing concern around the role technology plays in the lives of America's children – especially when it comes to school. But it has not always been this way. In the 1990s and early 2000s, education policy experts warned that America's students would fall behind the rest of the world unless they learned how to use computers from an early age. By the early 2000s, many school systems were buying laptops in bulk and issuing them to students; assigning school e-mail addresses that they would keep until graduation; and skipping right past spelling and grammar lessons in favor of word processing software that would correct students' spelling and grammar for them.

By the 2010s, some school districts experimented with “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) or “Bring Your Own Technology” (BYOT) policies, which was intended to leverage students' attachment to their own devices while saving the district money. The Volusia County School District in Central Florida was one early adopter of BYOT in 2011, and news and media outlets trumpeted the success of these programs. “The Volusia County School District...is one of the places that used to have signs around its schools that admonished students: no cellphones allowed. But the signs have been replaced over the last two years with new ones that read: B.Y.O.T.”

“Volusia school officials say that they realized they should take advantage of, rather than fight, students' deep connections with their devices. At the same time, the district found that the cost of providing and maintaining computers for students was becoming prohibitive.”¹

Another was Mamaroneck Union Free School District in Westchester County, New York. Mamaroneck administrators defended the choice, saying, “Our high school is one of the few in the country with an open campus. The students can come and go as they please. This is an extension of that freedom, which helps students learn responsibility. We recognize that students are living in a digital age, and BYOD helps students establish the foundations of digital citizenship.”²

But with the rapid way technology has changed – including the introduction of the smartphone to the world – our society is grappling with the use of phones in schools. And now New York and Florida are among half a dozen states that have either passed or are considering bills to ban cellphones in classrooms state-wide.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/23/technology/in-some-schools-students-bring-their-own-technology.html>

² <https://apnews.com/many-schools-now-urge-kids-to-bring-their-own-screens-89e11121ea4a49f4a8cfa641d7f2253d>

Changing Perspectives on Teens and Technology

In the 2010s when these school technology policies were being adopted, smartphones were still relatively new. Apple released the first iPhone in January 2007. By 2014, nearly three-quarters of U.S. teens had a smartphone.³⁴

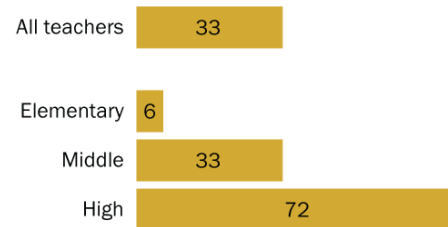
Public health data collected in the ensuing decade points to a troubling pattern. 87% of Gen Z youth (defined as those born in the late 1990s and early 2000s) now face some form of mental health challenge.⁵ After a brief drop in 2009, emergency room admissions for self-harm behaviors among U.S. girls and young women have climbed sharply every year since. Suicide rates for boys aged 10-14 have increased 91% since 2010, and for girls in that same age group, 167% over the same period.⁶

Beyond concerns about mental health challenges exacerbated by internet-connected, highly portable technology, teachers and school administrators are also observing classroom disruptions and disciplinary problems arising from students bringing their phones into class, while others are concerned that these devices, far from being learning aids, are actually impairing learning and negatively impacting student achievement and retention. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in fall 2023, 72% of U.S. high school teachers consider cellphone distraction a major problem in their classrooms. Middle school teachers (33%) and elementary school teachers (6%) also share concerns about student distraction due to cellphones.⁷

A 2018 Rutgers University-New Brunswick study found that when students use cellphones for non-academic purposes during lectures, their performance in end-of-term exams tends to be worse.⁸

High school teachers most likely to say cellphone distraction is a major problem

*% of public K-12 teachers who say that students being distracted by their cellphones is a **major problem** in their classroom*



Note: Other response options included “Minor problem” and “Not a problem.”

Source: Survey of U.S. public K-12 teachers conducted Oct. 17-Nov. 14, 2023.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

³ https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/pj_2022-08-10_teens-and-tech_0-04-png/

⁴ According to Away for the Day, 56% of middle schools in the U.S. allow students to carry their phones on them all day, while public middle schools are twice as likely to allow students to have their phones than private middle schools. The organization’s data also showed that more than 80% of parents don’t want their kids using phones in school.

⁵ <https://news.blueshieldca.com/2023/08/03/new-poll-mental-health-challenges-prevalent-among-gen-z-youth-more-than-three-in-four-have-discussed-their-struggles-with-others/>

⁶ <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/reports/>

⁷ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/12/72-percent-of-us-high-school-teachers-say-cellphone-distraction-is-a-major-problem-in-the-classroom/>

⁸ <https://www.aau.edu/research-scholarship/featured-research-topics/cellphone-distraction-classroom-can-lead-lower-grades>

“The study... also found that students who don’t use electronic devices in class, but attend lectures where their use is permitted, also do worse – suggesting that phone and tablet use damages the group learning environment.”⁹

Likewise, a study from the London School of Economics also found that the “mere presence of a smartphone” by a neighboring student can lower test scores for a non-phone student by approximately 16%.¹⁰

A meta-analysis across 14 countries published earlier this year revealed that student mobile phone use negatively impacts educational outcomes, including test scores, grade point average, and self-rated academic performance. Researchers found that both educators and students support regulating students’ phone use at the school level, even if they did not fully support an all-out ban. “Mobile phones were viewed as a distraction to student learning and compromised student safety through inappropriate use (e.g., photos and videos being taken at school and shared), cyberbullying, and social media-related issues.”¹¹

In a 2015 study, *Away For the Day*, an initiative pushing to transform schools into cell phone-free spaces, found that high school students increased their test scores by 6.4% after their school banned cell phones.

A November 2022 study examining smartphone use among elementary school students concluded that the overall effect on student outcomes was negative and a potential hindrance to learning.¹²

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that by 2020, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 77% of U.S. schools had moved to prohibit cellphones for nonacademic purposes.¹³ But a significant codicil to that impressive statistic is that fewer than half (43%) of public high schools have such a rule, and at many of them, the bans are not strictly enforced. To the extent they are, the burden often falls on teachers to enforce them.¹⁴

Other countries have gone even further: In 2018, French lawmakers outlawed cellphone use for children under 15, and in 2022, China implemented a nation-wide ban on phones for school children.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1350.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/14/4/351>

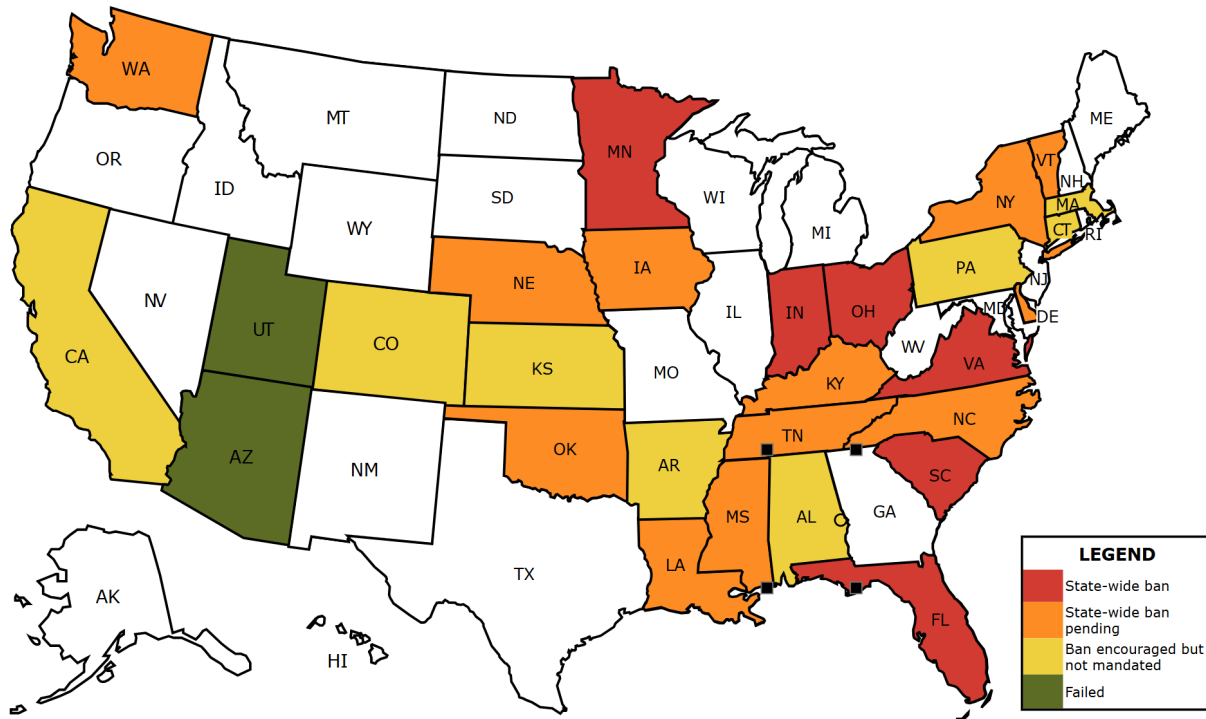
¹² <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10639-022-11430-9>

¹³ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_233.50.asp

¹⁴ <https://stateline.org/2024/03/13/if-schools-wont-ban-kids-cellphones-some-lawmakers-say-they-will/>

State by State

The 50 U.S. states have a different policies and practices. Here is a look at where things stand at the state level:



*states in white have no state-wide policy

Alabama

In February 2024, the Alabama State Board of Education unanimously approved a resolution recommending tighter cell phone use restrictions in schools. The resolution encourages local boards of education to regulate the use of electronic communication devices on school property.¹⁵ The resolution does not mandate a statewide ban on cell phones. Instead, it encourages school boards to consider instituting their own policies regarding cell phone use during school hours.¹⁶

Montgomery Public Schools has already banned cell phone use during school hours, and has seen a significant reduction in discipline rates as a result.¹⁷

Alaska

There is no statewide ban on cellphones in schools in the state of Alaska.

¹⁵ <https://alabamareflector.com/2024/02/08/alabama-state-board-of-education-passes-resolution-encouraging-cell-phone-restrictions/>

¹⁶ <https://aldailynews.com/alabama-board-of-education-adopts-resolution-to-curb-phone-usage-in-schools/>

¹⁷ Ibid

Anchorage School District: Students are allowed to use cell phones and electronic devices in class only when directed by the classroom teacher for school purposes. Examples of appropriate use include educational tasks, but texting, listening to music, and using earbuds or headphones during class are not allowed. Students who violate the conditions of use must surrender their cell phones and other portable electronic devices to school personnel upon request.¹⁸

Arizona

Arizona does not have a statewide ban on cellphones in schools. In fact, Governor Katie Hobbs recently vetoed a proposed bill that aimed to limit cellphone use by students at public schools across the state. The bill would have required schools to adopt policies restricting wireless device use to educational purposes or emergencies, and it would have limited access to social media sites on school-provided internet. Despite the veto, some districts, like the **Scottsdale Unified School District**, have implemented their own policies. For instance, in Scottsdale, students from pre-K through 8th grade are required to keep their phones off and put away during school hours under the “Away for the Day” policy. High schools, however, are not subject to this restriction.¹⁹ Additionally, the Arizona State Board of Education recommends that teachers use school-approved technology for electronic communication with students and avoid personal devices.²⁰

Arkansas

In Arkansas, there is not a statewide ban on cellphones in schools. However, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva recently invited superintendents across the state to participate in a pilot program addressing in-school phone usage and mental health. The program provides funding for secondary schools to offer pouches for students to store their phones during the school day and for telehealth mental health services. The goal is to combat screen addiction and social media distractions, which can sometimes lead to cyberbullying. **The Fayetteville School District**, for instance, is already working on implementing a clearer cell phone policy to prioritize learning while balancing technology access.²¹

California

California Governor Gavin Newsom recently announced his intention to restrict students’ usage of smartphones during the school day. This policy proposal builds upon a 2019 law that authorized school districts in California to limit or ban smartphone use by students while at school or under the supervision of a school employee.²² There has been some push-back from the California School Boards Association, which believes that regulations over student smartphone use should be determined at the local level by individual school districts.²³ In June 2024, **The Los Angeles Unified School District** – the second largest school district in the nation – approved a resolution by a vote of 5-2 to develop a policy

¹⁸ <https://www.asdk12.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&ModuleInstanceID=21272&ViewID=7b97f7ed-8e5e-4120-848f-a8b4987d588f&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=29015&PageID=13503>

¹⁹ <https://ktar.com/story/5569981/arizona-gov-katie-hobbs-vetoes-school-cellphone-ban-says-its-unnecessary/>

²⁰ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2022/06/23/arizona-board-sets-guidelines-teacher-student-communication/7654454001/>

²¹ <https://www.5newsonline.com/article/news/education/governor-sanders-school-district-phone-free-mental-health-program/527-cf2e6390-d6ef-427e-8f46-bce4b4f7313c>

²² <https://apnews.com/article/california-newsom-smartphone-schools-children-social-media-3a2f2f2b4b79e0a3fb2416ff993a92be>

²³ Ibid

that bans student use of cellphones and social media platforms during the entire school day. The policy, which will be implemented districtwide, will go into effect by January.²⁴

Colorado

Colorado has considered restrictions on cellphone use in schools, and although there is no state-wide ban in effect, some schools in Colorado have implemented bans or limitations. For instance, the **Brush School District**, banned cellphones due to concerns about online bullying.²⁵ Students are not allowed to bring cellphones, smartwatches, or other devices with calling, app access or texting capabilities to school, except for specific purposes like extracurricular activities or field trips.²⁶ **Durango School District** is considering a ban on cellphone use by middle school students.²⁷

Connecticut

In Connecticut, there is a bipartisan push to ban smartphones in schools statewide. Both Republicans and Democrats seem to agree on this issue, signaling a shift in attitudes.²⁸ One **Manchester**, Connecticut, middle school started requiring students to lock up their phones in Yondr pouches during the school day. These pouches lock the phones away but allow students to keep possession of them. The phones are unlocked at the end of the day. The school had policies in place prohibiting phone use during class, but administrators found enforcement was difficult and often came down to power struggles between students and teachers.²⁹ Governor Ned Lamont has advised districts to instruct students to leave smartphones at home or use protected pouches during the school day.

Delaware

Delaware lawmakers approved \$250,000 to test cell-hiding pouches in middle and high schools. “The Delaware Department of Education will be responsible for gathering experts, creating the system for the pilot program and later evaluating it. The department will also create the regulations for the applications districts will use when applying for funding.”³⁰ The move was applauded by state educators and prompted, in part, because of concerns around the state’s falling standardized test scores.

Florida

Florida became the first state to pass a bill banning cellphone use during instructional time for grades K-12. This includes a ban on social media access while using a school’s Wi-Fi. Teachers can confiscate devices if used inappropriately during class or collect phones before lessons start.³¹

²⁴ <https://www.parentstv.org/press-releases/ptc-says-los-angeles-unified-is-wise-to-ban-cell-phones-social-media>

²⁵ <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-schools-clash-parents-student-cellphones.html>

²⁶ <https://www.denver7.com/news/local-news/parents-in-rural-school-district-voice-concerns-over-cellphone-ban-in-upcoming-school-year>

²⁷ <https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/colorado-cellphone-ban-middle-schools/>

²⁸ <https://www.ctpublic.org/2024-06-21/is-a-statewide-ban-on-cell-phones-in-schools-realistic>

²⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/05/01/school-cellphones-confiscate/>

³⁰ <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/education/2024/07/08/delaware-education-cellphone-pouches-to-be-piloted-at-schools/74311859007/>

³¹ <https://www.orlandoweekly.com/news/florida-gov-desantis-signs-bill-to-ban-students-from-using-phones-and-tiktok-in-schools-34164256>

Georgia

Statewide in **Georgia**, cellphones must remain out of sight and in silent mode during instructional time; but several school districts within the state have implemented their own, more restrictive policies.³² Starting on August 1, middle school students in **Marietta County** will be required to place their phones and smartwatches in lockable pouches upon arrival at school.³³ Students will have access only during the last five minutes of the final period. Middle and high school students in **Liberty County** will also be required to put their phones in lockable pouches beginning this fall.³⁴ **DeKalb County** schools have launched a pilot program that would require students in some schools to store their phones in Yonder pouches during the school day.³⁵

Hawaii

Hawaii’s Department of Education (HIDOE) has established Technology Responsible Use Guidelines for students. This includes encouraging students to use HIDOE-owned or leased devices for educational purposes.³⁶ Students are allowed to use electronic devices in the classroom if authorized by the teacher. The HIDOE monitors devices, networks and internet activities by students, including email and stored files, and the HIDOE reserves the right to freeze, disconnect, or delete accounts of students who violate the guidelines. There does not appear to be a state-wide policy on cellphone use.

Idaho

Idaho hasn’t implemented a statewide ban on cellphones in schools, however the **West Ada School District** is considering a policy that would require students to place their devices in a “designated storage area,” such as a bin in the classroom or a student’s locker. The enforcement and disciplinary actions for non-compliance would be determined by each school.³⁷

Illinois

Illinois does not have a state-wide policy on cellphones, but various school districts have implemented their own measures regarding student cell phones. Some elementary schools enforce a complete ban on cellphones during class hours. Other schools allow students to use their phones only for classroom lessons. At **Evanston High School**, students can still use their phones during breaks between classes, but they are not allowed in classrooms.³⁸

Indiana

In April, lawmakers in Indiana approved a state-wide ban on wireless devices—applying to cellphones, tablets, laptops or gaming devices—during class.³⁹

³² <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/cellphone-ban-dekalb-county-schools-approves-400k-smartphone-pouch-pilot-program>

³³ <https://www.axios.com/local/atlanta/2024/06/24/atlanta-schools-cellphone-ban>

³⁴ <https://www.wjcl.com/article/liberty-county-schools-bans-cell-phones-students/60968521>

³⁵ <https://decatrish.com/2024/07/dekalb-school-board-approves-pilot-program-to-lock-up-smartphones-at-some-schools/>

³⁶ [https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/DOE Forms/FRL/TRUG.pdf](https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/DOE%20Forms/FRL/TRUG.pdf)

³⁷ <https://www.ktvb.com/article/news/local/west-ada-school-district-considers-policy-ban-cellphones-classrooms/277-56056ac1-5da7-4358-915c-227fa31fd5ed>

³⁸ <https://www.govtech.com/education/k-12/illinois-school-districts-take-different-approach-to-student-cell-phones.html>

³⁹ <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2024/bills/senate/185/details>

Iowa

A new bill (S.F. 2044) was introduced in the Iowa legislature that would prohibit students from using cell phones at school. If passed, school districts would create policies banning students from using cell phones during the school day, except when allowed by a teacher or required by law. Schools would also provide ways for parents and guardians to contact students during school hours.⁴⁰ The **Iowa Falls-Alden** School District has already approved a policy banning cell phones from high school and middle school classrooms during school hours. Students are required to leave their phones in lockers until the end of the last class.⁴¹ **Hoover High School in Des Moines** has already banned cell phones, headphones, and AirPods during the school day.⁴²

Kansas

The Kansas State Board of Education has assembled a 30-member task force to develop policy recommendations on non-academic use of cellphones by pre-K through 12th grade students while at school; the recommendations of the task force are projected to be finalized in August 2024.⁴³

Kentucky

Kentucky lawmakers have advanced a bill aimed at ending cellphone distractions in classrooms. The measure would require local school boards across the State to adopt a policy that, at a minimum, forbids students from using cellphones during instructional time. Exceptions to the ban would include emergencies or if a teacher allows cellphone use for instructional purposes. Disciplinary action for violating the ban would be decided by local school boards.⁴⁴

Louisiana

Senate Bill 207, sponsored by State Sen. Beth Mizell, passed the Senate with a unanimous vote. If signed by Governor Jeff Landry, the bill would prohibit students from using cell phones during the entire school day. Students would be required to power off and put away their devices while on campus, and turning the device on during the day would also be prohibited.⁴⁵

Maine

In Maine, several school districts have taken steps to limit cellphone use during the school day. For instance, **RSU 1 in Bath** recently passed a policy requiring 6th through 12th grade students to lock their phones or smartwatches into magnetic pouches for the entirety of the school day. Similar bans have been implemented in districts like **Augusta**, **South Portland**, and **Westbrook**.⁴⁶ At this time, there is no state-wide policy.

⁴⁰ <https://cbs2iowa.com/news/local/new-bill-seeks-to-restrict-student-cell-phone-use-during-school-hours>

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/kansas-state-board-of-education-to-study-limitations-on-cellphones-in-classrooms/ar-BB1q1I9m?ocid=msedgntp&pc=U531&cvid=104180f498024073b08d9f598f819a96&ei=34>

⁴⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/kentucky-legislature-schools-cellphones-9ed3947e579d4550b7c04d200aac56ed>

⁴⁵ <https://www.brproud.com/news/louisiana-news/bill-to-ban-cell-phone-use-in-public-school-passes-senate-heads-to-governors-office/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.mainepublic.org/education-news/2024-07-02/another-maine-school-district-is-banning-cell-phone-use-during-the-school-day>

Maryland

In Maryland, the cell phone policy varies across school districts and classrooms. In **Baltimore County**, students are expected to silence and put away cell phones during instructional time. The policy gets stricter for younger students in elementary and middle school, while high school students may use their devices during lunch.⁴⁷ In **Montgomery County** schools, personal mobile devices cannot be turned on until the end of the school day “for independent use.” Teachers have the discretion to allow phone use for instructional purposes, and phones can be used during lunch.⁴⁸ In **Carroll County**, educators are discussing possible changes, including a classroom ban on phones next year.

Massachusetts

While the policy on cellphones in the classroom varies across school districts, the state encourages districts to restrict or ban cellphone use in schools, and there’s a possibility of moving toward a statewide mandate in the future. Some schools have implemented policies requiring students to give up their phones at the start of class, while others restrict phone use in hallways as well.⁴⁹

Michigan

There is currently no state-wide ban on cell phones in the classroom, but some individual schools and districts are experimenting with such policies. **Tomlinson Middle School** in Inkster, part of the **Westwood Community School District**, implemented a classroom cell phone ban, resulting in higher rates of completed assignments and longer attention spans. In the lunchroom, students engaged in more social interaction due to the absence of cellphones.⁵⁰

Minnesota

In April, Minnesota lawmakers passed a bill requiring school districts in the state to adopt limits on cellphone use by the start of the 2025-2026 school year. The Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association and the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals are charged with the task of collaborating “to make best practices available to schools on a range of different strategies in order to minimize the impact of cell phones on student behavior, mental health, and academic attainment.”⁵¹

Missouri

While there is currently no statewide bill in Missouri to implement a cell phone ban in schools, some individual schools and districts are experimenting with such policies.

Mississippi

Mississippi is considering legislation that would require school districts to develop policies prohibiting cellphone use during instructional time, unless authorized by a teacher. The proposed legislation also

⁴⁷ <https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/maryland-school-districts-wrestle-with-cell-phone-use-policies-consider-legislative-means/>

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/will-massachusetts-schools-ban-cellphones-in-classrooms/3053223/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.bridgemi.com/talent-education/school-cell-phone-bans-are-spreading-michigan-next>

⁵¹ <https://www.house.mn.gov/sessiondaily/Story/18285>

aims to educate middle school and high school students about the negative effects of excessive cellphone use.⁵²

Montana

As of now, there is no statewide legislation in Montana specifically banning cellphones in classrooms, but some individual schools and districts may implement their own policies regarding cellphone use.

Nebraska

Nebraska lawmakers are considering a bill that would prohibit students from having cellphones in class. State Senator Ben Hansen introduced the bill, which proposes that students place their smartphones and similar electronic devices into designated clear containers upon entering the classroom. Exceptions would be allowed for emergencies or perceived safety threats, as well as for health reasons with a doctor's note.⁵³

Nevada

There is no state-wide ban on cellphones in the classroom in Nevada, but starting in the 2024-2025 school year, students in grades 6 to 12 in the **Clark County School District** will be required to use signal-blocking pouches to store their phones during classroom instruction. The new ban means elementary and secondary school students won't be able to use their cellphones in the classroom unless it's for educational purposes, medical reasons, or as a support for students with special needs.⁵⁴

New Hampshire

As of now, there is no statewide legislation in New Hampshire specifically banning cellphones in classrooms. However, individual schools and districts may implement their own policies regarding cellphone use.

New Jersey

New Jersey allows each of its nearly 600 public school districts to set their own policies on cell phones. Some districts ban students from bringing cell phones to school, while others require phones to be kept in lockers during the school day.⁵⁵

New Mexico

As of now, there is no statewide legislation in New Mexico specifically banning cellphones in classrooms, but some individual schools and districts may implement their own policies regarding cellphone use.

New York

New York City Schools -- the nation's largest school district with 915,000 students -- has announced plans to prohibit cell phone use during the day, and the ban would go into effect by January 2025;⁵⁶

⁵² <https://excelinedinaction.org/2024/02/15/reclaiming-the-classroom-states-empowering-parents-teachers-to-fight-back-against-tech-intrusion/>

⁵³ <https://www.ketv.com/article/nebraska-lawmakers-bill-prohibit-students-cellphones-class/39286391>

⁵⁴ <https://www.oxfordlearning.com/should-cell-phones-be-allowed-classrooms/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.govtech.com/education/k-12/n-j-cell-phone-bans-cause-tears-but-fewer-distractions>

⁵⁶ <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/06/26/new-york-city-is-set-to-announce-a-cell-phone-ban-00165202>

New York's Governor, Kathy Hochul is planning to propose legislation that would prohibit smartphones in schools statewide.⁵⁷

North Carolina

North Carolina's General Assembly introduced Senate Bill 485, which calls for a study of cell phone policies in public elementary and secondary schools.⁵⁸ The North Carolina School Boards Association (NCSBA) has also recommended policies that encourage schools to tightly restrict smartphone use in class, which local districts have the flexibility to apply, customize, or ignore. For example, **Onslow County** has a policy where smart devices can be on campus as long as they are not activated, used, displayed, or visible during instructional time.⁵⁹ **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Rock Hill Schools, and Burke County Schools**, have enacted no-phone policies.⁶⁰

North Dakota

As of now, there is no statewide legislation in North Dakota specifically banning cellphones in classrooms.

Ohio

Gov. Mike DeWine signed a bill in May requiring school districts to establish policies on cellphone use, which will take effect no later than July 2025.⁶¹

Oklahoma

Senator Adam Pugh has asked the Oklahoma Senate to conduct interim studies looking at cellphone use in schools, and a bill was proposed that would incentivize schools to ban cellphones from classrooms with special funding and grants.⁶² Some school districts within the state have already banned cellphones in the classroom and report positive outcomes, such as reduced disruptions and increased student engagement.⁶³

Oregon

While there haven't been statewide bans, some districts have implemented their own policies. **Portland Public Schools**, Oregon's largest school district, leaves phone policy decisions up to schools or individual teachers.

Pennsylvania

A proposal to restrict Pennsylvania students' use of cellphones during the school day has been signed into law by the governor. Senate Bill 700 establishes a \$100 million pilot program to award grants to schools for purchasing lockable smartphone bags. Students will place their mobile devices in these bags during class. School districts that adopt an official policy prohibiting cellphone use during the school day

⁵⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/may/30/new-york-smartphone-school-ban-bill>

⁵⁸ <https://www.carolinajournal.com/opinion/smart-phones-in-class/>

⁵⁹ [Ibid](#)

⁶⁰ <https://www.opb.org/article/2024/07/08/oregon-washington-schools-cellphones/>

⁶¹ <https://education.ohio.gov/Media/Ed-Connection/May-20-2024/Governor-DeWine-signs-bill-requiring-Ohio-schools#:~:text=Last%20week%2C%20Ohio%20Governor%20Mike,phones%20in%20K%2D12%20schools.>

⁶² <https://districtadministration.com/oklahoma-schools-incentives-ban-cellphones-smartphones/>

⁶³ <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/2024/07/05/oklahoma-cellphone-bans-private-school-vouchers-senate-study/74291636007/>

can receive an automatic base grant of \$100,000.⁶⁴ While this program is currently voluntary, State Senator Ryan Aument plans to pursue a statewide prohibition on smartphone use during school hours.⁶⁵

Rhode Island

While there is no statewide ban in Rhode Island, individual districts and schools can choose their own cell phone policies, for example, **Nathanael Greene Middle School** in Providence has adopted the use of Yondr pouches. Under this program, each student receives a pouch to take home. Once at school, they must store their phones in the locked pouch until the end of the day.

South Carolina

The South Carolina Board of Education has plans to ban cellphones and other electronic communication devices in classrooms by 2025. This policy must be followed by district schools to receive state funding.⁶⁶ *Greenville News* reports, “When S.C. Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver sent out a brief survey to teachers regarding cellphone use in late May, she received hundreds of responses within the first 10 minutes, according to the memo. Of the 50,000 emails delivered, around 10,000 educators responded to the survey. Standard survey responses average between 3%-5%. This survey received a 20% response.” According to the survey, 83% of high school teachers said cellphones distract students in the classroom, 92% of teachers support a cellphone-limiting policy and 55% supported a complete ban within the school day. Teachers cited academic dishonesty/cheating, cyberbullying, lost learning, and teacher morale as major concerns. The *Greenville News* also notes, “The federal chronic absenteeism threshold (for when a student is absent from school) is set at 10% of instructional time missed. Applying that same methodology to teachers’ estimations of learning time lost due to cellphones would mean that between 55%-70% of students are ‘chronically absent’ (while still being physically present) due to cellphone distraction.”⁶⁷

Some school districts have already implemented their own cellphone policies. **Greenwood School District 50** trustees voted to ban phones during the school day, **Richland School District 1** bans phones during class time, and the **Charleston County School District** only allows students to use phones during certain parts of the day, such as lunch.

South Dakota

As of now, there is no statewide legislation in South Dakota specifically banning cellphones in classrooms. However, individual schools and districts may implement their own policies regarding cellphone use.

⁶⁴ <https://www.wgal.com/article/pennsylvania-proposal-to-limit-students-smartphone-use-during-school-signed-into-law/61600416>

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/2024/07/12/cellphone-ban-south-carolina-public-schools-2025/74379473007/>

⁶⁷ Ibid

Texas

There are no comprehensive bans on cellphones in the classroom in Texas, but individual districts are working to address the issue.⁶⁸ The **Katy Independent School District**, for example, has a policy banning cell phones and other personal devices in the classroom.⁶⁹

Tennessee

HB 2758 / SB 2809 is currently making its way through the Tennessee General Assembly which would prohibit students from displaying, using, or accessing electronic devices (such as cell phones) during instructional time unless authorized by the school for educational purposes.⁷⁰ However, the implementation details would be decided by individual school boards and local education agencies (LEAs). Some schools in the area already restrict phone use during class, while others allow limited use between classes or during lunch.⁷¹

Utah

HB270, a bill attempting to ban cellphones and smartwatches in Utah's classrooms was rejected by a vote of 9-3 by a House committee, however Governor Spencer Cox is urging school districts to remove cellphones from classrooms, and Utah public schools are expected to establish policies and provide training for teachers, students, and parents on the use of electronic devices within schools.

Vermont

Bill S.284, introduced in the Vermont Senate, aims to prohibit the use of personal digital products and social media in public schools, independent schools, career and technical centers, and prequalified private prekindergarten programs. It also requires the adoption of policies allowing students to opt out of electronic device use and online products.⁷² However, another bill specifically targeting cellphones in all Vermont schools did not pass in the Senate.⁷³⁷⁴

Virginia

Governor Glenn Youngkin issued an executive order in July 2024 directing the Virginia Department of Education to create guidance for public schools to limit or ban cell phones. The order aims to promote a healthier and more focused educational environment. Schools will develop policies and procedures to restrict or eliminate cell phone use during instructional time, with protocols for emergency situations. The draft guidance will be published by August 15, and local school divisions are expected to adopt cell phone-free education policies by January 1, 2025.⁷⁵

Charlottesville City schools introduced pouches to ban student cellphone use districtwide⁷⁶

⁶⁸ <https://www.fox7austin.com/news/texas-school-districts-student-cell-phone-issue-is-ellen-troxclair>

⁶⁹ <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/education/article/katy-isd-cell-phones-policy-19409704.php>

⁷⁰ <https://www.wivk.com/2024/02/22/new-bill-would-ban-cell-phones-in-tennessee-classrooms/>

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² [https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/BILLS/S-0284/S-0284 As Introduced.pdf](https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/BILLS/S-0284/S-0284%20As%20Introduced.pdf)

⁷³ <https://www.vermontpublic.org/local-news/2024-03-19/bill-requiring-safeguards-for-kids-online-passes-in-vermont-senate>

⁷⁴ <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/BILLS/S-0284/S-0284%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

⁷⁵ <https://www.wtvr.com/news/local-news/governor-youngkin-cell-phone-free-schools-july-9-2024>

⁷⁶ <https://www.vpm.org/news/2023-08-29/schools-ban-cellphone-use-pouches-hopewell>

The **Fairfax County** School Board approved a proposal to launch a pilot program for storing student cellphones during the school day. High school students would be allowed to get their phones back between classes and during lunch. Those with medical conditions would be exempt. Middle school students would not get their phones back until the end of the day. Teachers would have the option to allow students to keep their phones during class for instructional purposes.⁷⁷

In **Hanover County**, the School Board recently adopted a policy that prohibits students from using cellphones, earbuds, smartwatches, and other mobile devices during the instructional day, class changes, and lunch.⁷⁸

The **Henrico County** School Board voted unanimously to adopt tougher consequences for students who violate the division's cell phone policies. After the first offense, students are issued a verbal warning and their parent or guardian is contacted. After the second offense, the device is confiscated for the rest of the school day and the parent or guardian contacted.

Loudon County Policy 8655 was passed unanimously by the Loudoun County School Board and will go into effect this fall (the start of the 2024-25 school year). The policy prohibits elementary school students from using electronics. Middle schoolers can use their technology only at the start and end of the school day and must keep their cell phones on silent in their locker or classroom storage, not in their backpacks or pockets. High school students are allowed to use their devices between classes or at lunch with staff permission. Cell phones, tablets, earbuds, and gaming devices are among the electronics banned during academic hours. In case of emergencies, parents can contact the main office to reach their child.⁷⁹

Richmond City schools also launched a pouch pilot program that allows students to keep their cellphones in a locked pouch during school hours.⁸⁰

Washington

House Bill 2018 is designed to keep Washington students from using phones during the school day. Some districts, like the Peninsula School District in Gig Harbor, have already executed a phone ban.⁸¹ If passed, the mandate would be enforced by the 2027-28 school year. **Peninsula School District** has already implemented restrictions on phones in classrooms, requiring students to keep their phones turned off and stowed away during the entire school day. **Pasco, Kennewick, Reardon-Edwall,** and **Monroe** school districts also have policies limiting or banning cellphone use.⁸²

⁷⁷ <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/northern-virginia/fairfax-county-school-board-considers-cellphone-restrictions-for-middle-and-high-schools/3613679/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.wtvr.com/news/local-news/hanover-cell-phone-ban-july-9-2024>

⁷⁹ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/loudoun-county-implements-strict-cell-phone-policy-for-students/ar-BB1oXX0c?ocid=msedgntp&pc=U531&cvid=d89166be53934a26b1bf65cf82db7464&ei=16>

⁸⁰ <https://www.the74million.org/article/virginia-senate-bill-would-allow-school-boards-to-ban-phones-during-school-hours/>

⁸¹ <https://mynorthwest.com/3948604/phones-banned-schools-washington-under-new-bill-if-it-passes/>

⁸² <https://washingtonstatestandard.com/2024/05/02/should-washingtons-public-schools-ban-students-from-using-cell-phones/>

West Virginia

While there are no state-wide plans to ban cellphones in the classroom, the Ohio County Board of Education is considering a proposed policy that would restrict cell phone use in 6th to 12th grade classrooms. According to the policy, students in grades 6-8 will not be allowed to use their cell phones throughout the school day, while high school students in grades 9-12 will only have access to their mobile devices before school, in between classes, and after school.⁸³ Ohio County would be the first school system in West Virginia to enact such a ban.

Wisconsin

There is no state-wide ban in Wisconsin, but individual school districts have taken steps to limit phones in the classroom. **Appleton Area School District** permits students to use cellphones in non-instructional areas like common areas, hallways, and the cafeteria. **Green Bay Public Schools** allow phones during non-instructional time (passing periods, lunch, before/after school). Teachers and principals set rules, but bullying and inappropriate images are strictly prohibited. **Kimberly Area School District** allows high school students the use of personal devices before and after school, at lunch, and during extracurricular activities. Devices must be off and out of sight during class.⁸⁴ **Luxemburg-Casco School District** Middle schoolers participate in the “Away for the Day” program, leaving phones and smart devices in lockers during school hours.⁸⁵

Wyoming

As of now, there is no statewide ban on cellphones in Wyoming schools.

Objections (and how to get past them)

How will I be able to reach my child if there’s an emergency?

While this is a valid concern, most schools already encourage parents to call the school office should they need to reach their child. Encourage students to memorize important emergency numbers (like yours and other contacts) – just as you probably had to do when you were a child.

A phone helps my child stay organized!

Student planners and paper organizers are very effective at keeping track of homework assignments, extracurricular activities, and project deadlines. In fact, research shows that handwriting helps your brain retain information better than typing it into a phone. There is a persuasive argument to be made that phones becomes a crutch that the child relies on, rather than a tool that empowers them to be better organized.

⁸³ <https://wvmetronews.com/2024/07/10/ohio-county-board-of-education-considers-restricting-cell-phones-in-schools/>

⁸⁴ <https://www.jsonline.com/story/series/kidsincrisis/2024/01/03/wisconsin-school-districts-have-different-cellphone-policies/71904218007/>

⁸⁵ [Ibid](#)

Phones can be used to enhance learning by making lessons more interactive and fun!

Although school systems still wedded to technology use in the classroom will stress that any “problems” are only associated with “non-academic” use of cell phones in the classroom, their supposed benefits may have been oversold, especially by tech companies that stand to benefit from keeping these tools in classrooms. Technology in the classroom can lead to less retention and depth of understanding compared to traditional methods; it can be distracting, pulling students away from educational content and into social media or unrelated websites. But in an age when children are struggling socially, excessive reliance on technology in the classroom may decrease face-to-face interactions among students, affecting social skills development. Finally, Implementing technology effectively requires time and expertise, which educators may lack.

I want my child to be able to record incidents at school for their own safety and protection.

If you have legitimate concerns about your child’s safety at school, raise those concerns with the teachers and administrators directly. Recording a dangerous encounter not only won’t keep your child safe, but may in fact escalate the situation.

School phone bans could make it harder for kids to use tech in healthy ways.

Smartphone use triggers the release of dopamine and can become addictive. Even adults often find that they have a hard time putting their phones down. Saying that kids must learn how to use tech responsibly in school would be like saying kids need to learn how to drink responsibly in school. Neither was intended for children, and learning how to use both responsibly can come later, when they are adults, when their brains are more fully developed.

School phone bans are difficult to enforce.

The key to enforcement is setting out clear guidelines and consistently enforcing them. Even with strict rules, some students may find ways to use their phones during class. It is important (1) to make sure parents and students alike are aware of what the school/district/state policy is with respect to cellphones and that they will be strictly enforced, and (2) to provide secure storage for phones during class hours. Requiring students to lock-up their phones at the beginning of the day, and keep them locked-up until school is over will relieve teachers of the burden of enforcing rules during class time so they can focus on instruction.

Phone bans make it harder for parents to communicate with their children

In recent years -- and particularly during the COVID lockdowns -- parents got used to being able to reach their child/children throughout the day, every day. But “helicopter parenting” can negatively impact a child’s development and growth, fueling anxiety, making children less willing to take healthy risks, and reducing their ability to regulate their emotions, exhibit self-control, and solve problems on their own. Much of the resistance to cellphone bans comes not from students themselves, but from their parents, who want and expect to be in constant

communication with their child throughout the day, making it harder for students to focus on their schoolwork.⁸⁶

What if there's a school shooter situation at my child's school? How will I reach them?

There are emergency alert systems already in place in most school districts for bad weather or school cancellations. This system can be used to alert parents in case of such an emergency. Kids texting their parents during that kind of situation could actually put them in greater danger if they are listening to mom or dad's instructions, for example, instead of the instructions of the adults and first responders who are actually there on the ground and have more first-hand knowledge of the situation and protocols for safely evacuating.

Can School Phone Policies Stand Up to Legal Challenges?

In *Koch v. Adams*, 361 S.W.3d 817, 819 (Ark. 2010), a student sued the school district after his phone was confiscated by a teacher because he was using his phone during class, in violation of the school district's policy. The court rejected the student's argument that the school policy was illegal and unconstitutional. The ruling was upheld by the Arkansas Supreme Court, which held that confiscation policy did not violate Arkansas education statutes and did not violate the student's constitutional due process rights.

A New York court also upheld a cellphone ban in schools, emphasizing that it reasonably relates to legitimate educational concerns.⁸⁷

How to Change Policy in Your District

As a concerned citizen, you can take several steps to advocate for a school cell phone ban in your district, county, or state:

Research and Understand Existing Policies:

- Familiarize yourself with the current policies in your area. Understand whether there are any existing restrictions on cell phone use in schools.
- Gather data on the impact of cell phones on student learning, behavior, and well-being. This report includes many of those data points. Use this information to build your case.

Engage with Local School Boards and Administrators:

⁸⁶ <https://slate.com/human-interest/2024/03/phone-free-schools-movement-parents-teenagers.html>

⁸⁷ <https://aasb.org/you-cant-take-my-phone-legal-issues-related-to-policies-restricting-students-mobile-devices/>

- Attend school board meetings and express your concerns. Share evidence supporting the need for a ban.
- Collaborate with teachers, parents, and administrators to raise awareness about the issue. Encourage open discussions.

Petition and Gather Support:

- Create an online or physical petition advocating for a cell phone ban. Collect signatures from parents, teachers, students, and community members.
- Present the petition to school board members, legislators, or other decision-makers.

Contact Your State Representatives:

- Write letters or emails to your state representatives, urging them to consider legislation for statewide cell phone bans.
- Explain the benefits of such a ban and emphasize its positive impact on student focus, safety, and overall well-being.

Collaborate with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs):

- PTAs have influence within schools. Attend PTA meetings and discuss the issue.
- Encourage PTAs to pass resolutions supporting cell phone restrictions and advocate for them at the district level.

Educate the Community:

- Organize informational sessions or workshops for parents, teachers, and students. Discuss the effects of excessive cell phone use during school hours.
- Use social media platforms to share relevant articles, studies, and success stories from other districts.

Leverage Media and Public Awareness:

- Reach out to local newspapers, TV stations, and radio shows. Share your perspective on the importance of cell phone bans.
- Positive media coverage can raise awareness and put pressure on decision-makers.

The **Parents Television and Media Council**® (www.parentstv.org®) is a non-partisan education organization advocating responsible entertainment. It was founded in 1995 to ensure that children are not constantly assaulted by sex, violence and profanity on television and in other media. This national grassroots organization has more than 1.4 million members, and works with television producers, broadcasters, networks and sponsors in an effort to stem the flow of harmful and negative messages targeted to children. The PTC™ also works with elected and appointed government officials to enforce broadcast decency standards. Most importantly, the PTC produces critical research and publications documenting the dramatic increase in sex, violence and profanity in entertainment. This information is provided free of charge so parents can make informed viewing choices for their own families. *Visit the new PTC Watchdog Blog at <http://www.parentstv.org/blog/>. Follow the PTC on Twitter: @ThePTC.*