

## Exploring School Cell Phone Bans

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### Overview

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The introduction of smartphones in the early 2000's created a new generation of adolescents with unlimited access to screen time, social media, and the internet at large. Almost half of children in the U.S. have a smartphone as early as 11 years old. In a study conducted by [Common Sense Media](#) in 2022, a sample group of 203 students aged 11-17 had their smartphone usage tracked for one week. The study found that participants used their phones for four and a half hours a day on average. 97% of participants used their phones during school hours, averaging 43 minutes per school day. Participants aged 13 and older were more likely to check their phone over 100 times a day.

Many [studies](#) have shown that the use of cell phones during school hours hinders overall learning, contributes to negative school environments, and restricts a teacher's ability to provide effective instruction. In 2023, [Pew Research Center](#) conducted an online survey of 2,531 U.S. public K-12 teachers. About 72% of public high school teachers stated that cellphone distractions are a major problem in their classrooms, followed by 33% of public middle school teachers and 6% of public elementary school teachers in the U.S. 71% of high school teachers also shared that their school or district has a cell phone policy of some kind, but 60% of the same respondents specifically reported that enforcing the policies is challenging.

As of June 2024, [13 states](#) have enacted policies either restricting or banning students' use of cell phones in school. Three states ([Florida](#), [Louisiana](#), and [South Carolina](#)) have enacted legislation restricting the use of cell phones during the school day. [Indiana](#), [Minnesota](#), [Ohio](#), and [Virginia](#) enacted policies requiring school districts and the state board of education to create and implement guidelines to limit or ban the use of cell phones in schools. [Arkansas](#), [Delaware](#), and [Pennsylvania](#) have established voluntary cell phone pouch programs with allocated funding to encourage school districts to limit student cell phone use. Pennsylvania's law goes a step further in incentivizing districts to implement cell phone restrictions. Specifically, Pennsylvania requires schools to develop and adopt an official policy on restricting cell phone use during the school day in order to receive funding for the lockable smartphone bags.

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## Advantages of Statewide School Cell Phone Bans

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- **Positive School Environment**  
Schools throughout the U.S. and around the world that have restricted students' use of cell phones have seen improved [test scores](#), an increase in [engagement](#) with classmates, and fewer disciplinary issues, including a decrease in instances of cyberbullying and academic dishonesty.
- **Ability to Create Uniform Cell Phone Ban Policies Across the State**  
As of the 2021-2022 school year, about [76%](#) of schools in the U.S. had some variation of a cell phone policy. However, each school, sometimes within the same district, has differing requirements, consequences, and enforcement techniques. By creating school cell phone restrictions legislatively or mandating the State Board of Education to do so, there is uniformity and clarity on what is expected of teachers and students alike.

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## Challenges of Implementing Statewide School Cell Phone Bans

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- **Enforcement**  
Enforcing a strict cell phone policy can be an extra burden on teachers and administrators without the proper protocol and tools to do so.
- **Parental Backlash**  
In a 2024 [survey](#) conducted by the National Parents Union, most parents stated that they prefer their children to have access to their phones indefinitely in case of an emergency. With some stricter cell phone policies, students must stash their phones in a different part of the classroom during the school day.

- **Creating Effective, Comprehensive and Equitable Cell Phone Ban Policies**

Since stricter policies on cell phone use in schools are a relatively new phenomenon, there is minimal evidence on the effectiveness of various policies.

However, [school districts](#) in Florida have noticed positive changes in their school environments. [Florida's law](#) prohibits cell phone use in K-12 schools and blocks access to social media on all devices connected to school district Wi-Fi. Indiana prohibits students from using any portable wireless device during instructional time, but the policies include exceptions for emergencies and with permission from teachers or administrators. In Delaware, Colonial School District's middle schools have used [voluntary cell phone pouches](#) since 2022, and teachers have reported positive changes in their school's atmosphere. In 2015, [New York](#) discovered that their statewide cell phone ban was more strictly enforced in schools serving lower income students as opposed to schools with students from higher income families, highlighting equity concerns in cell phone ban policies and consequently leading to a lifting of the ban.

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## Current Events

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- **Delaware**  
[Senate Bill 326](#), signed in June 2024, allocates \$250,000 to the Department of Education for the School Cell Phone Pilot Program. The funds will be used to establish a voluntary cell phone pouch program for grades 6-12 throughout the state. A report on the outcome of the program is due on May 1, 2025.
- **South Carolina**  
In September 2024, the [South Carolina State Board of Education](#) approved a

model policy for school districts to follow in implementing cell phone restrictions in schools. This decision occurred a few months after the state budget mandated that school districts adopt a cell phone restriction policy or risk state funding.

- **California**

In August 2024, California Governor Gavin Newsom [urged schools](#) to create and implement restrictions on cell phone use before this school year, citing [AB-272](#) signed in 2019, that gives school districts the authority to do so.

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### Considerations for Delaware Legislators

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- **Creating a Task Force to Study the Effects of Social Media Use in Delaware Schools**

In 2023, New Jersey enacted [Senate Bill 715](#) which created the Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents. This commission is tasked with studying the prevalence of social media in adolescents, as well as the social and emotional effects social media usage has on students and their academic performance in New Jersey schools. The commission's duties also include creating social media usage standards, including strategies to limit the use of electronic devices during the school day.

- **Introducing Legislation Mandating the Creation of School Cell Phone Restriction Policies**

Currently, the Delaware Code does not mandate that school districts adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use of cell phones in schools. Although most districts and schools in Delaware do have protocols for limiting cell phone use, policies are not uniform, easily enforceable, or transparent.

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### Additional Resources

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- UNESCO's [Global Education Monitoring Report](#) from 2023 highlights how digital technology can complement learning, but regulating the use of cell phones in schools should be studied.
- A collection of [research studies](#) on the impact of cell phones in academics.
- The [U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory](#) from 2023 on the ties between social media and youth mental health.
- This [Delaware Online article](#) from August 2024 reports on Brandywine School District's and Smyrna School District's decisions to implement stricter cell phone restrictions during the school day.