

## Your Question:

A state legislator asked for information on cell phone use policies in schools.

## Our Response:

The issue of cell phone use in schools is wide-reaching and touches on topics from privacy to acceptable use. According to a [2022 study](#) done by Pew Research Center, the vast majority of teens say they have access to a digital device, such as a smartphone (95%) or a desktop or laptop computer (90%), and 97% of teens say they are on the internet daily. Additionally, 46% say they are online almost constantly. According to the [National Center on Education Statistics](#), almost 77% of schools have banned cellphone use in school as of 2020.

Based on a preliminary scan of state policy, state education agency resources and local education agency policies, Education Commission of the States found that the issue of cell phone use in schools is most often dealt with at the local level. When addressed at the state level, the policy generally 1) broadly defines what constitutes a misuse of a cell phone, 2) directs local agencies to adopt acceptable use policies and 3) prohibits the use of cell phones during state-administered testing. This response offers an overview of state and local policies on cell phone use in schools.

## State Policy on Cell Phone Use in Schools

Few states directly address the use of cell phones in classrooms. A preliminary scan of existing and pending state policy revealed that states often identified the misuse of a cell phone as part of a greater issue or directed local education authorities to develop and implement policy.

### **Alabama**

In February, the state board passed a [resolution](#) strongly encouraging local boards to adopt a policy limiting cell phone use while on school property.

### **California** [A.B. 272](#) (Enacted, 2019)

This bill authorizes the governing body of a school district, a county office of education or a charter school to adopt a policy limiting or prohibiting student use of smartphones while students are on school grounds. Students may use cell phones in case of an emergency, with employee permission or when allowed through an individualized education plan.

### **Florida** [H.B. 379](#) (Enacted, 2023)

This bill prohibits students from using cell phones during instructional time and requires teachers to designate an area for cell phones during instructional time.

### **Indiana** [S.B. 185](#) (Enacted, 2024)

This bill requires public schools, including charter schools, to adopt and implement a wireless communication device policy that regulates student use of a wireless communication device, including cell phones, tablets, laptops and gaming devices. This policy must be published on the school's website.

**Kentucky** [Rev. Stat. Ann. § 158.165](#)

State statute requires the board of education of each school district to develop a policy regarding the possession and use of cell phones by students while on school property or while attending a school-sponsored event. The policy is to be included in the district's standards of student conduct.

**Ohio** [H.B. 250](#) (Enacted, 2024)

This bill requires school districts to adopt a cell phone policy that seeks to limit cell phone use during school hours.

**South Carolina** [Code Ann. Regs. 43-279 \(IV\)\(A\)\(2\)\(j\)](#)

State policy establishes minimum standards for student conduct that school districts must address in their local student conduct policy. Among the activities and behaviors identified is the possession of cell phones in schools. Consequences for cell phone misuse, as defined by the district, can range from a verbal reprimand to consequences in coordination with local authorities depending on the specific school policy.

**Texas** [S.B. 2375](#) (Failed, 2023)

This bill would have required the board of trustees of a school district and the governing body of a charter school to prohibit students from using a cell phone during instructional time.

**Virginia** [EO-33](#) (2024)

At the beginning of July, Gov. Glen Youngkin issued an executive order directing the department of education to draft guidance for schools to adopt policies that would establish cell phone-free education. The guidance must include processes for parents to communicate with their children.

**Local Policy on Cell Phone Use in Schools**

In general, the use of cell phones in schools is addressed through district or school level policy that ranges from outright bans across a district to the authorization of schools to set restrictions. Often, districts provide schools with direction but ultimately leave enforcement and monitoring up to the school.

**Chicago, Illinois**

Chicago Public Schools [policy](#) allows school principals to form policy on possession of cell phones at school. If cell phones are authorized to be on school grounds, the school policy must identify when cell phones can be used and how they must be kept when on school grounds. Principals may also prohibit cell phones but must allow individual students to possess them for good cause and with a written request from a parent or guardian.

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

Milwaukee Public Schools [policy](#) allows students to possess cell phones on school grounds, but they cannot be activated, displayed or used while in school other than for approved education purposes. The restriction also applies to extracurricular activities and field trips.

**New York City, New York**

In 2007, the New York City superintendent banned cell phones in all public schools. This policy was [overturned](#) in 2015. Currently, New York City [policy](#) allows students to bring a cell phone to school. Under the district policy, each school is charged with developing their own cell phone policy and students who bring a cell phone to school must follow each individual school's cell phone rules.

## Additional Resources

**National Education Association, [Cell Phone Bans in School Are Back. How Far Will They Go?](#) (2023)**

This article provides an overview of the issue with useful research, perspectives from school leaders and parents, and a discussion of district and school-level policies.

**EdWeek, [Schools Say No to Cellphones in Class. But Is It a Smart Move?](#) (2019)**

This article provides examples of school and state guidelines around cell phone use and discusses the pros and cons of restricting student access to phones.

**National Conference of State Legislatures, [Social Media and Children Legislative Tracking](#) (2024)**

This resource catalogs introduced and enacted legislation related to minors and social media more broadly, including state efforts to regulate social media networks and content providers, efforts to provide media literacy education in schools and other efforts to ensure safe access to technology.