



## **Smartphone Bans in Schools: Full-Day Bans Associated with Best Outcomes for Students**

### **A Guide for State Legislators**

#### **Background**

Smartphones undermine student attention and classroom engagement. The evidence shows that smartphone use in schools is connected to lower academic achievement, declining mental health, and more frequent behavioral problems. Schools should work with parents, who are increasingly concerned about the ill effects of smartphones and constant access to social media.

A growing body of research suggests that well-designed bans on smartphone use in school can mitigate these problems, leading to better classroom environments, reduced online bullying, better mental health, and improved academic performance. For state legislators, understanding the differences in ban types and implementation is crucial to maximizing benefits while addressing practical challenges.

A [University of Southern California survey](#) found that 93 percent of parents support some type of cellphone restriction or ban during the school day.

#### **Research**

Well-designed bans reduce disruptions and cyberbullying and are linked to better student behavior.

In a [new Paragon study](#), professors David Marshall of Auburn University and Tim Pressley of Christopher Newport University found that international studies and early evidence from the U.S. point to several benefits of removing phones during the entire school day:

- Students perform better academically and classrooms become more focused and productive.
- Teachers report easier classroom management and fewer disruptions.
- Students report increased concentration and more face-to-face interaction with peers.

On mental health, findings are mixed but promising. While some research from Australia and England found no direct reductions in anxiety or depression linked to school phone bans, indirect advantages include less social comparison and fewer conflict triggers from device use. Early reports from New York City charter schools, like KIPP NYC, noted enhanced student well-being, with increased after-school participation and social interactions following bans. In Virginia, 62 percent of teachers reported improved student behavior.

Bans can also lead to significant academic gains. In the UK, schoolwide bans increased national exam scores by 6.4 percent. Importantly, the most substantial improvements were felt by low-achieving and disadvantaged students. Similar gains have been observed internationally, including improvements in math and language performance. In the U.S., Florida's statewide ban for elementary and middle schools showed test score improvements in the second year after an initial adjustment, underscoring the need for time to adapt.



## **Policy Recommendations**

Research shows policy design and enforcement matter:

- The most effective bans are comprehensive "bell-to-bell" policies, prohibiting devices from arrival to dismissal.
- Bell-to-bell bans outperform limited "instructional-time" restrictions (e.g., prohibiting phone use during classes only), which allow use in hallways or during the lunch break, leading to inconsistencies and persistent distractions.
- Success depends on infrastructure like secure pouches (costing \$25–\$30 per student) or lockers, consistent enforcement, and clear rules to close loopholes.

Legislators should prioritize flexible state mandates that encourage school districts to adopt full-day bans but allow for local flexibility. They should provide teacher training, funding for tools, and professional development to ensure buy-in. It is important to engage stakeholders — students, parents, teachers, and administrators — early to define goals, address safety concerns (e.g., emergencies handled via school offices), and build support.

With 31 states and D.C. implementing some form of school phone limits as of 2025, evidence supports bans as part of a broader strategy to foster focused, healthy learning environments. Rhode Island and North Dakota have enacted the strongest bell-to-bell policies, requiring inaccessible storage of devices throughout the school day while allowing limited medical exceptions.