



January 15, 2025

Proponent of HB 2421 for House Education Committee Hearing on 1/16/2025

Dear House Education Committee,

We are writing to support HB 2421 in Kansas. We applaud the "bell to bell" device separation mandate that applies to all schools.

We are the author and primary researcher of the book, *The Anxious Generation*, which documented the negative effects that smartphones and heavy use of social media has had on youth around the globe. The book has spent more than a year at the top of bestseller lists and has been used to motivate grassroots mobilization of students, teachers, administrators, and parents for phone free schools. Technology can certainly provide benefits to young people, but the current business incentives and practices of some tech companies are leading them to cause vast harm to children and adolescents. Protecting kids from online harm is non-partisan, and supported by the majority of Americans. Legislators have the opportunity to take clear decisive action, joining the bi-partisan movement to protect kids' mental health, attention, and relationships by supporting phone-free schools.

The proposed legislation would be an important step in giving kids a break from harmful and addictive technology for the 6-7 hours each weekday that they are at school. This is critically important for students, as well as for teachers and administrators. Schools influence 13 years of critical child development and can help students establish lifelong patterns of healthy behavior. Based on our research, we believe that phone free policies are likely to provide substantial academic, socio-emotional, safety, and economic benefits for schools.

Phone-free schools are likely to reduce distraction and increase student focus. Recent studies have found that students receive an average of 237 notifications each day. Just during the school day, students spend an average of 90 minutes on their phones, with 25% spending more than 2 hours. Experimental studies have found that student use of devices reduces subsequent academic performance. 35 percent of students admit to using their phones to cheat. Many instances of bullying and fighting begin with electronic communications.

Teachers, who are most qualified to comment on the effects of phones in schools, see the problem. 84% of educators believe that social media contributes to mental health issues among students at their schools. 91% said social media has negatively impacted how students treat people in real life.

The problems have reached a tipping point. Teacher morale is plummeting and some teachers have been driven to quit. 88% of teachers believe that smartphones make their students more distracted or tired, while 74% believe they make students more depressed, anxious, or lonely and 85% believe they

increase student conflict and bullying. 72% of high school teachers say that cell phone distraction in their classes is a major problem. 83% of teachers support a policy that prohibits phone use for the entire school day.

There are many strengths to the current bill, and we only have one suggestion. We ask that any policy have these five essential features, as elaborated in this model bill:

1. **Require all schools in the state to comply.** - This eliminates any confusion across districts, sets a norm for an entire community, and allows students to relax, knowing that they will not be missing activity from friends at other schools. We appreciate that the current bill sets a strong policy now, while the issue has legislative attention.
2. **Physically separate students from all personal devices.** - The regular use of devices in school is a distraction to students, whether a device is a smartphone or is just used to receive text messages. We appreciate that the current bill does this.
3. **Ban phones for the entire school day.** A classtime-only rule also doesn't give teachers as much benefit as they might expect. Research from the National Education Association found that 73% of teachers in schools that allow phone use *between* classes report that phones are disruptive *during* class. In contrast, of the several policies examined, only the phone-free or "away for the day" policy produced good results with only 28% of teachers in such schools saying that phones were disruptive during their classes. It is only when students have 6-7 hours away from their phones that they fully turn to each other and to their teachers. We appreciate that Kansas' bill is indeed "bell to bell" in that it mandates separation for the entire school day.
4. **Stop schools from requiring social media use for communications.** Schools should not use social media as a primary communications tool, to allow parents the freedom to make individual choices about whether or not to use social media, both for themselves and their kids. We appreciate that the current bill prohibits direct communications.
5. **Include two (and only two) important exceptions.** While it may be tempting to add many exceptions to placate parent fears, there are only two that we have found to be widely necessary: medical needs, and special education needs. Some students may have a legitimate health or educational need that requires access to their own smartphone. We appreciate that the current bill has limited exceptions.

In summary, we support this effort and applaud Kansas' efforts that are amongst the strongest in the nation.

We have yet to find a school that earnestly tries to go phone free and regrets it. Students, teachers, and administrators are reporting a wide range of positive benefits, including in-person socialization, laughter in the hallways, reduced distraction, fewer fights, more reading, and improved student engagement.

We thank you for your efforts to protect kids in Kansas and would be glad to follow up further.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Haidt
Zachary Rausch

Testimony to the House Education Committee

February 5, 2026

Bill HB 2421 Proponent

Elizabeth Harms, Former Teacher, Current School Counselor

liz.harms@usd452.org

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I eagerly voice my support for HB 2421 for a variety of reasons pertaining to student academic success, interpersonal and social development, overall student cognitive functioning, and in support of teachers struggling to maintain classroom management and student academic integrity.

I began teaching in 2011 when Smartphones were available but far less commonly used by children and teenagers. I prided myself on classroom management and student engagement, utilizing the best teaching strategies I could find. I loved my students and had positive relationships with all, but it was impossible to compete with the pervasiveness of cell phones in the classroom. I tried different approaches to managing cell phones as more data and ideas emerged with approaches for appropriate cell phone use, but cheating became more commonplace and more students viewed it as acceptable, despite my attempts to the contrary. I had a constant stream of phones I would confiscate only to see appear in class in the following days, because there was limited support from administration and parents.

In my current role as a school counselor, I would estimate that almost half of the issues I see students struggling with are exacerbated through cell phone use during the school day. Whether that comes from students texting as a distraction, from unkind interactions through Snapchat, or from middle school girls feeling additional scrutiny and insecurity due to their friends taking and sharing their pictures without their permission. We have annual assemblies about responsible cell phone use, but developmentally, teenagers are very impulsive, so poor decisions are still made. These adolescents have so much potential for good, but they need adults to set and maintain structure and expectations that protect their development during the school day, instead of a permissive atmosphere that looks the other way and then responds reactively when misconduct involving cell phones occurs.

Our school has recently moved to a no phone bell to bell policy, and we have seen large improvement. The main way we could use support is through all teachers and parents understanding the importance of enforcing this policy consistently. Many teachers are exhausted with the variety of issues they deal with, so if the policy was at the state level, it would relieve them of feeling the need to constantly explain their own reasoning for not wanting cell phones to interfere with their classrooms. We also have a teacher shortage in Kansas, so we have a growing number of "Transition to Teaching" individuals who may be lacking the training in classroom management. We need to support these teachers, especially, by eliminating factors that are working against their chances of success in the classroom. Having top-down regulations about cell phone use in schools would help with teacher retention and would reduce local discrepancies and arguments about how the matter should be handled, independent of how vigilant or how lax local administrations have been thus far.

I strongly vote yes on bill HB 2421 because our students deserve the best opportunity and environment possible to succeed in learning and preparing for all the future holds. It is our job as educators, parents, and legislators to ensure guardrails are in place to make this happen.

Elizabeth Harms
Johnson City, KS

Dear members of the House committee considering the adoption of HB 2421:

My name is Alison Hirons and I am currently in my 22nd year of teaching high school chemistry in the state of Kansas. Over the course of my career, I have had a front row seat to observe the effect that widespread adoption of smartphones and other personal electronic devices by our society has had on the educational landscape. I can't point to a single other factor that has had as much of a detrimental effect on the classroom climate as these devices. I know you will hear from a lot of experts about the myriad ways these devices are negatively impacting students, so I would like to focus on how current policies fall short in protecting the learning environment for both students and teachers.

My district adopted a personal electronic device policy that went into effect at the start of the 24-25 school year, prohibiting the use of these devices during instructional time but allowing them during passing periods and at lunch. I can tell you that, while having a policy is better than not having one, not much has really changed in terms of protecting the learning environment from the distraction posed by these devices. Even in classrooms where teachers are using a cell phone caddy and being as diligent as possible about enforcing the policy, students are still receiving and responding to notifications on smart watches and listening to air pods during instructional time. Students continue to be distracted by their devices because the devices continue to be accessible to them, even if physically separated from them by the caddy.

Not only do current policies fall short in eliminating student distraction for personal electronic devices, they also place an undue burden on teachers to enforce. They require each teacher to check each hour of each day that each of their students has put their phone in the caddy. And this joyless, exhausting, never-ending task doesn't end once the phones are the caddies. If there happens to be any down time at all during class, due to a student finishing an activity more quickly than their peers, or during a transition from one activity to another, there will inevitably be at least one student who asks if they can use their phone for some reason or another (reasons include texting their ride because plans have changed, submitting an assignment for another class, responding to a text from their mom, etc.). You can understand why many teachers quickly give up on trying to enforce a policy that requires this kind of constant vigilance, which just makes enforcement of the policy that much harder for those who don't give up on it.

For these reasons, I urge you to pass legislation like HB 2421, making personal electronic devices inaccessible to students for the entirety of the school day. This is the only way to ensure that these devices will not pose a distraction to students, and to free teachers from the never-ending burden of policing student use of these devices during instructional time. Teachers will be happier because they will be able to focus more of their energy on the aspects of their job that bring them joy, and students will be more successful because their attention won't be constantly fragmented by distractions from their devices.

Sincerely,

Alison Hirons

Dear Representative Martinez,

January 13, 2026

I am writing to express my strong support for passage of SB-302/HS 2421; a proposed bill establishing a no cell phone policy in schools during instructional hours. As an educator of over 40 years in the state of Kansas, I have seen many times how unrestricted cell phones are used negatively. This negative usage affects student learning, engagement, and overall school climate.

Cell phone are a constant distraction in the classroom. Even when used discreetly, they interrupt focus, reduce meaningful participation, and undermine academic progress. Studies have shown that limiting cell phones during the school day improves attention, comprehension, and test performance.

Studies will also show that cell phones increase anxiety, cyberbullying, and much social conflict among students. By banning cell phones from school buildings, it would give educators more time to focus on the learning environment in their classrooms. Interpersonal skills among students and adults are extremely low in our society at this time. Sadly, I have seen whole groups of students at tables during lunch on their cell phones. Students need to realize not everything in this life is solved through a cell phone, computer, or text message. By passing this law it would relieve teachers of the burden of enforcing inconsistent rules.

Eliminating cell phones does not curtail parent communication or safety. Every school in the state of Kansas consistently provides safety protocol on a yearly basis. Emergency procedures are already in place. One has to look at the Columbine Shootings on April 20, 1999 to understand that inconsistent and confusing cell phone messages being transmitted caused conflicts for people on the outside of the building. It has been mentioned that had the ambulances/first responders had earlier clearance into the building teacher Dave Sanders would not have bled to death and have lost his life. It was the conflicting cell phone messages that caused confusion.

Learning needs to be the main priority in our school buildings, and this bill would help protect that time. Students need to be focused on improving reading, writing, and practicing interpersonal skills. We need to go back to a society that communicates and listens to each other.

I urge the passage of this legislation to help provide schools with the tools to foster academic success, student well-being, and respectful learning environments. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to education.

Sincerely

Tim Laner

January 19, 2026

House Committee on Education

HB 2421 written testimony only

Respected Chair Susan Estes and Committee Members,

I am a proponent of HB 2421 and ask that you vote YES on this bill and pass it favorably out of Committee.

We need to restrict students from all electronic equipment except for as set forth in the bill as exceptions. They need to be able to concentrate on their teachers and materials and not be distracted by their electronic devices.

Again, please vote YES on HB 2421

Thank you!

Most sincerely,

Jill O'Connor

Precinct Committee Woman, OP, 5-18

Overland Park, Kansas

913-220-4925

Proponent of HB2421

(Student Phones, Personal Devices)

For the Senate Education Committee

January 16, 2026

Gretchen Shanahan

Parent

Chair Estes and Members of the Committee, **thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of House Bill 2421 on behalf of . . .**

My students, their peers, teachers, faculty and those of future generations.

I'd like to share what we should all know about safety in schools.

Our Kansas schools are and have been safe places. Over the decades, districts have developed many protocols and security features. One well known feature is the use of school resource officers. An SRO is a carefully selected, specifically trained and properly equipped law enforcement officer assigned to work collaboratively with schools.

Founded in 1991, the National Association of School Resource Officers offers high-quality training for SROs and school safety professionals.

With this associations expertise in what SROs do day in and day out, I'd like to read a summary of their statement in support of bell to bell school phone policy. They state that...

During normal days, phone access promotes social media drama, cyberbullying and easier planning of physical altercations. This hinders student safety.

During school emergencies, the risks posed by phone access during emergencies are even greater..

As students must be completely focused on life-saving instructions. Phones can easily distract students from hearing, understanding and reacting appropriately.

Some school emergencies require students to hide in silence. Sounds or light from students' phones could help an assailant locate potential victims.

Responders rely on cell phone networks to facilitate safe responses. Students using phones simultaneously could hinder essential emergency communications.

Students communicating to parents during an emergency often prompts parents to rush to the school, creating traffic issues that hinder emergency responders.

A parent can be mistaken for an assailant if the parent tries to access the school building in response to the emergency.

For all these reasons, NASRO strongly supports polices and legislation that ban cell phone access “bell to bell...”.

I am a parent who understands concerns about safety. In my lived experience, I can relate to living in fear of “what might happen” rather than living in the moment.

Living in the moment, without a phone, eases anxiety not just for ourselves but those around us. I firmly believe that after schools implement this policy we will see less dependence, fear and anxiety that is replaced with greater resilience, pro-social behavior, greater safety, education and happiness in our schools.

Finally,

Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength

Testimony to the House Committee on Education

NAME: Jessica Skoglund

TITLE: Kansas Teacher, Parent, and Citizen

EMAIL ADDRESS: jessica.a.skoglund@gmail.com

BILL NUMBER: Bill HB 2421

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: PROPONENT

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: WRITTEN

DATE OF HEARING: January 16, 2026

Chair Estes & Members of the Committee,

As a high school teacher for over a dozen years, I support House Bill 2421. There are numerous reasons I support this bill, but I will outline just a few.

First, research consistently supports that cell phones negatively impact education. In fact, a 2016 study in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* found that the mere presence of a phone—even if stored out of sight—proved to be a distraction to learning. Students and teachers deserve to have a policy that prevents distractions and promotes learning.

Additionally, early research coming out on states that have enacted phone bans in schools shows that these bans work. Noted Wharton psychologist Angela Duckworth along with economists from Stanford University surveyed 20,000 public school teachers and found that more phone restrictions led to more focused classrooms. Initial data also shows that academics are higher in schools that do not permit students to keep phones on their person.

I would also like to address a few of the issues I have seen discussed about the bill. Many parents are concerned about reaching their student in case of a school emergency. While I understand this emotional argument as I am a parent myself, it is based more on fear than on evidence. A recent report by the Rockefeller Institute of Government found that “using phones during an active shooter event can endanger students by drawing attention to their location, overloading communication networks, and distracting them from following safety protocols.”

Furthermore, I have seen some legislators note that they want this issue to be one of local control. The bill already does that to some extent by allowing local school districts to implement specific policies and enforcement mechanisms. What is most important is that Kansas takes a consistent stand across the state in banning what the data overwhelming shows harms learning.

I will close with what Duckworth says about her survey of 20,000 teachers: “We have not found the educator who does not care about this issue and who doesn’t feel we should be doing more than what we’re doing right now.” I hope that you will help our teachers in doing more on this issue by voting to ban cell phones in schools in our state. Thank you for your consideration!

Jessica Skoglund

Olathe School District Teacher and Parent

Olathe

Testimony to the House Education Committee

February 6, 2026

Bill HB 2421 Proponent

Jeff Smith

jeffrey.smith.a@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 2421 and to share my concerns about allowing students to use phones during the school day in our Kansas public schools.

I am writing from the perspective of not only a concerned parent in the district but also of a large international engineering and construction firm headquartered in Kansas City, a major employer of new graduates in the region. As social media use and screen time have increased over the past decade, I have seen our children's social skills negatively affected. This has now extended to college-aged students and young professionals. While generational differences have always played out in society, communication has always been the primary medium for developing interpersonal relationships and learning from one another. New grads who are dynamic in conversation and work well in diverse groups are the ones who get ahead. Those buried in their phones and lacking fully developed social capabilities lag behind.

Please vote yes on bill HB 2421 so that our children are best positioned to develop healthy relationships with one another and succeed in life.

Respectfully,

Jeff Smith

Prairie Village, KS

Testimony to the House Education Committee

February 6, 2026

Bill HB 2421 Proponent

Maria Smith, parent

maria.smith.a@gmail.com

Dear Chair & Members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 2421, legislation that promotes phone- and social media-free learning environments in Kansas schools. I am a parent of four children in the Shawnee Mission School District, ranging from preschool through high school. I am writing in strong support of this legislation based on concerns I have observed over many years as my children have progressed through our public schools.

One of my children entered middle school as a new student and struggled to make friends, not because of a lack of interest or effort, but because so many of her peers spent lunch periods and passing times on their phones. Instead of socializing and making eye contact, many children were isolated behind screens. This made an already difficult transition even harder and contributed to feelings of exclusion and loneliness.

As my child moved on to high school, my concerns deepened. This year, she has sat at a lunch table with a handful of fellow freshman girls who were actively using a video chat app called "Amigo". They were chatting with adult men who, on multiple occasions, used racial slurs and exposed themselves to these girls. This occurred openly in the school cafeteria on personal devices.

Beyond these alarming safety concerns, my daughter regularly describes the constant social pressure created by phone and social media use. Instead of conversations, connections, or shared experiences, many students spend their time scrolling, comparing, and consuming content. This environment discourages real communication and makes it harder for students to build healthy friendships and a sense of belonging.

Phone-free school policies (**bell-to-bell, not just instructional time**) would not eliminate all challenges, but they would meaningfully improve the school environment. SMSD updated its cell phone policy in 2025 and decided to continue to allow personal cellphones to be out at lunch and in the hallways. This is not what is best for our students. Schools that have implemented bell-to-bell, phone-free policies report better student engagement, increased positive peer interaction, higher test scores, and improved mental health. These policies also allow educators to focus on teaching without competing against devices designed to capture attention at all costs.

Research over the last several years has shown that this is what is best for our kids. Importantly, these policies do not compromise safety or communication. Schools already have established systems for emergencies and parent contact. Removing phone and social media use during the school day helps protect students and encourages healthier habits that extend beyond the classroom.

I urge you to vote YES on HB 2421 and give Kansas schools the authority and consistency they need to create safer, more focused, and more connected learning environments for all students. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to Kansas families.

Respectfully,

Maria Smith

Prairie Village, KS

Shawnee Mission School District

Dear members of the Kansas House Education Committee:

Thanks to each of you for your public service, I truly appreciate your time and work on behalf of Education in the state of Kansas. It has always been a mainstay of our state's lifestyle and economic appeal and an honoring of our long-term promise to residents now and in the future.

I am writing to lend hearty support of the Senate's newly filed "Phone-free schools bill (HB 2421)". I have followed this concern for several years and I feel this should be passed as soon as possible. I know this will be considered on January 15th, so I want to urge you to vote "YES!"

My reasoning is that the proposal will assist with the following:

- Protect instructional time (aka improve student focus and learning).
- Help students learn to regulate their use of phones, social media, etc. - which is positively correlated to physical and mental/emotional health.
- Reduce student and teacher stress that can be attributed to the distraction devices can create.
- Increase interpersonal, face to face conversations - which is also correlated to better mental health and to adolescent development.

I watch my granddaughters (15 & 12) whose parents have been prudent and diligent with technology privileges. The access to phones for texting, scrolling, etc. creates a distraction that is not necessary, not conducive to learning and undermining of interpersonal growth in relationships. Please take the lead in setting a boundary that will serve the students, teachers, parents and even taxpayers well.

Thank you for voting "Yes" on SB302 for Bell to Bell Phone Free Schools in Kansas!

Mina Steen
3010 W. 69th Street
Mission Hills, KS 66208
913-481-2804

Dear Chairwoman Estes and members of the committee,

Hello, my name is Amy Warren and I have 3 children currently attending Wichita Public Schools. I am a co-chair of the Ks Coalition for Distraction Free Schools, and was sworn in last month to serve on the board of education for Wichita Public Schools (though I am not speaking as an official representative of them today.)

Thank you for presenting HB2421 for consideration. I would like to start by describing how we got to the point where legislation is necessary.

We were caught off guard. With optimism we welcomed smartphones, but failed to see they were really like an invasive weed, incompatible with what we are growing in our schools. During the school day phones divert valuable resources from that which is meant to thrive- attention, connection, critical thinking, etc. We're here because these devices are not neutral. The harm to learning isn't a bug in the system or some individual failing. These were never designed for our learning environments.

As we became aware of the extent of the harms from a phone-based childhood we assumed that consequences for personal devices would accrue only to the individual student who carried the phone. So even though having a phone in school had a negative effect on *that* student, others could make a different choice and fair better. So we left it up to individual students, parents and educators to manage.

However, we can't address our collective problem with individual solutions. Evidence shows that physical proximity to a device reduces cognitive capacity. It shows that device misuse doesn't just negatively affect the student holding it, but distracts and draws attention from surrounding peers. Teenagers receive an average of 237 notifications per day, with more than 25% of those occurring during school hours. That's nearly 60 notifications during school. Attention, in the educational setting, is like a community well that can be poisoned for all by only one person's device.

We now know harms aren't just to attention, but also to mental health, bullying, critical thinking skills. So we introduced strongly-worded guidelines and porous policies, hoping that schools and local districts would address our collective action problem with their own individually tailored solutions, meaning now it's classrooms, schools and local districts that are deciding as opposed to individual students.

Let me provide you with an update on this version of the solution, having been in schools, having talked with teachers, staff and principals and many others: our class-by-class, school-by-school approach may appear to be successful for some, but it is failing for FAR more.

We are dealing with an invasive plant that has damaged our main crop. Year after year we watch as phone-disrupted education becomes more normalized, accepting that though our students are struggling, it's just the way it has to be. We've settled, willing to allow widespread harms and disruptions to students and staff while we wait and wait for others to get on board. We have forgotten the learning experiences that got us- the adults in the room- where we are today; forgotten that school days have more to offer than what we're giving this younger generation.

I understand why we have settled on these inequitable solutions. As a freedom-loving people we often prefer to limit legislation, and leave it as a last resort- only to be used when either all other measures have failed, or when the immediate consequences are clear. Other measures have failed. Consequences are clear. Please pass House Bill 2421.

SEEKING
JUSTICE IN
PUBLIC POLICY

KANSAS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE



Date: February 6, 2026

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KANSAS STATEHOUSE OFFICE
Kansas Catholic Conference
204 SW 8th Ave.
Topeka, KS 66603

To: Chair Representative Estes and members of the Kansas House Education Committee

From: Chuck Weber, Kansas Catholic Conference

RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 2421. Requiring school districts to prohibit the use of personal electronic communication devices during school hours, prohibiting any employee of a school district from using social media to directly communicate with any student for official school purposes and requiring school districts to report on the amount of screen time that certain students experience during a typical school day.

The Kansas Catholic Conference is the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Kansas. We welcome the opportunity to be heard on the proposed bill, HB 2421.

This is a good piece of legislation that will benefit all Kansas families and students, including students who attend Catholic, private and public schools.

For many years now, Kansas Catholic schools have restricted the use of cell phones by students during instructional times. These policies help reduce the noise and distractions of the culture that very often come through screen time and digital media accessed on cell phones. Time spent in school is sacred and should be focused on learning.

While we offer a cautionary note about the prospect of any future overreach and unreasonable mandates on Catholic schools, the Kansas Catholic Conference supports HB 2421.

Thank you.

Chuck Weber
Kansas Catholic Conference