

**Testimony before the Kansas Senate Committee on Education
Regarding SB 302**

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John Ketcham
Senior Fellow and Director of Cities

Manhattan Institute for Policy Research
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

About the Author

John Ketcham is the director of Cities and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.* He has authored a number of MI reports and op-eds, including on restricting smartphone use in K-12 public schools. He holds a JD from Harvard Law School and BS in management information systems from Fordham University.

*The Manhattan Institute does not take institutional positions on legislation, rules, or regulations. Although my comments draw upon my research as a MI scholar, the views represented in my testimony are solely my own, not my employer's.

Chair Erickson and Members of the Senate Committee on Education, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 302. Across the United States, smartphones have rapidly reshaped how young people communicate and focus their attention. Yet students have not lost the need for sustained learning, face-to-face interactions, and opportunities for play. SB 302 offers a practical and effective means of ensuring that Kansas schools provide a sound education and healthy, age-appropriate socialization.

Teachers across the country report that phones are among the most persistent disruptions to classroom learning. Incessant pings and vibrations draw students' attention away from their lessons and impede retention. The immediate gratification that results from checking phones further reinforces compulsive behavior.¹ Phone use also distracts nearby peers who are earnestly trying to learn. This, in turn, contributes to a schoolwide environment that undermines academic excellence. As Kansas's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time noted, "Beyond just acting as a distraction for students, some studies indicate a link between phone use in school and academic performance . . ."²

Smartphone use is also profoundly affecting students' psychological well-being. The ubiquitous exposure to social media has contributed to declining mental health in Gen Z and Gen Alpha youth, including far higher rates of depression and anxiety among heavy users.³ Social-media use in school has fueled bullying and even physical altercations.⁴

Excessive digital communication impedes the development of essential social skills. Interpersonal interactions are necessary for normal childhood socialization and promote the social transmission of knowledge.⁵ When students look at their phones during lunchtime and break periods rather than interact with each other, they lose opportunities for social engagement. As a result, smartphone use at school weakens students' ability to form and sustain healthy interpersonal relationships.

SB 302 would address these issues by requiring that public school districts and accredited nonpublic schools adopt policies prohibiting students from using or accessing personal electronic communication devices during instructional time. Importantly, the bill includes a "bell to bell" prohibition, as it defines "instructional time" as the time from the start of the school day until dismissal on school premises, encompassing recess, lunch, and passing periods. This broad restriction is essential to ensure that students engage in focused learning and age-appropriate, face-to-face socialization throughout the school day.

¹ See Bruce Goldman, *Addictive potential of social media, explained*, STANFORD MED. SCOPE (Oct. 29, 2021), <https://scopeblog.stanford.edu/2021/10/29/addictive-potential-of-social-media-explained/>.

² KAN. STATE DEP'T OF EDUC., BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON STUDENT SCREEN TIME REPORT 9 (2024).

³ See *id.* at 10.

⁴ Emily Young et al., *Frequent Social Media Use and Experiences with Bullying Victimization, Persistent Feelings of Sadness or Hopelessness, and Suicide Risk Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023*, U.S. CDC (Oct. 10, 2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/su/su7304a3.htm>; Natasha Singer, *An Epidemic of Vicious School Brawls, Fueled by Student Cellphones*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 15, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/15/technology/school-fight-videos-student-phones.html>.

⁵ See Ashley Ransom et al., *Face-to-Face Learning Enhances the Social Transmission of Information*, PLOS ONE (2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8880930/>.

SB 302 requires that schools' policies keep devices turned off and stored in an inaccessible location during instructional time. This establishes a critical baseline while offering school officials flexibility to devise policies that best suit local circumstances. At the same time, the bill provides an exception for devices owned and issued by the school, which preserves the ability to provide school-managed technology for instruction. Likewise, it allows students to contact their parents by means of a school-approved device, addressing a common parental concern without creating an exception large enough to undermine the prohibition.

The bill further permits policies limiting or prohibiting device use at school-sponsored activities outside of instructional time. That discretion is prudent, as many of the same dynamics that impede in-school learning can also impair students' extracurricular experiences. Finally, SB 302 appropriately addresses professional boundaries by prohibiting school employees from privately or directly communicating with students via social media for official school purposes.

Successful implementation of an electronic-device ban depends on consistent enforcement. SB 302 requires that each school district and accredited nonpublic school set forth enforcement procedures and disciplinary actions. These policies will be easier to implement because of the unambiguous restriction on all personal electronic-device use during the entire school day (except for students with health or disability-related exceptions). Over time, education officials can fine-tune policies in the light of experience, including by establishing escalating consequences for common repeat violations.⁶

One of the bill's greatest strengths is the bright-line nature of its restrictions. Such a readily understandable and universal ban should foster school cultures that do not tolerate or expect phone use. This will help reorient schools to academic and personal excellence and, ultimately, to the realization of their mission. Many schools and districts that implemented phone bans have experienced rapid improvements in student focus, mental health, and attendance at school activities.⁷

If SB 302 is enacted, Kansas would join the majority of states that have restricted smartphones and other electronic devices during the school day. These states differ in their voting patterns, indicating the bipartisan, commonsense nature of this issue and the widely felt need to address it through legislation.

Restricting smartphone use statewide promises to improve academic achievement and student mental health for Kansas students. I commend the Senate Committee on Education for taking up this vital legislation. Thank you.

⁶ See, e.g., JOHN KETCHAM & JESSE ARM, MODEL LEGISLATION TO RESTRICT SMARTPHONE USE IN K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MANHATTAN INSTITUTE (2025) (proposing model legislation with an escalating discipline framework).

⁷ See, e.g., Tim Walker, *Do School Cellphone Bans Work? This Teacher Says Yes.*, NEATODAY (Nov. 14, 2025), <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/do-school-cellphone-bans-work-teacher-says-yes>; Esme Fox, *NY Students Banned From Using Phones First Hated, Then Loved It*, BLOOMBERG CITYLAB (July 17, 2024), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-17/new-york-schools-that-banned-mobile-phones-see-student-grades-rise>.