

Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 302.

My name is Kim Whitman. I'm a parent of two Shawnee Mission high schoolers and a co-lead for the national nonprofit Smartphone Free Childhood US and our Distraction-Free Schools Policy Project initiative. We work to ensure every child has a safer, more focused learning environment through strong distraction-free school policies. Today you will hear from our Kansas coalition for Distraction-Free Schools which consists of parents, educators, students, administrators, board members, and mental health professionals. We recently crafted a letter of support for phone and social media free schools in Kansas that has garnered almost 500 signatures.

As a co-founder of the Phone-Free Schools Movement and co-author of the Administrator Toolkit, I want to emphasize that local districts already have free research-based resources to implement effective bell-to-bell phone-free policies. Yet most local districts still aren't using this best-practice approach for students or they fall short by not applying to all grades. SB 302 ensures that every student in every district, rural or urban, has access to a truly distraction-free learning environment.

Some have raised concerns about local control. However, local districts have not adopted research-supported phone-free policies on their own, even after the State Board of Education's Blue Ribbon Task Force recommended this same gold-standard policy. SB 302 still preserves meaningful flexibility: local districts choose how to enforce the policy, which storage method to use, and what consequences are appropriate. The only requirement is that devices remain inaccessible during the school day.

This matters because phones and social media are intentionally designed to be addictive. A recent JAMA study found that students spend an average of 70 minutes per school day on their phones, with the top 3 uses being social media, videos, and gaming. That adds up to the equivalent of 30 instructional days per year. Six full weeks of learning lost simply because phones are accessible. When devices are stored away, students focus better and teachers can teach instead of policing phones.

The bill also protects students with IEPs, 504 plans, and documented medical needs, including those who rely on phones for diabetes monitoring. Research shows that broad additional carve-outs are not in students' best interest. ESL educators, for example, report that phones hinder language acquisition by pulling attention away from essential verbal and visual cues.

Finally, concerns about the prohibition on staff-student communication via social media stem from a misunderstanding. The intent is narrowly focused on platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, X, and TikTok—not tools like Gmail or ParentSquare. We support clarifying language and prefer a full prohibition on student-facing communication through social media so no student is required to use it to participate in school and after school activities.

With this clarification amendment, this bill allows Kansas to join the 19 other states that have prioritized distraction-free learning and already enacted bell-to-bell phone-free school laws.

Distraction-Free Schools



POLICY PROJECT

INFORMATION FOR KS LEGISLATORS ABOUT BELL-TO-BELL PHONE-FREE SCHOOL POLICIES

The Distraction-Free Schools Kansas Coalition is comprised of parents, teachers, students, school administrators, board members, and mental health professionals from across the state of Kansas. We support the gold standard practice of bell-to-bell phone-free school policies with all personal electronic devices stored inaccessible to students.

DistractionFreeSchools.com

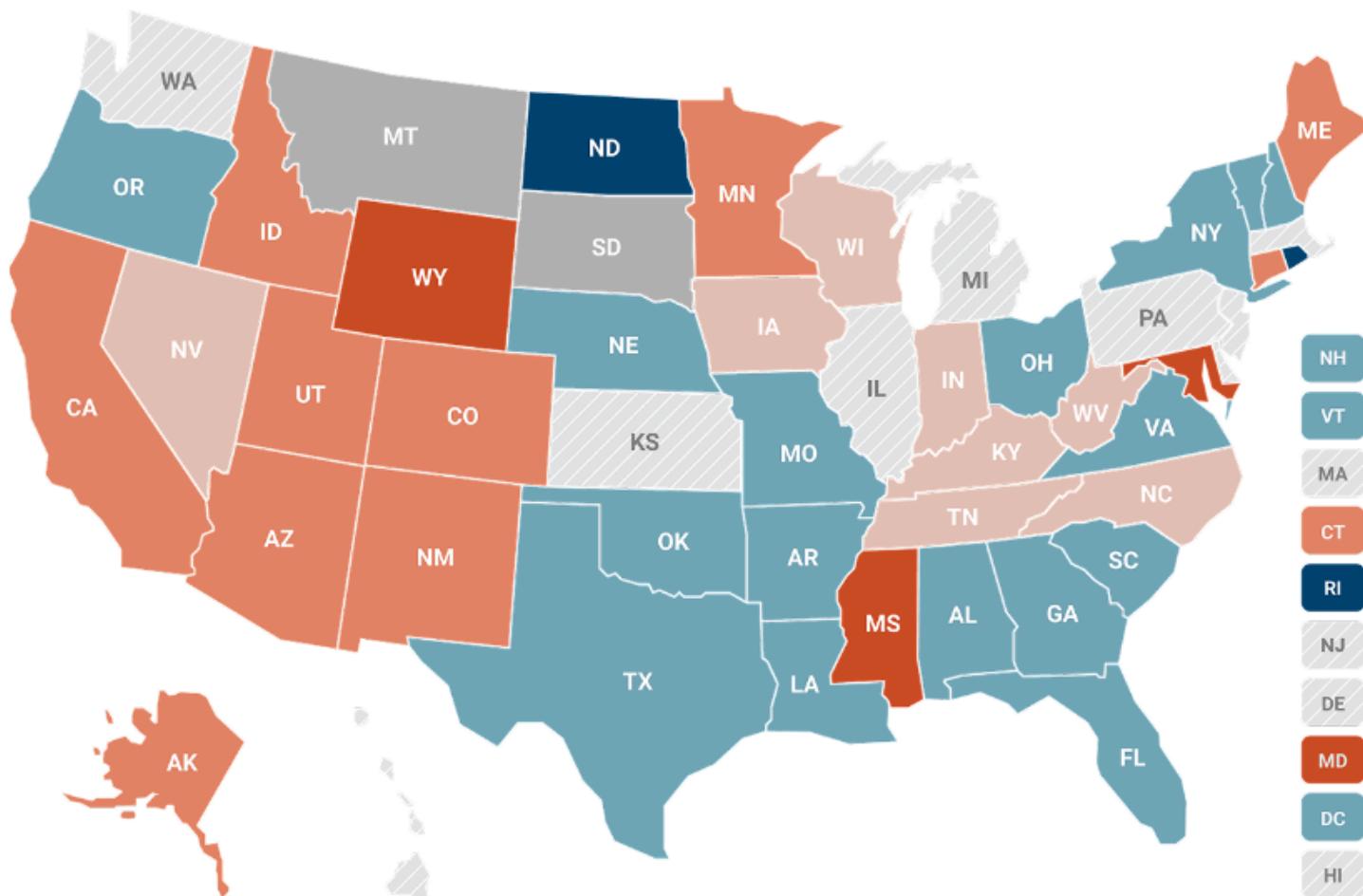
Contact: KimSpikingWhitman@gmail.com

36 STATES PLUS D.C. HAVE PASSED PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS LEGISLATION

Bell-to-Bell (19 states + DC)	Instructional Time	Policy Required
Alabama	North Dakota	Iowa
Arkansas	Ohio	Indiana
Florida (k-8)	Oklahoma	Kentucky
Georgia (k-8)	Oregon (EO)	Nevada
Louisiana	Rhode Island	North Carolina
Missouri	South Carolina	Tennessee
Nebraska	Texas	West Virginia
New Hampshire	Vermont	Wisconsin
New Jersey	Virginia	
New York	Washington DC	



[Click here to see an at-a-glance list of states by grade](#)



SUPPORT KS STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

BELL-TO-BELL PHONE-FREE SCHOOL POLICIES ARE BEST PRACTICE

Academic Success	Mental Health	School Safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Allow teachers to teach, rather than “police” devicesReduce classroom <u>distractions</u>Increase <u>focus</u> & <u>cognitive performance</u>Improve grades & test scoresDecrease cheatingEliminate “partial presence” on phones, which drain cognitive ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Create space to build real-life social skills, and grow school <u>connectedness</u>Encourage emotional resilience, independence, and problem-solving skills without texting or calling homeReduce <u>cyberbullying</u> & social media drama in the school building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Maintain calm in emergency situations and help kids focus on teachers’ instructions (best practice according to school <u>safety experts</u>).Keep communication lines clear for first respondersProtect kids from online harms such as <u>sexual predators</u> & <u>access to drugs</u> while at school

OTHER POLICIES FALL SHORT AND PRODUCE POOR RESULTS

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME ONLY POLICIES HAVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

For Teachers: Teachers are burdened with phone storage as well as “policing” device use. This wastes valuable instructional time and teacher energy. Teachers should be free to teach!

In Emergencies: Phones distract students from safety instructions and can reveal their locations.

Academically: Research shows true focus is only possible when devices are completely removed from the learning environment. Maximizing focus increases academic achievement.

Socially: Phones block opportunities to build critical social skills throughout the day – at lunch, in the halls, and during free periods. These skills require practice & are foundational for future success.

Emotionally: Intermittent access tethers kids to social comparisons & pressures. It limits chances to build independence and problem-solving skills.

BELL-TO-BELL HAS BROAD SUPPORT

Teachers want this. 83% of NEA teachers support bell-to-bell.

Taxpayers want this. 6 weeks of learning is lost to smartphone use = taxpayer \$ wasted.

Parents want this. 80% of voters support for bell-to-bell phone-free.

School Safety/Resource Officers want this: NASRO supports bell-to-bell.

Students need this. Their well-being and future work prospects are at stake.

DEVICE STORAGE OPTIONS

Storage options in last hour classroom



Locked filing cabinet



Locked phone locker

Storage options in entry and securely stored in front office



Pencil pouches in baskets



Manilla envelopes in baskets or bins

DEVICE STORAGE OPTIONS



Homemade wood locker with locked door



Homemade wood locker with individual locks



Individual phone lockers



ULINE storage cubbies



Yondr pouches

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

SUPPORTIVE OF BELL-TO-BELL POLICIES



The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) is dedicated to making schools and children safer by providing the highest quality training to school-based law enforcement officers.

NASRO, the gold standard in school-based law enforcement training, is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1991 for school-based police, school administrators, and school security and/or safety professionals who work as partners to protect schools and their students, faculty, and staff members.

I have been the Executive Director of NASRO for the last 14 years and prior to that I was a School Resource Officer for 14 years.

NASRO is extremely supportive of a statewide bell to bell phone and social media free policy for grades k-12. We do not support an exception for emergencies. We know that schools, students and staff are safer when student cell phones and personal devices are not present during the school day. For this reason, **if students are allowed to bring personal devices to school they should be securely locked away and inaccessible to the student from the first bell to the last bell of the school day.**

We often hear parents say they want to be able to contact their student in an emergency situation such as an active shooter in the school. However, outside communication during this critical time makes students less safe.

In an emergency situation that requires a lock down the following are essential safety procedures:

- 1) Students need to be focused on the adults giving instructions. During this critical time, students need to listen to the teacher and/or first responders for guidance. Messaging or **calling their parents who are not in the building could distract students from life saving instructions.**
- 2) If in hiding, **students need to remain quiet.** Noise and/or light from students' phone could alert an assailant to the location where students are hiding.
- 3) **Phone lines need to remain open** for communication between staff and first responders. If hundreds of students are calling their parents then the communication channels may be overwhelmed and impede necessary communication with first responders.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

SUPPORTIVE OF BELL-TO-BELL POLICIES

- 4) Clear access to the school allows for faster response times by first responders. **If parents are alerted by students and rush to the school, the extra traffic could potentially block access routes for emergency response vehicles.**
- 5) **The fewer people approaching the building, the more secure the surroundings.** Parents rushing to the school can risk being mistaken as an assailant.
- 6) Schools are equipped to manage emergency communication with first responders and with parents. **Misinformation can quickly spread over social media.** If students are texting and posting on social media during an emergency situation it could lead to a more hazardous situation.

For the best outcome it is essential for students NOT to be on their phones during a lockdown. **In addition to phones placing students in more danger during emergency situations, they also contribute to a less safe school environment in general.** A significant portion of discipline referrals result from students having access to phones and social media during the school day. These concerns include privacy violations, social media drama, cyberbullying, and fights. All of which are significantly reduced in schools that require students to lock up their phones for the entire school day. If students have access at any point during the day, lunch or passing periods for example, then these infractions still occur. Therefore, it is prudent that legislation be passed so all students can have a safe and distraction-free learning environment.



Mo Canady

Executive Director
National Association of School Resource Officers

PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS BRIEFING DOC

The Problem:

1) Youth Mental Health Crisis - The causes of the current youth mental health crisis are multifaceted, **but the weight of the evidence clearly shows a significant relationship with exposure to social media and other digital and online products**. Former U.S.

Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, has said that children need device-free spaces – including schools – and has called on Congress to require warning labels on social media. He has also stated that, “the risk of not acting could be someone’s life.”

<https://edhub.ama-assn.org/jn-learning/video-player/18901909>

2) Disruption to Academic and Social Skills - All children deserve a safe school environment to learn, and experience social growth – free from cyberbullying and other harm. Unfortunately, the introduction of personal devices in school environments has had the opposite effect.

3) Teachers see the impact on student focus and learning. A National Education Association poll showed that 83% of teachers support an all-day phone ban.

<https://www.nea.org/resource-library/impact-social-media-and-personal-devices-mental-health>

Proposed Solution:

Phone-free schools to improve academic focus, mental health, and social cohesion. This will lead to a safer school environment - a break from cyberbullying and other online harm - will improve children’s mental health and social development, and will allow school leaders/administrators/staff more time to focus on more important work. The Phone Free Schools Movement has developed this [Administrator Toolkit](#) to help schools to transition to phone-free.

- The model bill requires that all K-12 schools (public and charter) implement a first bell to last bell of the day phone-free policy.
- During this time, students would not access personal devices of any kind (e.g. cell phones, earbuds, smartwatches, etc.)
- Schools/districts may choose which method of personal device storage they use. Exceptions would be made for medical and special education needs.

Distraction-Free Schools

 **POLICY PROJECT**

FAQs

1) How can schools implement cell phone restrictions affordably?

There are established practices around the country that provide examples of inexpensive and effective storage. This [D.C. middle school](#) uses pencil pouches, and this [Dayton, Ohio high school](#) uses manilla envelopes.

2) How do these policies affect administrator workload and students' tight schedules?

Schools with over 2000 students have successfully implemented procedures to support a bell-to-bell policy. Administrators and teachers ultimately regain time in their day with fewer resources spent supporting dysregulated students or handling hazing, harassment, and bullying (HHB) claims. Data shows a dramatic drop in HHB and other behavior incidents after a phone-free policy is enacted.

3) What if students don't have cell phones with them during a school shooting or other emergency?

We know this is a major concern for some parents and students. As parents who care deeply about protecting all children, we were surprised to learn that [school safety experts actually recommend that students not have phones](#) during a school shooting or similar emergency.

Their attention should be squarely on the adult in charge and what is occurring in real time. The most powerful protective factor against school violence is [school connectedness](#).

Student use of cell phones during the school day degrades vital social cohesion and enables increased bullying and harassment.

4) How can parents stay in touch with their children during the school day?

Developmental psychiatrists say there should be no better place to allow children to explore their independence than in the safety of the school community. Additionally, student anxiety decreases when phones are removed for the day. Regular communication between caregivers and students is always available by calling your child's school or reaching your child directly via their school-issued email address.

5) How can schools support marginalized students who rely on phones and social media for connection?

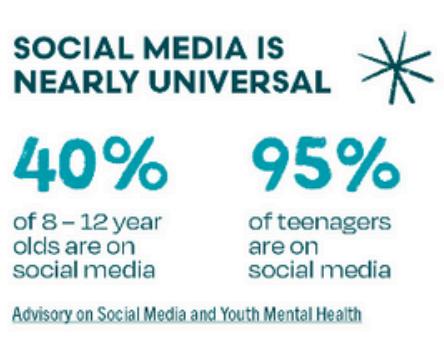
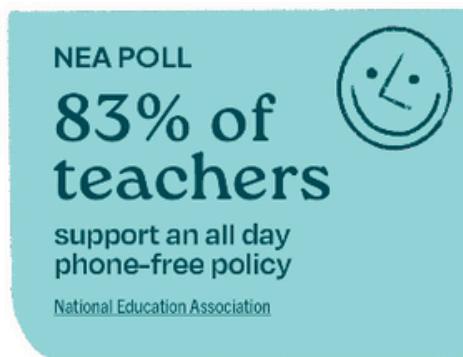
Sadly, data shows that marginalized children are most likely to be harmed on social media. Efforts to build a sense of community and connection for all children is crucially important for the well-being of marginalized students.

Schools can do this, including simple community-building programs like interest-based lunchtime groups, peer-to-peer mentoring, professional development for staff, educational curricula to teach positive bystander, allyship and community-building skills for all students, and clear anti-bullying policies.

6) How can we help students learn to use phones responsibly?

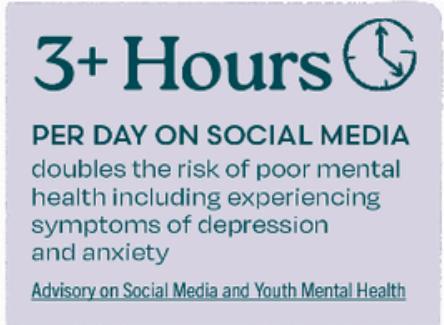
We need to prepare children with communication and media literacy skills, as well as the ability to focus and think critically. These skills are best learned through face-to-face communication, not with devices that are purposely designed to addict them. We do not ask kids to take drugs to learn how to manage drug addiction. We should not ask them to carry phones to learn how to manage phone addiction.

Research Infographic

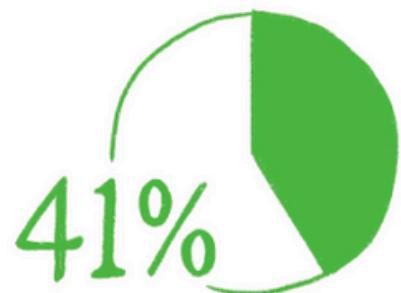


72% OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS REPORT CELLPHONES ARE A MAJOR DISTRACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

[The Mere Presence of a Cell Phone May be Distracting](#)



Since 2010



rate their overall mental health as poor or very poor

[American Psychological Association](#)

35% OF TEENS ADMIT TO USING THEIR CELLPHONE TO **cheat**

[Common Sense Media](#)

22% OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS HAVE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED **Suicide** IN THE PAST YEAR

10% HAVE ATTEMPTED **Suicide** IN THE PAST YEAR

[CDC, 2023](#)

Adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were more than

Four Times
as likely to report thoughts of
Suicide & Attempts

as those who didn't

[National Institutes of Health](#)

Each additional hour of total screen time increases the odds of suicidal behaviors

[Science Direct](#)

STEEP DROP IN BULLYING
46% & 43%
OF GIRLS
OF BOYS

experienced a reduction of bullying after smartphone bans were enacted.

[Smartphone Bans, Student Outcomes and Mental Health](#)

Pornography Exposure

1/3 of all teens reported that they have been exposed to pornography during the school day



[Common Sense Media](#)

YOUTH REPORTING

LONELINESS

are also more likely to **DROP OUT OF SCHOOL AT THE AGE OF 16**

[Loneliness During the School Years](#)

95%

OF TEACHERS SAY ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE A PROBLEM IN PUBLIC K-12 SCHOOLS

[National Education Association](#)

87%

of teachers said bullying is a problem in Public K-12 schools

34%

of middle school teachers call bullying a major problem

[National Education Association](#)



“Brain Drain”

The mere presence of one's own smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity

[Brain Drain](#)