

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 130

(Senator Benson, *et al.*)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Ways and Means

Education - Student Personal Electronic Device Use Policy - Required

This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with stakeholders, to develop guidelines for a policy on student use of personal electronic devices during school hours, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, smartwatches, or any other electronic device that is capable of connecting to a smartphone or a cellular or Wi-Fi network. Each local board of education must, in consultation with parents, teachers, students, and school personnel, develop and adopt a policy that limits a student from using a personal electronic device during school hours. A policy developed in accordance with the bill must provide exceptions (1) for any purpose documented in the student's individualized education program or Section 504 Plan; (2) to monitor or address a student's documented health issue; or (3) when directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes. Policies must also be printed in the student handbook, provided to school staff and personnel, and be reviewed and updated every two years. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE can develop guidelines as specified with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local boards of education can develop, adopt, and publish personal electronic device use policies as specified with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The guidelines must include model policy options for local boards of education to use in the development of a policy, considerations for students in different grade levels, considerations for legal exemptions and accommodations for students, and recommendations on the limitation of student use of personal electronic devices during school hours. MSDE may, in collaboration with stakeholders, periodically update the guidelines. MSDE also may collect information on each local board's personal electronic device use policy and use the information collected to develop best practices and inform the periodic review of the guidelines.

Current Law: Many local school systems have policies governing the use of cellular phones in schools or on school grounds, which are aligned with local codes of discipline. According to MSDE, at least 19 of Maryland's 24 local school systems have recently updated or adopted new student cellular phone use policies as of September 2024. Additional local school systems are in the process of reviewing and updating policies. Policies vary across systems and schools and typically cover definitions, guidelines, compliance procedures, and consequences for violations. They also generally cover procedures for notifying parents and staff, and the responsibilities of school administrators and may provide differing levels of flexibility for elementary, middle, and high school students.

MSDE advises that the agency is in the process of convening the Task Force on Student Cell Phone Use in Schools. Comprising teachers, administrators, parents, students, superintendents, and other educational experts across all grade bands, the task force will review current policies across the State on allowable student use of cellular phones in schools. MSDE anticipates the task force will generate a set of policy recommendations to support school districts in addressing student cellular phone use by April 2025.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local boards of education can develop and adopt new policies or modify existing policies in accordance with the bill's requirements using existing resources. The local school systems in Baltimore City and Anne Arundle, Baltimore, Montgomery, Prince George's, and St. Mary's counties advise that they already have policies governing the use of cellular phones in schools.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See SB 112 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Center for School Safety; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Baltimore City Public Schools; Baltimore County Public Schools; Frederick County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Prince George's County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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