

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 368 (Senator Watson)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Establishment
(Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

This bill requires each local board of education to develop and implement, by the 2026-2027 school year, a policy to prohibit the use of cellular phones by students during instructional time, which includes any time during the school day, except a student's lunch period. The policy must also require students to store their phones in a secure place during instructional time and prohibit a student from using social media applications and websites as determined by the local school board during school hours. The policy may not prohibit a student from using a phone (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; (3) during an emergency event; or (4) when directed by an education or administrator for educational purposes. The policy must also establish administrator-enforced disciplinary measures for violations, beginning with a warning for a first offense. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill pertains to local boards of education.

Local Effect: Local boards of education can develop and adopt cellular phone use policies as specified with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

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 the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), at least 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 local school 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. In December 2024, the U.S. Department of Education released [Planning Together: A Playbook for Student Personal Device Policies](#) to help school district and school leaders develop policies on the use of personal devices in schools.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local boards of education can adopt the required policy or adapt existing policies in accordance with the bill using existing resources. This analysis also assumes local boards of education can establish secure locations for student phones using existing resources and school infrastructure. Local school systems in Baltimore City and Anne Arundle, 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: HB 630 (Delegate Boafu, *et al.*) - Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Baltimore City Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; St. Mary's Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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