

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 29
Education – Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program – Establishment

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 29, which would establish the Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program, requiring the Carroll County and Montgomery County public school systems to develop and implement a policy that prohibits student cell phone use during the school day, with certain exceptions for health, educational, or emergency circumstances. It would also require the eligible school systems to submit a report on the effectiveness of the Pilot Program.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

A recent poll of NEA members showed that 90 percent support school policies prohibiting the use of cell phones during instructional time.¹ Why such overwhelming support? Of those same educators, 83 percent report that students are having difficulty concentrating and completing assignments, trends which experts say correlate with increased access to cell phones.^{2 3} Adolescents are increasingly spending large portions of their days

¹ National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

² National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

³ How Phones Ruin Concentration. Child Mind Institute (2024). <https://childmind.org/article/kids-shouldnt-use-phones-during-homework/#:~:text=Multitasking%20leads%20to%20shallower%20thinking,Clinical%20Expert:%20Matthew%20Cruger%2C%20PhD>

using phones or other devices: according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, U.S. children ages 8-12 are using devices or in front of screens for an average of 4-6 hours each day, and children over 13 are getting up to 9 hours of screen time each day.⁴

It is impractical and often ineffective to enforce restrictions on cell phone usage when policies vary on a classroom-by-classroom basis. Enforcement must not be left up to individual educators; rather, schools need widely observed norms led by system leaders and administrators.

We appreciate this bill's thoughtful approach to testing model policies and collecting data. The report in this bill is likely to yield useful insights on the benefits and challenges of enforcing cell phone policies, and we urge that those insights are applied in developing uniform, countywide policies that are crafted in partnership with local bargaining units.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 29.

⁴ Screen Time and Children. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2024). https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx