

Student Cellular Device Use Policy

Uploaded by: Branndon Jackson

Position: FAV

LATE TESTIMONY

Testimony to the County Board of Education on Student Cellular Device Use Policy

Joanne C. Benson

SB130

Good afternoon, Chair Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan, and the esteemed member of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee. (EEE)

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on behalf of students, educators, and parents in our community regarding the newly established Student Cellular Device Use Policy. My name is Branndon Jackson, and I am on the Prince George's County School Board.

As we navigate the challenges of modern education, we must address the impact of technology on student learning environments. The proliferation of cellular devices among students has brought both opportunities and distractions into our classrooms. The new policy, aimed at regulating the use of these devices, is a critical step towards fostering a more focused and productive educational atmosphere.

Supporting Evidence:

1. **Improved Academic Performance:** Research conducted by the London School of Economics found that schools enforcing a ban on mobile phones experienced a substantial improvement in student performance. Specifically, test scores increased by an average of 6.4%. This data underscores the potential academic benefits of reducing mobile phone distractions during instructional time.
2. **Prevalence of Device Usage:** According to a Pew Research Center report, 95% of teenagers in the United States have access to a smartphone, and 45% of them report being online "almost constantly." This statistic highlights the ubiquitous nature of mobile devices in students' lives, necessitating clear guidelines for their use in educational settings.
3. **Classroom Focus:** A study from the University of Texas at Austin revealed that students who used their phones during class scored 20% lower on a test of lecture material compared to their peers who did not use phones. This finding illustrates the direct correlation between device usage and diminished academic performance.
4. **Mental Health Concerns:** A survey by Common Sense Media indicated that 50% of teens feel addicted to their mobile devices, with 59% of parents believing their children are addicted. This addiction can lead to negative mental health outcomes, such as increased anxiety and decreased attention span, further justifying the need for a regulated device usage policy.

The newly established policy provides a balanced approach to managing cellular device usage, allowing for educational flexibility while prioritizing the academic and mental well-being of our students. By enforcing rules that limit distractions, we create a conducive learning environment where students can thrive.

I urge the County Board of Education to support and rigorously implement this policy. Let us work together to ensure our schools are spaces where learning takes precedence and distractions are minimized. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully, Branndon Jackson, Chair of Prince George's County School Board, and A Caring Parent.

Sincerely,

Brandon Jackson

SB0130_FAV_MedChi_CBOE - Student Cellular Device U

Uploaded by: Drew Vetter

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Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 29, 2025

Senate Bill 130 – *County Boards of Education – Student Cellular Device Use Policy –
Established*

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, supports Senate Bill 130, which is legislation aimed at prohibiting the use of cell phones by students during instructional time in Maryland schools.

As the leading voice for physicians and their patients in Maryland, MedChi is deeply committed to promoting policies that support the health and well-being of our youth. This legislation represents a critical step toward fostering an environment that enhances student focus, mental health, and academic achievement. The General Assembly is considering multiple bills on the topic of cell phone use by students this Session, and MedChi feels there is sufficient evidence to support adopting policies prohibiting cell phone use by students on a statewide basis.

The pervasive use of cell phones in classrooms has raised significant concerns among educators, parents, and healthcare professionals. Research consistently demonstrates the detrimental effects of cell phone use during instructional time on both learning outcomes and mental health. A study published in *Educational Psychology* found that students who used mobile devices in class for non-academic purposes scored significantly lower on tests compared to their peers who refrained from such use. The study concluded that cell phone distractions impede the ability to process and retain information, ultimately hindering academic performance (Kuznekoff et al., 2015).

Beyond academic performance, excessive cell phone use has been linked to mental health challenges among young people. According to the American Psychological Association, excessive screen time is associated with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances in adolescents. The constant connectivity facilitated by cell phones can exacerbate feelings of social pressure and cyberbullying, leading to a negative impact on students' emotional well-being (Twenge et al., 2017).

Furthermore, limiting cell phone use during instructional time promotes healthier social interactions and communication skills. A study conducted by the London School of Economics found that banning mobile phones in schools improved test scores, particularly among low-

achieving and low-income students, by reducing distractions and leveling the playing field (Beland & Murphy, 2016). These findings underscore the importance of creating a focused and equitable learning environment for all students.

MedChi also wishes to support the exceptions provided for in this bill, including for student individualized educational programs, for documented health reasons, and for educational purposes.

MedChi supports this legislation as a proactive measure to address these challenges and improve educational and health outcomes for Maryland's youth. By removing the distraction of cell phones during instructional time, we can help students develop stronger cognitive skills, foster healthier social interactions, and protect their mental health.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 130.

For more information call:

Andrew G. Vetter
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Danna L. Kauffman
Christine K. Krone
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SB130_MSEA_Lamb_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Lauren Lamb

Position: FAV

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 130
County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy -
Established

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
January 29, 2025

Lauren Lamb
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 130, which would require each county board of education to develop and implement a policy that prohibits students from using a cellular device during instructional time during the school day. It would also prohibit the policy from preventing a student from using a cellular device for any purpose documented in a student's individualized education program, to monitor or address a student's documented health issue, or for education purposes when directed by an educator or administrator.

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

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

phones.^{2 3} Adolescents are increasingly spending large portions of their days 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 therefore encourage uniform, countywide policies that are crafted in partnership with local bargaining units and include thoughtful exceptions for health, emergency, and educational circumstances.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 130.

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>

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

SB 130

Uploaded by: Danielle Lueking

Position: UNF



Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
January 29, 2025

Board of Education
of Howard County

Jolene Mosley, *Chair*

Linfeng Chen, Ph.D., *Vice Chair*

Andrea Chamblee, Esq.

Jennifer Swickard Mallo

Jacky McCoy

Meg Ricks

Antonia Watts

James Obasiolu
Student Member

William J. Barnes
*Superintendent,
Secretary/Treasurer*

SB0130: UNFAVORABLE

County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy – Established

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy – Established** as a mandate on local school system policy that takes away our ability to make a balanced decision on the use of cell phones in schools.

This body has several bills to review this session on the topic of school system cell phone policies. Each requires a local school system to develop and implement a policy to limit the use of cellular phones by students. Some contain definitions of cellular devices, some address the time of day a student can and cannot use these devices. Others contain specific parameters on how to secure phones during instructional time, exemptions for when a student can use their devices, and require the inclusion of disciplinary measures for violations of the policy. What should be evident from the many variations of the bills similar to SB0130 being heard by this Committee is that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to be legislated.

Many factors go into the development of a local policy regarding the use of personal technology devices by students in school. Teachers and administrators want to ensure that student focus is on instruction and cell phones and/or social media can be a major distraction which impacts that focus. Parents want to have a direct connection with their student in case of emergency or other personal needs. Balancing these perspectives and providing for consistency in the implementation of local policies and procedures ensures all stakeholders are engaged in a way that allows the resulting policy to be carried out with fidelity.

As a growing body of national evidence points to the negative impacts of personal technology devices and social media on youth mental health and the local classroom, the Board has committed to looking for ways to reduce the distraction of cell phones. Through months long processes and deliberations, including staff presentations, stakeholder surveys, and public hearings, on January 30, 2025, the Board [approved adjustments](#) to *Policy 8080 - Responsible Use of Technology, Digital Tools, and Social Media*, and the *Student Code of Conduct* intended to reduce the use of personal devices by students during the student day. The new policy in Howard County will go into effect on March 3, 2025, and will require that student cell phones be away, silent, and not cause distractions in the classrooms, hallways, or lunch room for all students at all levels. Additionally, the Maryland State Department of Education also currently has a workgroup reviewing existing school system policies to make future recommendations.

As a legislative priority, the Board supports local decision making in the development of policy that accounts for a balance of educational practices, available resources, public input, and local accountability. Given potential solutions for Howard County could result in additional costs to the school system – such as phone lockers or pouches – support from funding sources after a local implementation decision is made would be preferred to legislative mandates for a policy.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on SB0130 from this Committee.

SB 130- County Boards of Education - Student Cellu

Uploaded by: Nia Callender

Position: UNF



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
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BILL: SB 0130

TITLE: County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy - Established

DATE: January 29, 2025

POSITION: Oppose

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents **opposes** Senate Bill 130.

This bill requires each local board of education to develop and adopt a policy that (1) prohibits the use of cellular devices by students during instructional time; (2) requires students to store their cellular phone in a secure storage container during instructional time; and (3) includes appropriate disciplinary measures for violations of the policy. Under the bill, instructional time includes any time during the school day, except a student's lunch period and cellular device includes any portable wireless communication device, smartphones, tablets, or wearable devices. A policy developed in accordance with the bill may not prohibit a student from using a cellular 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 health issue that has been documented by an educator or administrator; or (3) when directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes. The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.

Maryland superintendents appreciate the good intentions of this bill; however, PSSAM steadfastly opposes any legislation that imposes statewide mandates on local school systems or local boards of education, especially on policies that have previously been deliberated at the local level with all affected stakeholders, such as the case regarding student uses of cellphones.

In the past several years, superintendents, school boards and advisory groups in 19 out of the 24 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have taken proactive action to establish, update, or study district-wide cell phone policies. These efforts include establishing new policies specific to the use of cell phones, updating board policies, revising the district's code of conduct or student handbook regarding the use of technology to include cellphones or "smart" technology, and/or introducing pilot programs. Currently, 5 LEAs also have pilot programs underway to study the impact of varying levels of cell phone restrictions during the school day. Much of the local work was done through surveys to parents, teachers, and students, as well as extensive public meetings.

In addition, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), under the State Superintendent's leadership, has recently convened a broad workgroup of stakeholders, including superintendents, to study the use of cellphones in schools with the goal of recommending guidance for State Board adoption in the next several months. We support this workgroup and its on-the-ground membership to study this complex issue utilizing the newly released guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, as well as reflecting on the experiences of the local school districts who have already reached deep into their communities to determine the appropriateness of the use of cell phones and "smart technology" in the classroom and in schools.

PSSAM remains committed to focusing on empowering local decision-making to ensure that education policies are relevant, flexible, and reflective of the unique needs of each community. Again, we appreciate the bill's good intentions, but we ask the Legislature to continue to allow the education experts at the local level, as well as the MSDE-convened workgroup, to continue to examine this issue to determine the most effective public policies.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** Senate Bill 130 and kindly requests an **unfavorable** report.

SB 130

Uploaded by: Ronza Othman

Position: UNF

Subject: Unfavorable: Establishing a County Boards' Cell Phone Policy

Date: January 29, 2025

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002

President@nfbmd.org

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urges the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to vote against SB0130 as it is currently written. The intention of the bill is laudable, but in reality, it will create more problems than it solves.

The section of the bill that is problematic is "(D) The policy developed under this section may not prohibit a student from using a cellular device: (1) for any purpose documented in the student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan". The student who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan loses the confidentiality of their plan as soon as they use their phone. This confidentiality is an essential and longstanding aspect of these programs. Without it, the student may then be asked inappropriate questions about their disability by their peers. They may even be bullied, or worse, ostracized. This treatment will cause irreparable damage to both the individual student and their family. Persons with disabilities are not obligated to reveal their disability. Certainly, ensuring our students' focus in school is of utmost importance, but you don't solve one problem by creating another.

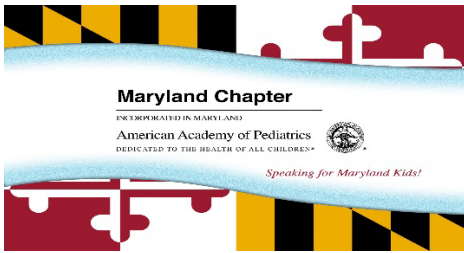
Please vote unfavorable on this bill.

For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.

SB0130_LOI_MDAAP_CBOE - Student Cellular Device Us

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: INFO



Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 29, 2025

Senate Bill 130 – *County Boards of Education – Student Cellular Device Use Policy – Established*

LETTER OF INFORMATION

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of information for Senate Bill 130.

As pediatricians, we are deeply committed to promoting the health and well-being of children and adolescents. We know from both research and clinical experience that the use of cell phones in schools presents complex challenges, including impacts on academic focus, mental health, and peer relationships. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has developed a **Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies**, which we encourage this Committee to review as it explores policy solutions. The guide offers evidence-based recommendations on the role of cell phones in schools and strategies for balancing educational needs with the realities of technology in students' lives. The resource can be accessed here: [Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies](#)

We also wish to draw your attention to a specific concern regarding proposed legislation that includes "health" exemptions to school phone use restrictions. While we understand the intent to support students with documented medical conditions, such provisions, if broadly defined, could unintentionally burden pediatricians and other healthcare providers with an influx of appointment requests from families seeking exemptions for their children to retain phone access. This could divert critical time and resources away from other essential healthcare needs. To mitigate this risk, we recommend that any proposed exemptions include clear and specific criteria for medical necessity. We also suggest working collaboratively with schools, healthcare providers, and families to ensure policies are both practical and equitable in implementation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your commitment to the well-being of Maryland's children.

For more information call:

Christine K. Krone

J. Steven Wise

Danna L. Kauffman

410-244-7000

SB 130- State Board- LOI.pdf

Uploaded by: Madeline Houck

Position: INFO

TO: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 130 - County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy – Established

DATE: January 29, 2025

POSITION: Letter of Information

Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (Department) would like to share the following information regarding **Senate Bill (SB) 130 - County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy – Established**. As written, the bill requires that local boards of education develop and implement a policy to ban the use of cellular devices, including tablets, smartwatches, and other wearable devices, during instructional time. Specifically, it requires that students store the device in a secure storage container.

The State Board and the Department appreciate the intent of this bill to prioritize our youngest learners' academic engagement and to limit distractions within their schools and classrooms. We concur that every elementary, middle, and high school should have a clear, consistent, and research-informed policy to guide the use of cell phones in schools.

To that end, we are pleased to share that the Department and State Board have convened the Task Force on Student Cell Phone Use in Schools, scheduled to launch in January 2025, that will review current policies across the state on allowable student use of cell phones in schools and develop guidance to support school districts in addressing this issue. The task force consists of teachers, administrators, parents, students, superintendents, and other educational experts across all grade bands, who will collaborate to generate a set of resources for school districts by early spring 2025.

The majority of school districts in the state have updated policies in place that govern the use of cell phones in schools or on school grounds, which are aligned with local codes of discipline and may be differentiated for grade bands. Many school districts designed their policies in partnership with local parents and teachers through the use of surveys, voluntary pilot programs, and other engagement strategies. As the Task Force convenes, the Department and the State Board will continue to conduct a comprehensive review of existing policies and leverage the expertise of our stakeholders. Throughout this process, we will be sure to collaborate with our essential partners in the General Assembly.

We request that the committee consider this information as it deliberates **SB 0130**. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs, at Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0504 or Hannah Oakley, Deputy Director of the State Board, at hannah.oakley@maryland.gov, if you would like any additional information.

SB29, 130, 368 Maryland Education Coalition.docx.p

Uploaded by: Rick Tyler, Jr.-Chair

Position: INFO



Maryland Education Coalition



Ellie Mitchell & Rick Tyler, Jr. – Co-Chairs

Web site - www.marylandeducationcoalition.org

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January 29, 2025

SB 29, SB 130 & SB 368

Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

POSITION - INFORMATIONAL

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) was founded over 40 years ago (1980) and is Maryland's oldest, most experienced, and diverse public education advocacy coalition. MEC advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide for all public school students in Maryland.

The Maryland Education Coalition recognizes that research on best practices for cell phone use in schools is continually evolving. While there is broad agreement on the need to limit young people's screen time and regulate the contexts in which cell phones are used, we believe cell phone policies are most effective when designed and enforced locally by school districts and individual schools.

To ensure these policies are effective and equitable, we recommend that they align with guidance provided by the Maryland State Department of Education and adhere to the following principles:

1. **Grounded in High-Quality Research**

The latest research should inform policies on child development, education, and technology use.

2. **Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement**

Cell phone policies should be developed with meaningful input from students, staff, teachers, and families, reflecting the needs and perspectives of those directly impacted.

3. **Equitable and Non-Punitive Accountability**

Accountability measures for violations should avoid overly punitive consequences. Policies must not result in unnecessary disciplinary actions, including suspension, exclusion, or expulsion, which can disproportionately harm students.

4. **Support for Diverse Needs**

Policies must accommodate the technology needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. Where cell phones are required or used for services, appropriate accommodations must be provided.

5. **Flexibility for Exceptions**

Clear guidelines should address when staff and faculty may exercise discretion to allow exceptions, ensuring policies remain practical and context-sensitive.

Ultimately, students deserve a classroom environment that prioritizes focus and learning. Technology rules should reflect the latest research and best practices to support student success while respecting diverse needs and circumstances.