

FAVORABLE
House Bill 630
County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Phone Use Policy –
Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

House Ways & Means Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 630, which would require each county board of education to develop and implement a policy limiting the use of cell phones by students during the school day, with certain exceptions for health, emergency, or educational purposes.

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 using phones or other devices: according to the American Academy of Child

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>

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 reach 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, which this bill specifies. We encourage uniform, countywide policies that are crafted in partnership with local bargaining units and include thoughtful exceptions for health, emergency, and educational circumstances.

We recognize that device use in schools is a priority issue this year, and we urge a collaborative approach to setting best practices for schools across our state.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 630.

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