
TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: House Bill (HB) 192 - County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Established (No Distracted Learning Act)

DATE: January 29, 2025

POSITION: Letter of Information

Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways and Means 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 **HB 0192**, which would require that local boards of education adopt the policies set forth in this legislation that differentiate limitations on students' cellular phone access based on their grade during school hours, except under certain circumstances. Further, this bill would require local boards of education to adopt the student discipline policies outlined in this legislation.

The State Board and the Department appreciate the intent of this bill to prioritize our students' 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. However, as it is currently written, this bill would require all school districts to adopt the discipline policy outlined therein. School discipline policy is the responsibility of Maryland's school districts, with exceptions only in very specific circumstances, which this bill does not meet.

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 HB 0192. 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.

