



Committee: House Ways and Means

Bill Number: House Bill 147 – County Boards of Education – Elementary and Middle Schools – Student Technology Use Policy

Hearing Date: January 23, 2025

Position: Support

The Maryland School Counselor Association (MSCA) is a professional organization of over 900 counselors who work with students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade in public, private, charter, and magnet school settings. School counselors have a responsibility to promote healthy student development and to protect students from digital technology’s potential risks. School counselors consider the ethical and legal considerations of technological applications, including confidentiality concerns, student and community safety concerns, security issues, potential benefits and limitations of communication practices using electronic media, and managing appropriate boundaries with students and stakeholders. This includes adhering to legal, ethical, district and school policies and guidelines around student technology use. Therefore, the MSCA **SUPPORTS** HB 147.

HB 147 requires each County Board to develop and adopt a policy that prohibits an elementary school or a middle school student from using a cellular phone or personal electronic device during school hours. A developed policy would prohibit a student from using a cellular phone or personal electronic device: 1) for any purpose documents in the



student's individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan; 2) to monitor or address or address a student's documented health issue; or 3) when directed by an educator or administrator for education purposes. This legislation would not apply to a County Board that has an existing policy limiting the use of cellular phones and personal electronic devices by students in elementary and middle school during school hours.

The cellphone has been a constant student companion in recent times. According to a 2023 Common Sense Media Survey, 97% of 11- to 17-year-olds reported using their phones in some capacity during school hours and handling their phone around 12 times during the average school day.¹

The use of cell phones and personal electronic devices in schools can have a significant negative impact on student learning, primarily due to their distracting nature, leading to decreased focus, potential academic performance decline, and issues like online harm or cyberbullying, while also raising concerns about academic integrity through cheating possibilities. However, the use of cell phones and personal electronic devices can be beneficial for learning and access to educational tools when managed appropriately.

Online harm and cyberbullying have real-world consequences that we as school counselors see daily, as we provide mental health support and guidance to students. Youth often feel overwhelmed and scared online, and don't know where they can turn for timely help. High levels of depression and anxiety are stoked by constant use of online platforms including social media. This spills into the classroom and affects academic learning and performance.

¹ https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2023-cs-smartphone-research-report_final-for-web.pdf#:~:text=quarter%20arrived



In fact, the U.S. Education Department urged state, school, and districts in December 2024 to adopt policies on cellphone use in schools citing the risk that social media can pose to student’s mental health.² At least 27 states and Puerto Rico have introduced legislation related to cellphone use in schools and nine states have enacted such measures since 2023.³ State education agencies and state board of educations in at least 11 states have acted regarding cellphone use in school during the same period. Governors in Arkansas, Montana, Oklahoma, and Virginia also have issued orders and action to address related challenges.⁴ Here in Maryland, many Maryland districts have already enacted student technology use policies.

While there is no one-size-fits-all policy for student cellphone use as there are nuances in each school district, this legislation will bring districts without policies in place for elementary and middle school students in-line with their peers and allow current districts with policies in place to continue with their existing policies.

We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Jocelyn I. Collins at jjcollins@policypartners.net.

² <https://marylandmatters.org/2024/12/03/dc/u-s-education-department-pings-states-schools-to-set-policies-on-cellphone-use/>

³ <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/hold-the-phone-recent-state-activity-on-cell-use-in-schools>

⁴ <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/hold-the-phone-recent-state-activity-on-cell-use-in-schools>