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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Kansas governor signs full-day cellphone ban into law for public, private schools

By **Matthew Kelly**Updated March 19, 2026 8:04 PM  Gift Article

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly signs a bipartisan school cellphone ban bill into law on March 19, 2026 at the Statehouse as onlookers snap cellphone photos. Matthew Kelly

🌟 Key Takeaways

AI-generated summary reviewed by our newsroom.

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Starting this fall, students in Kansas public schools and accredited private schools will be prohibited from accessing cellphones from the opening bell until class is dismissed for the day.

Flanked by legislative leaders of both parties, Gov. Laura Kelly signed the [bipartisan cellphone ban](#) bill into law on Thursday, calling the new restrictions “a matter of public health.”

“These devices are having a very concerning and measurable impact on the mental health of our children,” Kelly said. “Depression is up among teens. Anxiety is up. Sleep is down. And so much of it is linked to the devices and to social media.”

House Bill 2299 will require school districts to adopt new policies by Sept. 1, mandating that K-12 students store phones in an inaccessible place during the day and establishing consequences for violations.

The new law will ban other electronic communication devices during the school day, including tablets, computers, smart watches, wireless headphones and earbuds.

“We have a responsibility in the Legislature and the executive branch to protect the conditions that allow kids to learn, and sometimes that means having the courage to say, ‘Not everything that is available is beneficial. Not everything that is convenient is good,’” said Rep. Jason Goetz, a Garden City Republican who chairs the House K-12 budget committee.

Many Johnson County and Wyandotte County public districts already have policies restricting device usage during the school day. Existing policies that allow for limited screen time during lunch and passing periods will have to be updated.

In response to a request for comment on the cellphone legislation earlier this year, a spokesperson for the Shawnee Mission schools said the district’s current policy allowing high schoolers to access their phones outside of instructional time is the best fit for students there.

“In Kansas, local school boards are responsible for developing policy for how schools function,” spokesperson David Smith said in an email. “This responsibility is written into the Kansas Constitution, and we strongly believe that our community has already made the decision that is best for their schools and their children with regard to personal electronic device use.”

Kelly said she’s always been an advocate for local control.

“Communities do know what’s best,” she said. “But there are times when having one uniform policy takes the onus of action of going out on a very controversial limb off the shoulders of our (local) elected officials.”

Kelly said at the bill signing that she wished the legislation grandfathered in existing cellphone bans that have proven to be successful. “But we cannot let perfect be the enemy of good,” she added.

Implementing school cellphone ban

The only exceptions to the ban would be for students who need devices for the implementation of their individualized education program, or IEP, and students who present notes from licensed physicians deeming certain devices to be medically necessary to support their health or well-being.

Senate Minority Leader Dinah Sykes, a Lenexa Democrat, said the legislation was written to give local districts flexibility to define what inaccessible device storage will mean for students.

“We talk about, if there is a car, that they could leave it in the car. A locker would be in there, if it’s turned off,” Sykes said.

“Turned off and in your backpack — that is inaccessible because it’s not on the person,” she added.

The legislation calls for children who need to contact their parents or guardians to use a school phone.

Senate Majority Leader Chase Blasi, a Wichita Republican, said lawmakers considered concerns from parents about how they could reach their children during a crisis, such as a school shooting.

“We have heard from law enforcement that in fact, there are situations where an active shooter or another emergency happens on school grounds — when an event happens, students tend to reach out to their parents, naturally, in a moment of panic,” Blasi said.

“And unfortunately, parents flock to the school, which causes gridlock and blocks emergency personnel from getting to the school to address the situation.”

The bell-to-bell cellphone ban passed the Senate by a vote of 32-4 and the House by a vote of 84-39.

According to an analysis by the news outlet [Stateline](#), roughly 18 states and the District of Columbia have adopted bell-to-bell cellphone bans. [Missouri’s complete ban](#) on cellphones in schools went into effect last fall semester.

For Kelly, a Democrat whose policy priorities have routinely been thwarted by GOP supermajorities in the Legislature, the ban serves as a signature achievement in the final year of her second term.

“If there’s one thing I’ve been saying since the day I announced my candidacy for governor in 2017, and then probably every day since I have been governor, it’s that my very top priority is the well-being of Kansas children and the strength of our public education system,” Kelly said.

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