

My name is Lindsay Unger and I am a parent of two children in the Howard County Public School System. As a system of public education, I believe the State has an obligation to make every effort to protect the wellbeing, development, and education of our children. Allowing students K-12 to have access to cell phones and other personal devices during school hours, inclusive of between classes and lunch, violates this principle and I hope to surface reasoning to support a strong personal device bill.

Think back to your high school experience - imagine sitting in class, socializing at lunch, meeting friends in the halls - and now consider how many of us are attached to our phones as adults. We look down when it buzzes, we read while walking between rooms, we multitask in the bathroom, we communicate constantly. Imagine if you had this huge distraction at school. Why put this stress and strain on the attention span of our kids? Why not preserve school as a safe space to focus on their education and as a place to build strong, supportive connections with their peers and teachers.

There are countless publications all pointing toward the same conclusion and I will reference a few. As key decision makers in this process, I hope you have read the book "The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Haidt. Haidt makes many key points about the impacts of the digitization of childhood focusing primarily on cell phone use. Chapter 11 speaks to how the rapid adoption of smartphones and their acceptance in schools has fueled distraction, cyberbullying, and conflict among students. Removing cell phones from schools is one of the key pillars of his recommendation for counteracting the negative effects that a phone-based childhood has had on Gen Z.

The National Education Association conducted a survey in spring 2024 of 2,889 members working in elementary, middle, and high schools. The published report shows that, "Educators who work in schools that allow personal device use find it very disruptive. An overwhelming majority of NEA members—90 percent—support school policy prohibiting cell phone/personal devices during instructional time, and 83 percent support prohibiting cell phone/personal device usage during the entire school day with exceptions for things like medical or assistive-technology needs." One more that I will highlight is Adrian Ward et. al's 2017 paper called "Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity". I think the title alone speaks to the point.

As for the case for safety, I hope you all take the time to read the studies that show that while devices potentially may make students and parents *feel* safer when it comes to mass physical threats, in practice, they are negatively impacting the safety of all students in school-wide emergencies, causing misinformation, additional panic, and network congestion. In October 2025, the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) issued [a statement](#) that supports school policies and legislation that bar cell phone access for K-12 students during instructional time.

Cell phones are a tool for communication. They are not built for education. Smartphones are mini computers connecting students to everything outside of their classroom when what matters most during school hours is their connection to their teachers and immediate classmates. Any allotted use in schools, apart from IEP/504 exceptions, would be inequitable to those without access to the device/app.

As this is a matter of public health and safety, the State must put forth legislation that is determined fully by evidence-based research. It is the experts in neuroscience, child development, and safety whose input should be weighted the most. Fortunately, though, where policies have been put in place, there have been very positive outcomes. The Institute for Families & Technology conducted a [Public Opinion Survey](#) on Voters' Views of Phones in Schools. 91% of parents whose children are in schools with bell-to-ball bans support the policy.

The parameters of the policy must be strictly set at the state-level to ensure an equitable experience across counties - not reliant on differing levels of awareness and education on the topic. I am advocating for K-12 legislation that requires cell phones, and other similar personal devices, NOT to be on the person (inaccessible) from bell-to-bell, only with exception for IEP/504 requirements. Without these specific parameters, the legislation leaves too many children without health and safety guardrails that are critical to their education success. Please take this opportunity to make a tremendous difference in the lives of Maryland children.