

Recommendation: Reduce Budget to \$450,000 for Statewide Phone-Free School Implementation

A. HIGH IMPACT, LOW COST & FAST RESULTS

At **less than \$5 per student**, this represents one of the lowest-cost, highest-impact interventions available to improve classroom conditions statewide.

For approximately **\$5 per student**, schools can implement systems that:

- Improve academic focus and learning outcomes
- Increase school connectedness and student wellbeing
- Reduce bullying, behavioral referrals, and classroom disruptions

Maine schools that have already invested in distraction-free policies report meaningful improvements following implementation. This investment delivers **outsized returns** compared to other education initiatives.

This proposal supports a **statewide rollout to all middle and high schools by fall**, at a total cost of **\$450,000**.

State funding should prioritize implementation models that physically restrict phone access, as these consistently demonstrate stronger outcomes and reduced enforcement burden.

[Link to larger table.](#)

SCHOOL PHONE STORAGE MODELS – COST COMPARISON

Model	How It Works	250 Students	500 Students	1,000 Students	Cost / Student
Classroom-Based Storage (Homeroom)	Lockboxes in each homeroom. Phones stored at start of day and returned at dismissal.	\$675–\$1,125	\$1,350–\$2,250	\$2,550–\$3,825*	~\$3
Centralized Storage (Front Office)	Phones collected and stored centrally using envelopes/crates in a locked room; optional lockboxes for older students.	\$1,250	\$3,000	\$6,000	~\$5
Locking Pouches (Yondr-Style)	Phones placed in locking pouches that stay with students and are unlocked at dismissal stations.	~\$6,250–\$7,500	~\$12,500–\$15,000	~\$25,000–\$30,000	\$25–\$30

*Includes bulk discount

B. LOW-COST IMPLEMENTATION MODELS

1. CLASSROOM BASED STORAGE (HOMEROOM MODEL)

Affordable lockboxes for classrooms stored in homerooms

Example: York High School, Maine (~500 students)

[York High School has implemented a homeroom-based system using lockboxes.](#) The phones go in at the beginning of the day and are picked up after the last bell. The 36-slot lockboxes from [Vevor](#) are \$45 per homeroom, but are available at bulk discount of 15% for purchases over \$3,000.

School of 250 students (15-25 homerooms) =	\$675-1,125
School of 500 students (30-50 homerooms) =	\$1,350-2,250
School of 1,000 students (66-100 homerooms) =	\$2,550-3,825*

15% discount incl.* **Cost: ~\$3 per student

2. CENTRALIZED STORAGE (FRONT OFFICE MODEL)

Options: Manila envelopes in milk crates stored in a locked room, personal lockboxes for grades 11-12, and an opt-out provision for those leaving phones at home or in cars.

Example: Montpelier-Roxbury High School, Vermont (~400 students)

Montpelier-Roxbury ([open campus](#)) [has implemented a phone ban that includes an opt-out provision](#) for students who won't be bringing smart devices into school. This includes students who plan to store their smartphone in a personal vehicle. Open campus students may also access the school's office-based storage solution: A combination of manila envelopes and milk crates (in a locked room) for grades 9-10 and personal lockboxes in 11-12. Total cost to the school: \$2,000.

School with 250 students=	\$1,250
School with 500 students=	\$3,000
School with 1000 students=	\$6,000

Cost: ~\$5 per student

3. LOCKING POUCHES (YONDR-STYLE MODEL)

Individual, school-issued locking pouches that students keep on their person; devices are placed inside and magnetically sealed at arrival, remain inaccessible throughout the day, and are unlocked at designated stations at dismissal or for approved use.

Example: Morse High School, Bath, Maine (~600 students)

Morse High School has implemented a schoolwide pouch-based phone policy in which all students are required to place their phones into lockable Yondr pouches upon arrival. The pouches remain in students' possession but are magnetically locked and inaccessible throughout the school day, then unlocked at designated stations after the final bell.

Cost: \$25-30 per student

C. COST ANALYSIS AND STATE FUNDING ALIGNMENT

[DOE dashboard:](#)

Total Middle School (approx. 6-8th grade) and HS students in Maine: 90,544 (2024-2025)

- Current budget of \$700,000 / 90,500 = approx. \$7.70 / student
- A budget revision to \$450,000 / 90,500 = approx. \$5 /middle and high school student

Effective and affordable phone-free school models exist at a rate of \$3-5 per student on the lowest end of the budget. When accounting for local control and community choice as well as other implementation needs that conform to best practice (such as community education), a rate of \$5 per high school and middle school student covers cost while allowing for effective flexibility.

The highest return on investment comes from policies that physically restrict phone access and increase distance and duration away from personal communication devices for students.

D. WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS: RESTRICTIVE OVER PERMISSIVE MODELS

The case for a restrictive bell-to-bell policy: not all bell-to-bell phone policies are equal

The term “bell-to-bell” describes the duration of the cellphone policy, but does not give specifics of how that policy works.

“Bell-to-bell” policies typically fall into two distinct categories:

Permissive bell-to-bell policies work on an “honor system”. Students are required to keep phones “off and away” for the duration of the school day, keeping them in backpacks, pockets, or personal lockers.

Restrictive bell-to-bell policies physically restrict student access to phones, typically through use of lockers in homerooms/offices, filing cabinets or envelopes in offices, or commercially available lockable pouches.

Although bell-to-bell restrictions are a relatively new phenomenon, several studies have looked at the effectiveness of permissive vs restrictive policies.

In schools that have permissive bell-to-bell restrictions, [studies have found](#) that 25% of students use their phones for approx [70 min. per day](#). 10% of students in such schools log over 3 hours.

This is understandable and predictable. Using the honor system (phones stored in backpacks or hall lockers) still allows phones to compete for students’ attention. [Adolescents’ executive function and impulse control are still developing, making sustained self-regulation in the presence of highly engaging distractions particularly difficult](#). The honor system incentivizes students to sneak phones, increasing teacher policing and undermining the goal of stricter policies to reduce such policing.

Even for students who can withstand the urge to check their phone, research shows that the mere [presence of a phone within proximity](#) of an individual has cognitive effects that are similar to using a phone. Storing phones in a designated, inaccessible location creates the focused conditions students need to learn and reduces temptation.

Once attention is interrupted, it takes [the average student over 20 minutes](#) to regain focus.

The governor and legislature have seen fit to restrict student cellphone use in schools. It is prudent to follow best practice when doing so, and in the case of “bell-to-bell”, this means a restrictive policy that prevents student access to phones for the duration of the school day.

E. KEY FINDINGS

[From Morse High School \(Bath, ME\)](#): School leaders report that since implementing a cellphone policy with locking pouches, teachers are seeing greater student focus in class, fewer distractions, improved social interaction, and decreases in suspensions, with many educators calling it one of the most positive changes they’ve seen in years. (September, 2025)

[From Portland High School \(Portland, ME\)](#): After the district introduced magnetically locked pouches for phones, students and staff at Portland High say the adjustment has been smoother than expected, with teachers sharing that the policy is helping to reduce distractions so classrooms can maintain attention on instruction. (September, 2025)

From New York State: [New Survey Shows Governor Hochul's Distraction-Free Schools Law is Delivering Outstanding Results for New York Students and Teachers](#) (December, 2025):

- *83 percent reported that their schools are experiencing more positive classroom environments and better student engagement since implementing a distraction-free policy.*
- *75 percent reported that implementing a distraction-free policy is improving their ability to teach effectively.*

From Philadelphia Public Schools

- Urban schools that implemented a restrictive policy (over a permissive bell-to-bell policy) saw a nearly complete elimination of behavioral issues attributable to social media (filmed fights, petty vandalism etc).

F. Addressing Common Implementation Concerns

Enforcement Burden

Research shows that vague or teacher-enforced policies often fall apart in practice leading to inconsistent enforcement and increased staff workload. In contrast, clearly defined, physically restrictive storage procedures reduce the daily discretionary enforcement burden on teachers.

Emergency Access

Schools routinely have protocols for emergency communication. Restrictive storage does not eliminate access, it routes communication through school systems that are already designed for safety and coordination.

Equity & Opt-Outs

Students who do not bring phones incur no burden or cost. Opt-out provisions that allow phones to remain at home or in cars ensure equity for families with different needs.