

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
House Bill 163
County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy -
Requirements

House Ways & Means Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports, with amendments, House Bill 163, which would require a county board of education to develop and adopt a policy to restrict or limit the use of personal electronic devices by students during school hours, with certain exceptions to accommodate health or educational needs. It would also require the policy to be published on the county board's website and in student handbooks.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 44 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

A 2024 poll of NEA members showed that 90 percent support school policies prohibiting the use of cell phones during instructional time.¹ Why such overwhelming support? Of those same educators, 83 percent report that students are having difficulty concentrating and completing assignments, trends which experts say correlate with increased access to cell phones.^{2 3} These concerns are not limited to teenagers. Even elementary and middle school students have considerable daily screen time – according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, U.S. children ages 8-

¹ National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

² Ibid.

³ How Phones Ruin Concentration. Child Mind Institute (2024). <https://childmind.org/article/kids-shouldnt-use-phones-during-homework/#:~:text=Multitasking%20leads%20to%20shallower%20thinking,Clinical%20Expert:%20Matthew%20Cruger%2C%20PhD>

12 are using devices or in front of screens for an average of 4-6 hours each day.⁴

It is impractical and often ineffective to enforce restrictions on cell phone usage when policies vary on a classroom-by-classroom basis. Enforcement must not be left up to individual educators; rather, schools need widely observed norms led by system leaders and administrators. We therefore encourage the following amendments:

- (1) Expand policies to apply bell-to-bell for all grade levels – meaning, from the start of the school day to the end of the day without exceptions for passing periods or lunch – to promote clear and enforceable expectations about when devices should be stored out of sight.
- (2) Clarify that the school administration is responsible for enforcing the policy. School administrators should seek stakeholder input to develop student compliance plans and provide support for educators and staff toward the effective implementation of the policy.
- (3) Ensure that countywide policies are crafted in partnership with local bargaining units and community stakeholders, and that all policies include thoughtful, routinely updated plans for family communication and emergency response.⁵

With the inclusion of these amendments, we would urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 163.

⁴ Screen Time and Children. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2024). https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx

⁵ Sample Policy Limiting Personal Device Use in Schools. National Education Association (2025). https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/sample-policy-limiting-personal-device-use-in-schools_final_0.pdf