

FAVORABLE
House Bill 525
County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device
Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

House Ways and Means Committee
February 18, 2026

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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 525, which would require each county board of education to develop and implement, not later than the 2027-2028 school year, a policy limiting the use of cell phones and social media by a student during the academic school day. It includes reasonable exceptions for needs documented in a student's individual education program and for health, emergency, or educational purposes.

MSEA represents 75,000 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}

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

² National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

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>

Adolescents are increasingly spending large portions of their days using phones or other devices: according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, U.S. children ages 8-12 are using devices or in front of screens for an average of 4-6 hours each day, and children over 13 reach up to 9 hours of screen time 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. We appreciate this bill's recognition that enforcement must not be left up to individual educators; rather, schools need widely observed norms led by system leaders and administrators. We encourage that the regularly updated policies referenced in the bill include input from local bargaining units. This bill's balanced approach will support effective implementation while accommodating the needs of students, families, and school employees.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 525.

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