
TO: House Ways and Means Committee

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

DATE: February 18, 2026

POSITION: Letter of Information

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) would like to share the following information regarding HB 525, which would require county boards of education to develop, adopt, and publish a policy limiting the use of personal electronic devices during school hours.

The State Board and MSDE appreciate the intent of this bill to prioritize our students' academic engagement and to limit distractions within their schools and classrooms. We concur that every elementary, middle, and high school should have a clear, consistent, and research-informed policy to guide the use of electronic devices in schools.

To that end, we are pleased to share a summary of the work MSDE and the State Board have engaged in since the 2025 legislative session, including the recommendations of the [Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools](#), the state's ongoing participation in a national research initiative that surveys Maryland educators on their experience with student cell phone use, and State Board and MSDE's analysis of local education agencies' (LEAs) policies that informed the passage of the State Board's August 2025 resolution on the issue.

The Task Force, which was convened in the first months of 2025, was composed of a diverse group of stakeholders from across the state, including teachers, administrators, parents, students, principals, and district superintendents, collectively representing 11 counties and all grade bands. This broad representation ensured that the guidance reflected a wide range of perspectives and school contexts.

The Task Force developed research-informed, actionable guidance to support LEAs in strengthening the implementation of cell phone use policies. The [guidance](#) emphasizes increasing opportunities for stakeholder engagement to build enduring community support, developing cohesive policies that consider the needs of all student groups, utilizing evidence-based approaches to discipline for policy infractions, building emergency preparedness procedures that align with cell phone restrictions, and supporting districts in addressing practical implementation challenges. Importantly, the Task Force did not seek to mandate a single, uniform policy across the state. Instead, flexibility was prioritized to allow each district to design policies reflective of its unique community needs.

As the Task Force's work concluded, the Department was approached to participate in the national research initiative, Phones in Focus, which to date has surveyed nearly 9,000 Maryland educators and administrators during the 2024–25 and 2025–26 school years. Preliminary findings indicate that more elementary and middle schools adopted bell-to-bell cell phone policies this school year, while adoption of such policies in high schools remained flat or declined slightly. Further, across all grade bands, the majority of schools with educators who completed the survey currently operate under no-show cell phone storage policies, though this storage option ranks relatively low in teacher satisfaction, with 59 percent reporting satisfaction. Teachers reported much higher satisfaction with other student cell phone storage options, including 81 percent who were satisfied with locker storage, 84 percent satisfied with centralized collection, and 92 percent satisfied with a policy that did not allow cell phones on campus.

Additionally, during the summer of 2025, the Department again partnered with Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM) to survey nearly all LEAs regarding their cell phone and electronic device policies. At the time, 18 LEAs had some version of a bell-to-bell policy in place. For seven LEAs, this policy extends to elementary, middle, and high schools. However, for ten LEAs, bell-to-bell restrictions were in place only in elementary and/or middle schools. Those same ten LEAs have adopted schedule-based restrictions for their high school students.

[Informed by the findings](#) and results from the Phones in Focus surveys as well as our LEA-level survey, the State Board passed a [resolution](#) in August 2025 outlining its approach to cell phone use in schools. The resolution highlights the Task Force guidance, notes that nearly all Maryland LEAs already have a cell phone policy in place, and encourages all LEAs to maintain and regularly revisit comprehensive policies aligned with the priorities identified by the Task Force.

The State Board and the Department request that the committee consider this information as it deliberates **HB 525**. Thank you for your attention to this important work and for your continued commitment to supporting effective, locally responsive school policies.

Please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov, or Hannah Oakley, Deputy Director of the State Board, at hannah.oakley@maryland.gov, if you would like any additional information.