

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2018

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to improving student outcomes by restricting mobile device use by public school students.

Brief Description: Improving student outcomes by restricting mobile device use by public school students.

Sponsors: Representatives McClintock, Couture, Waters, Rude, Reed, Cheney, Doglio and Caldier.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/23/24, 1/30/24 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to select pilot sites to implement a strategy to restrict student mobile device use during instructional hours and to report back on implementing the restriction.
- Directs the OSPI to report to the Legislature with a summary of research on policies and procedures restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours and recommendations for successful restriction strategies.
- Requires the Washington State School Directors' Association to develop a model policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours.
- Directs school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools to adopt, by the beginning of the 2027-28 school year, a policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Shavers, Vice Chair; Rude, Ranking Minority Member; McEntire, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Couture, Eslick, Harris, McClintock, Nance, Pollet, Steele and Timmons.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Ortiz-Self and Stonier.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Limits on Possessing Telecommunication Devices.

Since 1997, school district boards of directors have been authorized to adopt policies that limit the possession of: (a) paging telecommunication devices by students that emit audible signals, vibrate, display a message, or otherwise summon or deliver a communication to the possessor; and (b) portable or cellular telephones.

Model Policy and Procedures.

Legislation enacted in 2017 directed the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) to review and revise its model policy and procedures on electronic resources and internet safety to better support digital citizenship, media literacy, and internet safety in schools.

The model procedures developed by WSSDA specify that the district superintendent or designee is authorized to regulate use of personal electronic resources on district property and related to district activities. It also states, "[to] help ensure student safety and citizenship with electronic resources, all students will be educated about Internet safety. This will include appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms, and cyberbullying awareness and response."

School Implementation.

The legislation enacted in 2017 also requires school districts to annually review policies and procedures on electronic resources and internet safety. In reviewing and amending the policy and procedures, a school district must:

1. involve a representation of students, parents, staff, and community representatives with experience or expertise in digital citizenship, media literacy, and internet safety issues;
2. consider customizing the WSSDA model policy and procedures on electronic resources and internet safety;
3. consider existing school district resources; and

4. consider best practices, resources, and models for instruction in digital citizenship, internet safety, and media literacy, including methods to involve parents.

Instructional Hours.

"Instructional hours" means those hours students are provided the opportunity to engage in educational activity planned by and under the direction of school district staff, as directed by the administration and board of directors of the district, inclusive of intermissions for class changes, recess, and teacher/parent-guardian conferences that are planned and scheduled by the district for the purpose of discussing students' educational needs or progress, and exclusive of time actually spent for meals.

Summary of Bill:

Pilot Program.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must establish a two-year pilot program to study different strategies to restrict student mobile device use during instructional hours. The OSPI must select pilot sites from public schools and school districts that volunteer to implement a strategy to restrict student mobile device use during instructional hours.

"Mobile device" is defined as any personal mobile telephone or other portable electronic communication device with which a user engages in a call or writes or sends a message or any device in which the user plays a game or watches a video, except that such term does not include school-issued devices.

Strategies to restrict student mobile device use may include: (1) limiting use to specified time periods, designated locations, or during particular activities; and (2) limiting use by requiring students to leave mobile devices at the front of the classroom or in an administrative office, or to place mobile devices in a secure container. Strategies to restrict student mobile device use may include exceptions; for example, exceptions could be made for certain emergencies, students with certain disabilities, certain English learner students, students with certain health conditions, or instructional purposes.

The OSPI must select pilot sites with diverse site characteristics and proposals to implement a variety of strategies to restrict student mobile device use. The OSPI may distribute state and federal funds to pilot sites to support the required activities.

At a minimum, selected pilot sites must agree to: (1) restrict student mobile device use during instructional hours for at least two years, beginning with the 2024-25 school year; (2) survey administrators, teachers, students, and families for their perceptions of the benefits and detriments of the student mobile device restrictions; and (3) report to the OSPI with the survey results, student outcome data, and other information related to implementing the student mobile device restrictions.

Study and Report.

The OSPI must study policies and procedures restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours by, among other things: (1) researching the policies and procedures that have been adopted by schools in Washington and in other states to limit student mobile device use; and (2) analyzing data and other information collected from pilot sites.

By November 1, 2026, the OSPI must report to the Legislature with: (1) a summary of its research and analysis; (2) recommendations for successful strategies for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours; and (3) recommendations for exceptions to the student mobile device restrictions.

Model Policy and Procedure.

After July 1, 2026, the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) must develop a model policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours. The model policy and procedures must be informed by and aligned to the research and recommendations contained in the OSPI report. The model policy and procedures must be posted publicly on WSSDA's website by February 15, 2027.

School Implementation.

By the beginning of the 2027-28 school year, each school district, charter school, and state-tribal education compact school must adopt a policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours. The policy and procedures must be consistent with the WSSDA model policy and procedures.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is focused on finding ways to increase student test scores. Banning cell phones in schools significantly improves students' academic outcomes and narrows the achievement gap between student groups. Students admit that they focus better in school without cell phones. Students are more engaged with each other and with staff. Cyberbullying is reduced and mental health is improved.

Cell phones and other technology can be important tools in schools. This bill researches the best methods for restricting student cell phone use before statewide restrictions are mandated. The bill has exceptions for emergencies, students with disabilities, and students with certain medical conditions, such as diabetes.

Some school districts have implemented no cell phone policies during school hours, while allowing high school students to have their phones during breaks. If students have their phones when they should not, it is considered an athletic code violation.

The local flexibility in the bill is appreciated, but more funding to better support other student needs is necessary, too. This bill can be implemented without cost.

The timeline for implementing cell phone restrictions should be months and not years. Written communication, town halls, and minor changes to policies are all it takes to implement these restrictions.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Cell phones are a problem in schools at every level and conducting a study on this topic delays implementing the known solution. Distribution of guidelines to implement cell phone restrictions would be helpful. Cell phones can be a great learning tool, but students who misuse them should have their phone confiscated.

Local decisions are better than forcing schools to adopt a statewide policy. A committee or work group at the school district level should create the local policy and guidelines.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Stephanie McClintock, prime sponsor; Eric Sobotta, Reardan-Edwall School District; Kelsi Hamilton, Chehalis School Board; and Preston Dwoskin.

(Other) Jeannie Magdua, Conservative Ladies of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.