AN ACT Relating to improving student outcomes by restricting mobile device use by public school students; adding a new section to chapter 28A.630 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.345 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.320 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.710 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.715 RCW; creating a new section; providing an effective date; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. (1) The legislature finds that student use of mobile devices in schools has had a multitude of negative effects on student outcomes. Mobile devices can be a constant distraction that disrupts the learning environment for all students. According to a study from the London School of Economics, and replicated by other researchers, the mere presence of a smartphone by a neighboring student lowers a nonphone student's test performance by about six percent.

(2) The legislature further finds that mobile devices can increase harm to students' mental health either by recording students without consent or through increased cyberbullying. Washington students are still recovering from the massive effects of school
closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, including severe learning loss and troubling trends in student mental health.

(3) The legislature intends to combat these effects with safer and more engaging learning environments for students. While the United States and nations around the world consider restricting mobile devices for students, the Washington legislature intends to explore the best strategies to implement a phone free school environment with more focus on academics, development of social skills, and students engaging with each other, through research and analysis of information collected from pilot schools. Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to restrict student use of mobile devices in public schools during instructional hours using the strategy or strategies recommended by the office of the superintendent of public instruction, beginning in the 2027-28 school year.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. A new section is added to chapter 28A.630 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The office of the superintendent of public instruction must study policies and procedures restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours by, among other things:

(a) Researching the policies and procedures that have been adopted by schools in Washington and in other states to limit student mobile device use; and

(b) Analyzing data and other information collected from pilot program sites, as described in subsection (2) of this section.

(2)(a) The office of the superintendent of public instruction must establish a two-year pilot program to study different strategies to restrict student mobile device use during instructional hours.

(b) The office of the superintendent of public instruction 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.

(c) Strategies to restrict student mobile device use may include:

(i) Limiting use to specified time periods, designated locations, or during particular activities; and

(ii) 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.
(d) 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.

(e) The office of the superintendent of public instruction must select pilot sites with diverse site characteristics and proposals to implement a variety of strategies to restrict student mobile device use.

(f) At a minimum, selected pilot sites must agree to:
   (i) Restrict student mobile device use during instructional hours for at least two years, beginning with the 2024-25 school year;
   (ii) Survey administrators, teachers, students, and families for their perceptions of the benefits and detriments of the student mobile device restrictions; and
   (iii) Report to the office of the superintendent of public instruction with the survey results, student outcome data, and other information related to implementing the student mobile device restrictions.

(g) The office of the superintendent of public instruction may distribute state and federal funds to pilot sites to support the activities required under (f) of this subsection.

(3) By November 1, 2026, and in accordance with RCW 43.01.036, the office of the superintendent of public instruction must report to the appropriate committees of the legislature with: (a) A summary of the research and analysis required by subsection (1) of this section; (b) recommendations for successful strategies for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours; and (c) recommendations for exceptions to the student mobile device restrictions.

(4) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

   (a) "Instructional hours" has the same meaning as in RCW 28A.150.205.

   (b) "Mobile device" means 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.

(5) This section expires August 1, 2027.
NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. A new section is added to chapter 28A.345 RCW to read as follows:

The Washington state school directors' association shall develop a model policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours as defined in RCW 28A.150.205. The model policy and procedures must be informed by and aligned to the research and recommendations contained in the report required by section 2 of this act. The model policy and procedures must be posted publicly on the association's website by February 15, 2027.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 4. A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:

By the beginning of the 2027-28 school year, each school district shall adopt a policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours as defined in RCW 28A.150.205. The school district policy and procedures must be consistent with the model policy and procedures developed under section 3 of this act.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 5. A new section is added to chapter 28A.710 RCW to read as follows:

Section 4 of this act relating to a policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours as defined in RCW 28A.150.205 governs school operation and management under RCW 28A.710.040 and applies to charter schools established under this chapter.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 6. A new section is added to chapter 28A.715 RCW to read as follows:

Section 4 of this act relating to a policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours as defined in RCW 28A.150.205 governs school operation and management under RCW 28A.715.020 and applies to state-tribal education compact schools subject to this chapter.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 7. Sections 3 through 6 of this act take effect July 1, 2026.

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