

# DeWine pushes statewide cell phone ban in Ohio classrooms

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Gov. Mike DeWine is backing a new Ohio Senate bill that would prohibit students from using cell phones during the school day.

A state Senate committee held a hearing on [Senate Bill 158](#) hours after DeWine's announcement of backing, with testimony from sponsoring state Sen. Jane Timken, a Stark County Republican, and proponents.

DeWine held a news conference Tuesday morning to champion the bill, which Timken introduced after the State of the State address March 12, [when DeWine asked the legislature to ban](#) cell phone use during school hours.

This is the second time DeWine has called for curtailing cell phone use in schools. DeWine signed [House Bill 250](#) last May, which requires each school district to pass a policy by July 1 of this year to specify when students can and cannot use their phones.

Most Ohio districts already have policies. The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce in December released [a survey](#) showing that six in 10 school districts and charter and STEM schools already had cell phone policies.

Dan Tierney, DeWine's spokesman, said that DeWine wanted to take the further step of banning them due to anecdotal evidence he's received from school officials across Ohio that already have cell phone policies, showing the positive benefits academically, socially and in mental health of keeping kids away from their phones.

"I think the jury has really returned on this issue," DeWine said during the news conference. "I think the evidence clearly shows from what we've seen across the state that every school in the state needs to ban the phones. It's time for us to finish the job."

When students receive messages, their attention drifts away from the lesson and to their phones. Many students receive as many as 11 messages an hour, he said.

By banning the phones, school officials told DeWine students are more engaged with educational content and grades have improved. The effects of bullying lessen because students can't use their phones. Child sextortion – in which people access a sensitive photos and begin demanding money to not post them publicly – and the associated risk of suicide by victims also is reduced, he said.

"The lunchroom is noisy once again," DeWine said. "Kids are actually talking to each other."

Timken said the bill contains an exception for students with disabilities who need to access specific apps to assist with their education. Schools will have to work with each child to find out what app they're using, she said.

Asked by a reporter whether SB 158 would put children in harm's way, Dublin City School District Superintendent John Marschhausen said that cell phones are not needed to assist with school plans for an active shooter.

"We now do active shooter drills on a regular basis, and at each step along the way, our staff's response, our communication with first responders and those steps we're taking to keep children safe don't include children having cell phones," he said.

Calls and messages from students have been shown to actually interfere with the school safety plan, he said.

Last year, the legislature passed [a law](#) that makes sextortion a third-degree felony. It goes into effect on Wednesday. The law was championed by then-Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and his wife, Tina.

"Online safety for our children is one of the most critical issues of our time," Tina Husted said. "We must be leaders in our state and our country for the safety, mental health and physical health of our children. I've compared online use to smoking back in the 40s and 50s. We didn't know what we didn't know. And now we know it causes cancer, emphysema and other health issues. And now, after 12-plus years of smartphone use since 2012, we know that excessive use has resulted in a sharp increase of mental health issues for our kids."

State Sen. Andrew Brenner, who chairs the Ohio Senate Education Committee, said that he expects swift passage of SB 158.