

Cell phone ban in Ohio schools advances through Senate committee

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - With an eye on next school year, an Ohio Senate committee advanced a bill that would generally prohibit students' cell phone use during class.

The Ohio Senate Education Committee on Monday afternoon passed [Senate Bill 158](#). It could hit the floor for a full Senate vote as soon as Wednesday, the next scheduled session, said state Sen. Andrew Brenner, a Delaware County Republican who is chair of the committee.

"The reason we're trying to move it is because we're trying to get it into effect by Sept. 1," Brenner said, referring to the new school year. "For it to go into effect, it's 90 days after it's been signed into law. So we're kind of on a tight timeline here."

The bill applies to traditional public schools and charter schools, but not private schools.

During his State of the State address in March, [Gov. Mike DeWine renewed his call](#) for a cell phone ban during instructional hours.

Last year, the legislature passed another cell phone bill that DeWine signed requiring local school boards to pass policies specifying when students can and cannot use their phones. DeWine said he wanted to take it further this year, after hearing anecdotal evidence that students improve academically, socially and in mental health when schools limit phone usage.

Before Monday's committee vote, the panel amended the bill to require each public school administrator to include in the building's comprehensive emergency plan a protocol to address student cell phone use during active emergencies.

Brenner said that several members of the public requested this amendment.

SB 158 contains some exceptions to the cell phone ban. Phone use can be allowed for certain student learning, to monitor or address a student's health concerns if deemed appropriate by the school's governing body, or if a special education or learning disabled student could benefit from phone use.

Michael Mercier, president of the Cincinnati-based Screen Education, an organization that researches, provides training and consulting services on the impact of technology on human wellness, said he supports the bill, but thinks it should contain sanctions if an adult doesn't follow the phone ban.

"If you don't have any mechanism to hold them responsible it's sort of a toothless bill," he told lawmakers.