

Ohio Senate votes to ban students from using phones during school hours

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**By Haley BeMiller
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The Senate voted 30-2 May 14 for [Senate Bill 158](#), a measure backed by Gov. Mike DeWine that would require school districts to adopt a ban by Sept. 1. The proposal builds on a law enacted last year that gives districts until July to implement a policy on cellphones in school.

Districts could still allow access to phones for learning or to monitor student health concerns. They must also craft policies for phone use during an emergency or active threat.

"We've witnessed an unprecedented rise in the use of cellphones," Sen. Jane Timken, R-Jackson Township, said. "While these advancements in technology can have a positive impact, they are not without consequences."

As of December, about 41% of districts had banned phone use entirely, while 45% restricted it to certain times of day, [according to a survey](#) by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. Akron Public Schools, for example, gives students [Yondr bags](#) to lock up their phones.

Dublin City Schools Superintendent John Marschhausen told a Senate committee that the district's new policy increased student engagement and reduced classroom disruptions. Dublin has a complete phone ban for grades K-8 and only allows high school students to use them for instructional purposes.

"Teachers are no longer competing with the allure of social media notifications and text messages for their students' attention, allowing for deeper engagement with the curriculum and more productive class time," Marschhausen said.

Opponents worry a ban would make it harder for parents to reach their children during an emergency. But DeWine and other backers of the bill contend excessive cellphone and social media use can have severe mental health consequences for children and teens.

[A 2023 U.S. Surgeon General Advisory](#) found social media can help children – particularly LGBTQ youth – make connections and express themselves. At the same time, it also increased the risk of depression and anxiety, made teens feel worse about their body image and exposed them to content dealing with self-harm and racism.

Sen. Beth Liston, D-Dublin – one of two Democrats to oppose the bill – said she shares concerns about distracted students but doesn't believe the state can prescribe a one-size-fits-all solution.

"As we look forward to the next 10 years, I don't feel like a state law is the best way to support kids in districts that are going to have to be dealing with the day-to-day of technology," Liston said.