

Governor Phil Murphy

During Visit to Woodbury Junior-Senior High School, Governor Murphy Highlights Support for Phone-Free Schools

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Governor Announces Proposed \$3 Million Investment in Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Supporting School Districts in Transitioning to Phone-Free Learning Environments

WOODBURY – Governor Phil Murphy today visited Woodbury Junior-Senior High School in Gloucester County to promote his support for phone-free schools and a legislative proposal highlighted during his 2025 State of the State Address that would require all school districts in New Jersey to adopt policies restricting the use of cell phones in K-12 classrooms. Woodbury Junior-Senior High School implemented its own phone-free school policy at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year that keeps students' cell phones locked away until the final school bell.

During his visit, the Governor observed a phone-free classroom, spoke with educators about the impact of the school's new cell phone policy, and participated in a roundtable discussion with students who shared their opinions on the transition to a phone-free school setting. At the roundtable discussion, the Governor announced that his Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal will include a \$3 million line item to support phone-free schools grants, which will enable school districts across the state to invest in tools to limit classroom distractions and create healthier learning environments.

"The presence of cell phones in our schools presents a significant barrier to student learning. Constant notifications and the temptation to check social media impede the learning process and diminish students' ability to thrive in the classroom. That is why I am proud to support a new initiative requiring all school districts in New Jersey to take stock of the harmful impact of unrestricted cell phone use during the school day and enact policies conducive to student success," **said Governor Murphy**. "Today in Woodbury, we saw how quickly a phone-free environment can transform a school community. As part of our upcoming budget proposal, we are going to provide several millions of dollars in grants to school districts that are interested in making the switch to phone-free schools, so that they too can enjoy the benefits of distraction-free classrooms. I look forward to working with our legislative partners, educators, parents, and – most importantly – students to empower our children to succeed in school."

"Implementing our cell phone-free policy has allowed us to regain control of the learning environment, ensuring that time spent in the classroom is focused on teaching and learning, not distractions. By removing barriers to engagement, we are creating a space where all students can thrive academically. Most importantly this was a huge step in the direction of ultimately closing the achievement gap for Black and Brown students and setting them on a path to long-term success," **said Andrew Bell, Superintendent of Woodbury City Public Schools**.

The Governor's endorsement of this proposal comes amid a staggering youth mental health crisis that has been felt across the nation. [Frequent social media use can increase the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf#:~:text=It%20explores%20and%20describes%20the%20current%20evidence%20on,the%20full%20scope%20and%20scale%20of%20social%20med) (<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf#:~:text=It%20explores%20and%20describes%20the%20current%20evidence%20on,the%20full%20scope%20and%20scale%20of%20social%20med>), including symptoms of depression and anxiety, in children and adolescents.

The Governor was joined on his visit to Woodbury Junior-Senior High School by Assembly Members Rosie Bagolie and Cody Miller who sponsor a bill ([A4883/S3695](https://njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2024/S3695) (<https://njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2024/S3695>)) that would direct the Department of Education to develop guidelines for school districts to consult in creating their own policies on non-academic cell phone use while under school supervision. Additional sponsors of the measure include Senator Paul Moriarty, Senator Kristin Corrado, and Assemblywoman Carmen Morales.

"Cellphones are a big part of today's society, but excessive use can have negative effects on the academic performance and mental health of school-aged children," **said Senate President Nick Scutari**. "This law will give school districts the ability to adopt policies for the best use of cellphones and social media so that students aren't distracted and their educational experience isn't disrupted. Classrooms are for learning."

"The time has come to do more about the distracting influence of cell phone usage during the school day. We need to empower our educators and administrators with the tools to ensure that unnecessary cell phone or social media use is not adversely impacting learning, student behavior or morale in our schools," **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin**. "Families and taxpayers alike invest heavily in the nation's best public schools so it's only right that students are focused exclusively on learning, and not what's happening on social media. I look forward to reviewing the legislation and the thoughtful debate in the days to come."

"Unrestricted cell phone use in our classrooms has become a major distraction that disrupts learning and negatively affects the mental health of students," **said Senator Paul Moriarty**. "Cell phone and social media usage have been linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression, as well as sleep disruption. I would like to thank Governor Murphy for recognizing the importance of this issue as we begin to take a common sense approach to dealing with it more directly."

"In today's day and age, cell phones and social media have advanced far from their original concepts and, unfortunately, have been widely reported as heavy contributors to the youth mental health crisis," **said Senator Kristin Corrado**. "With this policy, students will be able to better focus on their schoolwork and we can help ensure our children do not fall victim to the perils of social media at such a young age."

"New Jersey schools remain among the best in the nation because we're always willing to reexamine and adjust our methods," **said Assemblywoman Rosie Bagolie**. "Cell phones and the advantages and detriments they bring to the education system continue to evolve. That is why I look forward to working with educators and parents to find a balance between learning without distractions and making sure our students can reach out or be reached in times of need."

"At the end of the day, our classrooms must continue to be places where our students can thrive," **said Assemblyman Cody Miller**. "This legislation is about creating a space where education comes first. By limiting distractions and keeping phones off during class, we're giving our students the best chances at

“As an educator, I’ve seen firsthand how smartphones affect students, not just in their day-to-day work but also their memory and recall. This can make it difficult for students to build on lessons, which can lead to challenges in understanding schoolwork and lowered test scores,” **said Assemblywoman Carmen Morales**. “This bill would help develop solutions for regulating cell phones and social media in schools, ensuring policies are age- and grade-appropriate, while supporting both communication and focus in the learning environment.”

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