

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Establishing Phone-Free Schools in New Jersey

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Policy Will Become Effective Beginning in the 2026-2027 School Year

RAMSEY – Governor Phil Murphy today visited Ramsey High School in Bergen County to sign bipartisan legislation requiring all school districts in New Jersey to adopt policies restricting the use of cell phones and other internet-enabled devices in K-12 schools. Governor Murphy first announced his intention to pursue phone-free schools in New Jersey during his 2025

[State of the State address \(https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/addresses/approved/20250114_sos.shtml\)](https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/addresses/approved/20250114_sos.shtml) and highlighted the policy proposal during [a visit to Woodbury Junior-Senior High School \(https://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562025/approved/20250219a.shtml\)](https://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562025/approved/20250219a.shtml) in Gloucester County last February.

“With today’s bill signing, we are ensuring New Jersey schools are a place for learning and engagement, not distracting screens that detract from academic performance. In schools across our state, from Ramsey to Woodbury, we have seen the positive impact of phone-free policies,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Teachers report that students are more focused, less anxious, and they are socializing and laughing with each other – not through a screen – but in hallways and classrooms. By getting rid of needless distractions, we are fundamentally changing our schools’ learning environments and encouraging our children to be more attentive and engaged during the school day. This is a sensible policy that will make a world of difference for our children.”

This bill requires the Commissioner of Education to publish guidelines on restricting students’ use of cell phones and other internet-enabled devices during regular school hours, on a school bus, or during school-sanctioned events. Boards of education will be required to adopt policies that align with the statewide K–12 guidelines. Board policies must, among other provisions, prohibit the non-academic use of personal internet-enabled devices on school grounds during the school day, with limited exceptions.

Pursuant to this legislation, the Department of Education (DOE) is reviewing its previously published Guidance for Schools on Student Use of Internet-Enabled Devices and anticipates publishing updated guidelines in mid-January in consultation with stakeholders. The DOE guidelines will serve as a roadmap for creating safer, more focused learning environments. They will outline best practices for secure storage, staff training, and equitable enforcement, ensuring that every student benefits from fewer distractions and better opportunities for engagement. District policies will



become effective for the 2026–2027 school year.

“I applaud the Governor for taking a big step to protect our kids by making schools a safe, phone-free place to learn. Our young people are facing a mental health crisis – but, we all know that when children put the screens down, their mental health and academic results improve,” **said Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill**. “I look forward to implementing this important legislation and continuing to make progress on kids’ online safety and holding Big Tech accountable for the content they push toward our kids.”

“Recent research has made it clear that access to cell phones in schools impacts both student mental health and academic achievement,” **said Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer**. “Today’s legislation provides the framework to ensure every classroom is a place for learning and free of distractions. Our guidelines will be practical, developmentally appropriate, and equitable, helping districts create policies that protect student focus and well-being.”

“I’m thrilled to see New Jersey join dozens of other states going phone-free bell to bell. Restoring childhood begins with restoring focus to classrooms and fun to hallways and lunchrooms,” **said Jonathan Haidt, Author, The Anxious Generation & Professor, NYU-Stern**. “Governor Murphy’s leadership is making that a reality for thousands of kids in the Garden State.”

“The signing of this pivotal bill into law is momentous for the well-being and productivity of students across New Jersey,” **said Senator Paul Moriarty, Senate prime sponsor of the legislation**. “By developing a commonsense approach to help mitigate the hugely negative impacts of unrestricted cell phone and social media use in schools, educators will be well equipped to fight the crisis facing their students to guarantee a productive, distraction-free learning environment.”

“This bill will help ensure that students are fully engaged in learning while they are in the classroom,” **said Assemblywoman Rosy Bagolie, Assembly prime sponsor of the legislation**. “While internet-enabled devices such as smart phones and tablets can be useful tools, the rise of social media has unfortunately caused significant harm to our learning environments. Our legislation is a response to what parents, teachers, and principals have consistently told us—they need our support. A4882 will ensure that we are doing our part to help educators and our students succeed.”

This bill signing further demonstrates the Murphy Administration’s ongoing commitment to student mental health and well-being. In December 2025, the DOE took steps to lay the groundwork for districts to adopt bell-to-bell policies, announcing that 86 school districts were awarded grants under the

[Phone-Free Schools Grant Program](https://nj.gov/education/news/2025/NJDOEAnnouncesDistrictsApprovedForPhoneFreeSchoolsGrants.pdf)

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. This program, funded with a \$3 million appropriation in the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget, supports schools committed to implementing bell-to-bell cell phone bans in purchasing equipment like pouches or funding training or engagement sessions.

Research indicates that limiting phone use improves test scores, especially for struggling students, and reduces mental health risks related to excessive social media use. By reducing digital distractions and fostering healthier school climates, New Jersey is taking steps to ensure that every classroom is a place for learning, connection, and growth.

Sponsors of the legislation (S3695/A4882 (https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/S4000/3695_R3.PDF)) include

Senators Paul Moriarty and Kristin Corrado, along with Assembly Members Rosy Bagolie, Cody Miller, and Carmen Theresa Morales.

“Cell phones 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 cell phones and social media so that students aren’t distracted and their educational experience isn’t disrupted. It will help ensure that school classrooms are focused on learning.”

“New Jersey is blessed to have a public school system that consistently ranks among the best in the nation. When parents and teachers are telling us that cell phones are becoming a daily distraction in the classroom and beyond, it became incumbent upon us to listen and respond,” **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin**. “Our students deserve the best possible chance at success, and by giving school districts the guidance and tools they need to help students stay focused, we are creating learning environments that will keep young minds fully present in the classroom.”

“Distractions are abundant in our digital age, making it difficult for students to disconnect from social media, gaming, and other online activities to focus on learning,” **said Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz**. “Our schools must be incubators for academic growth first and foremost. By requiring districts to develop policies limiting cell phone access in the classroom, we can create more productive learning environments, improve student outcomes, and give power back to teachers and school leaders.”

“Our classrooms should encourage learning while minimizing distractions,” **said Senate Republican Leader Anthony M. Bucco**. “By giving schools clear guidance on cell phone and social media use, we’re helping students stay focused, fostering healthier learning environments, and protecting their well-being in an age where the pressures from digital and social media are everywhere.”

“Classrooms should be places where students are fully engaged in learning, building relationships, and developing critical thinking skills,” **said Senator Vin Gopal, Chair of the Senate Education Committee**. “By establishing clear, statewide guidelines for the use of internet-enabled devices, this law gives school districts the tools they need to reduce distractions while still allowing for thoughtful, appropriate use of technology. It is a balanced approach that supports student focus, mental well-being, and academic success.”

“As the Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, I want to make sure we are doing everything we can to ensure New Jersey’s students are able to achieve academic success. I frequently hear about the detrimental effects of students using phones and other devices in schools. Quite simply, students can’t learn if they’re constantly on their devices while the teacher is teaching,” **said Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Chair of the Assembly Education Committee**. “The legislation recognizes that individual school districts should be free to create their own policies on the use of internet-enabled devices, empowered with guidelines developed by the State. It’s one more way we’re continuing to keep New Jersey as a national leader in education.”

“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.”

“This legislation is designed to create a more focused learning environment and reduce distractions,” **said Assemblyman Cody Miller**. “These policies are not about punishment, but about helping students build healthier

habits and giving them the best possible chance to succeed in the classroom.”

“Young people depend on adults to make responsible decisions that support their learning and long-term success,” **said Assemblywoman Carmen Morales**. “Educators have recognized the risks of unlimited access to internet-enabled devices, which can allow students to disengage at times when their focus and effort are most needed. By providing school boards with guidance on how to address this issue, we can better support students who truly deserve every opportunity to succeed.”

“I was an early advocate for addressing cell phone use in schools, and I’m pleased to see this legislation become law. It provides clear guidance on student cell phone use while ensuring districts retain the flexibility to tailor policies to their communities. It’s a thoughtful approach that supports learning, safety, and local control,” **said Assemblywoman Aura Dunn**.

“The Balance Project is thrilled to see New Jersey taking this vital step to eliminate digital distractions in schools,” **said Holly Moscatiello, Founder of The Balance Project**. “We applaud Governor Murphy and the State Legislature for prioritizing safe, healthy learning environments, and will continue to support efforts to protect classrooms from the digital overload that disrupts learning and fuels anxiety.”

“We applaud Governor Murphy and the Legislature for passing this law to reduce classroom distractions,” **said NJEA President Steve Beatty**. “As a career educator I understand that technology plays a role in education, but that it should not be allowed to get in the way of engaged learning. Giving students a break from their phones will improve their mental health and create stronger classroom communities. That’s a win for everyone.”

“At Ramsey School District, our phone-free policy has fundamentally transformed the daily experience for our students. By removing the distraction of the cell phone, we have reclaimed the classroom as a space for deep academic focus and critical thinking. Teachers report a significant increase in student engagement during instructional time. Since implementing our phone-free policy at Ramsey, the ‘sound’ of our hallways has changed,” **said Andrew C. Matteo, PhD, Superintendent of Schools, Ramsey School District**. “Instead of heads-down silence, there is a tangible energy of conversation and laughter. We’ve moved from digital distractions back to genuine human connection, allowing students to be fully present with one another and their teachers.

“By removing the digital barrier that phones create, we have seen an immediate resurgence in student connection,” **said Michael Thumm, Ed.D., Principal of Ramsey High School**. “These phone-free moments do more than improve the school day; they cultivate the interpersonal skills and presence that will serve our students as they build relationships and collaborate throughout their lives.”

“A bell-to-bell cell phone policy has positively transformed the culture of our Junior-Senior High Campus. Students are more engaged in class, interactions are more authentic, and we’ve seen tremendous improvements in overall school climate and student well-being,” **said Andrew T. Bell Sr., Superintendent, Woodbury City Public Schools**. “This legislation reflects a thoughtful, student-centered approach to learning that supports both academic success and mental health. We appreciate the Governor’s leadership in listening to students and advancing a policy that puts learning first.”

“There are no words strong enough to fully capture how a bell-to-bell cell phone ban has transformed our high school. Students are noticeably happier, engaged/present in their classrooms, and connected to one another. We have a stark increase in students achieving honor roll and a huge decrease in negative student behavior,” **said Dwayne Dobbins Jr., Acting Co-Principal of Woodbury Junior- Senior High School**. “This legislation has the power to redefine

the culture of New Jersey's public schools, and it is my sincere hope that building leaders across the state will experience the same profound and positive impact that we have seen in the city of Woodbury."

"This legislation reflects moral seriousness and intellectual honesty about the developmental needs of children," **said Dr. Anthony B. Bradley, PhD, Research Professor of Interdisciplinary and Theological Studies at Kuyper College.** "As researchers have shown, constant access to internet-enabled devices during the school day is strongly associated with rising anxiety, diminished attention, and weakened academic engagement. By setting clear, age-appropriate boundaries while preserving necessary accommodations for health, safety, and learning, New Jersey is choosing evidence over ideology. This is not anti-technology – it is pro-child. The state is affirming that schools exist to cultivate focused learning and psychological well-being, not to serve as extensions of the attention economy."

"Banning phones will help our teachers serve all students better – perhaps especially our boys, who are lagging well behind in the classroom. The opportunity here is to invest in real-life, boy-friendly alternatives to screen time both inside and outside the classroom: hands-on learning, attractive extracurricular activities, sports, and much more," **said Richard V. Reeves, President of the American Institute for Boys and Men.**

"Screen Aware Montclair applauds Governor Murphy and the New Jersey legislature for their efforts to adopt common sense cell phone and social media policies for schools across New Jersey," **said Jordan Goldberg, Screen Aware Montclair, Lead Member.** "We look forward to seeing the DOE's recommendations and strongly encourage the adoption of bell-to-bell cell phone policies that keep cell phones out of the schools during the entirety of the school day."

"We believe that strict, enforceable regulation of cell phones and other internet-enabled devices will promote school environments that allow students to achieve their highest potential and teachers to focus on providing high-quality instruction," **said Elisabeth "Betsy" Ginsburg, Executive Director, Garden State Coalition of Schools.** "This bill gives boards of education the tools they need to achieve that goal, and we commend the sponsors and Governor Murphy for bringing it to fruition."

"We support Governor Murphy's signing of legislation S3695/A4882, which establishes important guidelines for student use of internet-enabled devices," **said Jacqueline Gibbs, President of the New Jersey Parent Teacher Association.** "We look forward to working in partnership with the Department of Education to ensure a thoughtful, effective implementation that supports students, families, and school communities."

"On behalf of the New Jersey School Board Association, we welcome this legislation as it provides our districts with clear guidance to create learning environments where students can focus on academics and meaningful peer interaction. School board members across the state have heard from educators about the challenges posed by constant device access in classrooms," **said Dr. Timothy J. Purnell, Executive Director/CEO of the New Jersey School Boards Association.** "This law empowers our schools to prioritize instructional time and student engagement, and we look forward to working with our districts to implement these policies effectively."

"The New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA) strongly supports this legislation as a thoughtful and balanced approach to managing student use of internet-enabled devices in schools. By establishing clear statewide guidelines – while preserving local decision-making authority—this bill helps districts reduce instructional distractions, promote student well-being, and maintain necessary flexibility for health, safety, and educational needs," **said Dr. Richard Bozza, Executive Director, New Jersey Association of School Administrators.** "NJASA appreciates the collaborative development process, the emphasis on age-appropriate implementation, and the common-sense accommodations built into the bill, and we look forward to supporting districts as these guidelines

are implemented across New Jersey.”

“Without the distractions of cell phones, students will be able to better focus on learning critical thinking skills,” **said Gabrielle "Gab" Casieri, MLIS, President, New Jersey Association of School Librarians.** “School library media specialists are ready to assist students in mastering those valuable lifelong skills.”

“JerseyCAN supports the passage of (S3695/A4882), which prohibits the non-academic use of cell phones, social media and internet-enabled devices during the school day. This legislation, focused on distraction-free schools, aptly recognizes that protecting instructional and learning time is of paramount importance to student success,” **said Paula White, Executive Director, JerseyCAN.** “The legislation also prioritizes students' mental health and well-being, which is equally crucial for students to thrive.”

“It’s so easy to become consumed with our smartphones and other internet-enabled devices, responding to texts, scrolling through social media or playing video games – but those actions are not conducive to learning,” **said AFTNJ President Jennifer S. Higgins.** “Signing S3695/A4882 into law will help to minimize such temptations and distractions during school hours and keep students engaged with their classwork – and, equally as important, engaged with each other.”

“This legislation is an important milestone for New Jersey’s students, reinforcing the need for learning environments that support focus, well-being, and meaningful engagement,” **said Olga Polites, the State Advocacy Leader in New Jersey for Media Literacy Now.** “By setting clear expectations around cell phone use, the state is also creating space for students to build essential media literacy skills – helping them think critically about the information they encounter and preparing them to be informed, engaged participants in our democracy.”

“The New Jersey Library Association commends Governor Murphy and the Legislature for advancing policies that keep student learning at the center of how technology is used in New Jersey’s public schools,” **said Lorraine Ruiz, President, New Jersey Library Association.** “By guiding districts to develop age-appropriate, research-informed expectations for when and how students use internet-enabled devices during the school day, this legislation helps ensure that digital tools support focus, deepen engagement with instruction, and expand access to high-quality learning resources. Librarians play a vital role in this effort by helping students navigate information online, integrate technology into their coursework thoughtfully, and build the critical thinking and digital literacy skills they need to thrive as lifelong learners.”

“The New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association supports this important new law and accompanying grant funding to help charters and other public schools achieve the goal of distraction-free classrooms,” **said T.J. Best, Senior Advisor for the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association.** “Public charter schools have been among the first in our state to take steps to ensure that when students are in the building they are learning and growing, not swiping and scrolling. This measure will help promote better youth mental health and student success in the digital age. We thank Governor Murphy, Assemblywoman Bagolie, and all the other sponsors for their leadership for our children.”

“The Latino Action Network applauds the enactment of S3695/A4882, a measure that carries particular importance for Latino students across New Jersey. For Latino students—who are disproportionately concentrated in under resourced districts where instructional time is already stretched thin—this bill is a critical step toward leveling the playing field and strengthening academic outcomes statewide,” **said Javier Robles, President, Latino Action Network.** “We thank the Governor and Legislature for taking this meaningful step to support the well-being and long term success of Latino youth.”

"Internet enabled device use in children requires careful guidance from appropriate experts and its influence on child and adolescent mental health is critically important to consider," **said the New Jersey Psychiatric Association.** "The role and use of cell phones, social media and the internet in youth is also important to consider when providing guidance to individuals across the state. The New Jersey Psychiatric Association thanks Governor Murphy and the legislature for shining a light on this issue and taking steps to protect New Jersey's youth. The NJPA will continue to focus its psychiatric expertise on sharing the evidenced-based approach to achieve this goal."

"We welcome Governor Murphy's signing into law of direct support for school districts to adopt and implement policies on cell phone use during the school day," **said Julie Larrea Borst, Executive Director, Save Our Schools NJ.**

"As a parent, I think about the world my son will grow up in every day—and I'm genuinely thrilled to see New Jersey and Governor Murphy taking this step," **said Pearl Gabel, Co-Chair of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** "This bill cuts through the noise, literally and figuratively. Phones are everywhere, all the time, and it's rewiring how kids learn, focus, and connect. We are giving students the space to tune in and be present in the world and with each other."

"For more than a generation, smartphones have steadily encroached on the daily lives of our children—fueling anxiety, rewarding distraction, and weakening the human connections that make deep learning possible. Over that same period, New Jersey has seen academic standards slip and student readiness decline. We did not arrive here overnight, and we will not fix it overnight. But today, we begin the work of turning the page," **said Charles Gelinas, Co-Chair of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** "With the bold leadership of Governor Phil Murphy, New Jersey is taking a decisive first step to reclaim our classrooms and refocus our schools on learning, growth, and human development. A bell-to-bell mobile device policy is not a cure-all—but it is a clear, principled statement about our priorities: that attention matters, that mental health matters, and that our children deserve environments designed for success, not distraction. We are grateful to Governor Murphy for his courage in leading on this issue, and to all of the bipartisan leadership in Trenton that understands the future of this state is shaped not by screens, but by students who are present, prepared, and empowered to succeed."

"The New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association supports thoughtful efforts to minimize learning distractions, increase student engagement, and protect students' well-being and safety, including from online predators and bullying, in today's digital environment," **said Heather Moran, a member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents and a representative of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association.** "We appreciate that this legislation avoids a one-size-fits-all approach and preserves the flexibility for school leaders and local boards of education to adopt policies that best reflect the needs of their students and communities. That local discretion is essential, and we believe it is an important strength of this law."

"While cell phones can connect young people to family, friends, and knowledge in positive ways, they also provide unlimited access to social media, which has been linked to harmful impacts on youth anxiety, depression, and family dynamics. Banning cellphone use in school is one of many proactive steps New Jersey can take to protect youth mental health, age-appropriate social development, and encourage focus on academic growth," **said Ebony Grace, CEO of NJSACC: New Jersey's Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Professional Network, and member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.**

"The commission's year-long process brought together parents, students, educators, and child advocates to examine the research and listen to families and those working with children and youth. What emerged was a clear picture: social media and constant phone access are affecting our children's mental health, academic performance, and

ability to form real connections,” **said Mary Coogan, Advocates for Children of New Jersey and member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** “This legislation equips schools with the tools they need to create environments where students can focus on learning and connecting face-to-face. We all can play a role in protecting children's well-being in the digital age and it's time to fully embrace our shared responsibility to support the healthy development of New Jersey's children.”

“The New Jersey legislature's work and Governor Murphy's action limiting cell phones in schools reflects what primary care physicians like me and educators are seeing nationwide: when phones are put away, students are more engaged, more present, and better able to learn and connect with one another. While some are understandably hesitant at first, kids adapt quickly—and many end up appreciating the space to focus without the constant distractions. It's a thoughtful, student-centered approach, and one more states should seriously consider,” **said Dr. Mike Varshavski, member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** “I was proud to serve on the Governor's Commission that helped study this issue and made the recommendation. I thank everyone else who played their part, including parents. I know students will be happier, healthier, and learn better because of this law.”

“Though I understand that losing our phones during school is difficult, the evidence shows that this can do a lot of good for kids,” **said Charlotte Valvanis, student member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** “I'm excited to see how mental health and academic performance can improve in New Jersey as a result of this new law.”

“I hope this bill encourages a shift in the school environment away from social media and toward meaningful human connection,” **said Anjali Soni, student member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.**

“I wholeheartedly commend Governor Murphy and the New Jersey Legislature for this bold bell-to-bell cell phone ban in schools,” **said Dorota Mani, educator and member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** “This transformative legislation strikes at the heart of the adolescent mental health crisis, slashing distractions from social media, curbing cyberbullying, and restoring focus to empower our students for success and well-being.”

“As a member of the Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents and representative of the New Jersey State School Nurses Association, I applaud this legislation as a critical step to protect students from the harms of unchecked social media and smartphone use,” **said Robin Cogan, MEd, RN, NCSN, FNASN, FAAN, school nurse and Member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** “School nurses are on the front lines of this crisis, and this law gives New Jersey a powerful framework to create healthier, safer, more focused learning environments.

“The signing of the Distraction Free Schools Bill is a significant step forward for New Jersey students. As members of the Commission on the Effects of Social Media, we recommended bell-to-bell cell phone bans because the evidence was clear: constant device access interferes with learning and contributes to youth mental health struggles,” **said Chanta Jackson, member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** “It's gratifying to see our work translate into action so quickly. This law enables students to engage fully in their education without the constant pull of social media. We hope our other recommendations will be similarly implemented to create healthier environments for New Jersey's children.”

“Schools are increasingly seeing the effects of cell phone use on students' attention, social relationships, and mental

health," **said Kristine Esposito, Ed.S., NCSPP, School Psychologist and member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** "As a school psychologist and member of the Social Media Commission, I strongly support this legislation as a critical step toward safeguarding student well-being, strengthening focus and connection, and creating healthier boundaries around technology during the school day."

"We are well aware of the daily distraction and challenges cellphones cause each day for students in our schools," **said Scott Rocco, member of the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents.** "The new bell-to-bell law prohibiting cellphones in schools, signed by Governor Murphy, will help our students fully engage in school and focus on the learning process in the classroom without the distraction of a cellphone. It will also strengthen their interpersonal connections and social skills through interacting with their peers, not a cellphone."

Governor Phil Murphy

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