

## Governor Phil Murphy

# Press Pool Coverage: Governor Murphy Visits Woodbury Junior-Senior High School; Highlights Support for Phone-Free Schools

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### PRINT

Gov. Phil Murphy toured Woodbury Junior-Senior High School in Gloucester County Wednesday morning to promote the school's cellphone ban and announce \$3 million in his fiscal year 2026 budget proposal to support school districts seeking competitive grants to enact similar policies.

The governor was joined by Assemblymembers Rosaura "Rosy" Bagolie and Cody Miller who sponsored a bill that would direct the state Department of Education to develop guidelines for school districts to create cellphone use policies.

"Alright, what do I do?" Murphy asked, as the school's acting co-principal Dwayne Dobbins, Jr. and Superintendent Andrew Bell directed him to turn his phone off, place it in a Yondr pouch and lock it for the tour, similar to what the students do. "Here we go."

The administrators explained that students lock their phones in the pouches from the school's day first bell to its last bell, at 2:37 p.m. The students keep the pouches on them all day and find one of the 20 nozzles stationed around the school to unlock the pouch at the end of the day.

"That's awesome," said Murphy.

This is the first full school year the school has implemented the policy.

The governor and legislators visited a freshman Algebra 1 class where students were working in groups of two and three on a study guide for a test the next day. Math teacher Charlene Aboyme called one student, ninth-grader Karelyne Morales-Rivera, up to the smart board to solve a graphing problem.

"Ta-da," said Morales-Rivera, when she successfully solved the problem.

After the class, Gov. Murphy and the assemblymembers joined Aboyme and four other teachers in the school to discuss the impacts of the cellphone ban. The teachers reported positive impacts, including fewer distractions in the classroom and increased attention spans.

One of the teachers said the students are "major phone addicts" and students are now checking out library books in lieu of checking their phones. Another teacher said it's a "pleasure" to redirect students who are distracted by talking to their friends, instead of using their phones.

"And as the superintendent said, this may not work for everyone. There may be different flavors that work," said Murphy. To implement the policies, officials have proposed legislation and are now "putting chum in the water" in regards to the \$3 million in proposed funding announced today.

Murphy and the educators acknowledged parents' concerns about not being able to reach their children, but said the school was staffed with security guards and officials have emergency procedures in place. Parents can also easily call the main office.

Assemblywoman Bagolie, who also serves as the principal and superintendent of East Newark, said her district also has a cellphone ban, but instead of using pouches, students place their phones in bins that educators lock for the school day.

"Is the bell to bell the real magic here?" Murphy asked the teachers, who agreed the full length of the school day was key.

Implementing the Yondr pouches at the Woodbury Junior-Senior High School cost roughly \$30,000, school officials said.

The governor, legislators and district superintendent also held a roundtable discussion in the school's library with eight high school students to discuss the policy. All of the students said they appreciated the policy and reported positive impacts, including stronger social bonds with peers and teachers, less distractions and better grades, even if some students admitted they did not initially like the policy. One student reported having a "free mind" and "peace" with the policy's implementation.

"That was a heck of an endorsement," Murphy said to two different students reporting positive impacts.

One student said her father doesn't like the policy, since he can't reach her during the day and it's just the two of them in their household. She said she reminds him he can call the main office any time and they'll pick up the phone.

Another student said it's nice that people can no longer film TikToks during the day, blocking the school hallways.

"I do believe that the pouches have been really, really beneficial even if not everybody uses them correctly. I think there's a lot of ways to get around it," said Colin Flynn, a senior at the high school. "There are a lot of problems with the system, but I think just the fact that kids are like held to a higher standard, to not have their phones out at all throughout the entire day, that extra enforcement allows the kids to then have those benefits that come from not having their phones."

Murphy said as the former ambassador to Germany, he's an "anomaly" and used to keeping his phone tucked in a bin or not into classified meetings for security purposes.

"We can't do every district," he said, but said "we're going to put several million" in the budget for districts to enact similar cellphone policies. Murphy said he first learned of Woodbury's policy through reading a story in the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Brianna Kudisch, NJ.com

### VIDEO

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