

Dear State Representatives,

I am writing to you today as a concerned parent and as a pediatrician, in support of a bill for bell to bell phone free schools. I am the parent of a middle school student, and I take care of children of all ages and from various localities in Maine as a physician, and I feel that cell phone access during school and school related activities is detrimental to students' emotional health and educational well-being.

This is more than just a feeling, however. It is backed up by evidence. Studies in England and Spain have reported increased standardized test scores in schools that did not allow cell phones on campus. This improvement was even more pronounced among the most economically disadvantaged students (improvement of 14% of a standard deviation in this group, compared to improvement of 6% of a standard deviation overall). The impact of banning phones in schools in one study was the equivalent of an additional hour per week of school instruction time, five additional days of instruction time per year. Our students have suffered academically since the pandemic, and eliminating cell phone use during school time will help them to catch up to their peers.

Beyond academics, teachers, counselors, pediatricians, and parents are all aware of the mental health crisis in this country. Cell phone use (not just social media use, but cell phone use in general) has been associated with worsening mental health in youth. One study found that 36% of children had been photographed by a peer without their consent, and 23% had been video recorded. In Europe, bullying dropped by 15-18% among 12-14 year olds and 10-18% among 15-17 year old students after a phone ban. Another European study found that students where cell phones were banned were 60% more likely to read, and 29% more likely to participate in sports activities, after cell phone use in school was eliminated. Our children need social interaction, and cell phone use during school, including during break times, hinders their social development.

Finally, cell phone use in school raises equity issues. I have seen first-hand instances when phones are involved in lessons, even though phone ownership is not a requirement for public school. Families such as mine which have chosen to limit access to this technology are left out. Families who cannot afford cell phones are also left out. A ban on cell phone usage at any time during the school day will eliminate this inequity.

States and school districts across the country and across the political spectrum are actively limiting cell phone use in schools. I urge Maine to join them, to give our children the best chance of optimal mental health and educational success.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Jubulis, MD

Jennifer Jubulis  
Scarborough  
LD 1234

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