

Megan Bartholomew
Scarborough Alliance for Thoughtful Tech
LD 1234

Dear Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of bell-to-bell, device-free schools. I am a healthcare professional and a mother of two school-aged children in Scarborough, and I care deeply about the learning environment our students experience every day.

As Maine faces urgent educational challenges, now is the time for bold, research-backed action to support student achievement and well-being. We are at a pivotal moment.

The 2024 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—often called the Nation’s Report Card—show that Maine students are experiencing the steepest academic declines in decades. Our fourth and eighth graders are now performing at their lowest levels in over 30 years in both reading and math.

In fourth grade math, Maine students had an average score of 233, below the national average of 237, with only 33% performing at or above grade level. In reading, the average score was 210, with just 26% reading at grade level—a notable drop from 36% in 2019. Eighth grade math scores averaged 273, slightly above the national average, yet only 25% of students met grade-level expectations. Eighth grade reading showed a similar pattern, with an average score of 255 and only 26% reading at grade level, down from 36% in 2019.

These results are deeply concerning. Maine is now one of 14 states performing significantly below the national average in core academic subjects.

Some may question the significance of NAEP results, noting that the assessment samples approximately 1,500 students. However, statisticians affirm that this sample size is extremely reliable, providing a 98% confidence level and a 3% margin of error—stricter than many standard studies. Maine’s own Department of Education includes NAEP results in its dashboard, recognizing their importance. Moreover, all states are held to the same standards when it comes to sample sizes and the inclusion of students with special needs, ensuring fair and meaningful comparisons.

To reverse these troubling trends, we must take meaningful steps to address learning loss, minimize distractions, and foster classrooms that prioritize education and engagement.

LD 1234 offers a practical, cost-effective solution: implementing a phone-free school day from bell to bell.

This is not a radical proposal—it’s part of a growing national movement. States that have already passed bell-to-bell legislation include Arkansas, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Virginia. Meanwhile, states actively considering similar legislation include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Vermont, Washington, Washington D.C., and West Virginia.

If Maine fails to act, at the state level, as a whole, we risk falling even further behind, while other states take meaningful steps to restore focus and structure in their schools. The evidence is clear: phones affect learning. The question now is whether we will lead or lag in our response.

The time to act is now. Let’s give our students and teachers the focus and support they need to succeed by reducing distractions and creating learning-centered classrooms.

I urge you to support phone-free schools throughout Maine.

Sincerely,
Megan Bartholomew
Scarborough Alliance for Thoughtful Tech