

My name is Lindsay Maielli, and I'm here to express strong support for bell-to-bell phone-free school policies. Today, I want to focus on the academic side of this conversation—because if we're serious about helping students succeed, we have to address the impact phones are having on their ability to learn.

As a teacher, I've experienced it firsthand. And as a parent of two school-aged children, I feel it personally.

Here in Maine—where we rank among the bottom 14 states nationwide on reading and math—we simply can't afford to ignore this issue any longer.

Let's start with the obvious: phones are a major distraction in the classroom.

72% of high school teachers say that cell phones interfere with learning. And it's not just when they're being used—research shows that even the presence of a phone in a backpack or pocket can cause what scientists call “brain drain,” reducing a student's ability to focus and process information. A phone on silent is still pulling at a student's attention—*“Did someone text me?” “Did someone like my post?”* A silent phone is not a silent mind.

On average, students check their phones over 100 times per day. That kind of fragmented attention makes it incredibly difficult to retain knowledge, focus during lessons, or stay engaged in class discussions.

But when schools implement bell-to-bell phone-free policies, things change.

Student engagement increases. Teachers report fewer incidents of cheating and plagiarism. And interestingly, mid-class bathroom breaks go down—because students aren't asking to leave just to sneak a glance at their phones.

We also have real-world data backing up these academic benefits.

A 2020 study of Norwegian schools found that banning smartphones:

- Improved girls' GPAs and math scores—on par with the gains you'd see from reducing class sizes
- Had the greatest impact on students from lower-income families
- Was most effective when strictly enforced—requiring students to hand in or lock away their phones, not just silence them

And there are ripple effects:

- **Attendance improves** because students aren't texting parents to pick them up early

- **More books are being checked out** from school libraries
- **Bathroom breaks are shorter and less frequent**, because students aren't using that time to scroll

Sometimes parents or students say, "But we need our phones for schoolwork."

The truth is, districts already provide the devices students need. The academic risks of personal phone use far outweigh the benefits.

In closing: allowing unrestricted phone use in schools undermines learning, increases cheating and disengagement, and widens the achievement gap—especially for students who are already struggling.

This is too big a problem to leave to individual school districts to solve one by one. We already know what works. This must happen at the state level.

Bell-to-bell phone-free policies are an investment in attention, academic achievement, and integrity. Our classrooms should be places where students can focus, grow, and thrive.

Thank you for your time—and for supporting a smarter path forward for Maine's students.

Lindsay Maielli