

Dear Legislators,

I am writing today because we need state leadership on an issue that affects virtually every school community in Maine: the *distraction, disruption, and harm caused by personal smartphones during the school day* - and the need for **bell-to-bell phone-free policies**.

The problem is real, widespread, and documented.

National surveys show that more than half of school leaders believe cell phones *negatively impact academic performance, attention, and mental health*. Many report that unrestricted phone use affects students' focus and classroom climate.

Research also shows that students use their phones extensively during school hours, often for non-educational purposes such as social media and entertainment, and this use happens during lessons when it's most distracting.

Teachers agree that cellphone distraction is a *significant classroom problem*. In a recent survey, about 72 % of U.S. high school teachers reported that cellphone distraction is a *major issue* in learning.

Smartphones reduce attention and cognitive engagement- not just anecdotally, but according to multiple lines of research showing that frequent checking, notifications, and the pull of social content literally disrupt focus and reduce the brain's capacity to sustain effort on learning tasks.

Other research indicates that phone bans are associated with *modest improvements* in academic measures and *notable improvements in social climate*, including reductions in bullying and peer conflict linked to smartphone misuse.

This is not just a local problem.

Parents in communities across Maine have repeatedly supported phone-free school policies. Hundreds signed petitions and letters in Scarborough, Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, and other towns- often with *overwhelming majorities in favor*. Yet, district-by-district efforts have repeatedly stalled, and meaningful, consistent change has not occurred.

School boards and administrators are committed, but they are stretched thin. Many have tried to manage this issue locally, and many teachers feel like *phone police*. This approach is inefficient, uneven, and unfair to educators and students alike.

That's why state action is necessary.

State-level policy would:

- *Eliminate the patchwork of inconsistent local rules.*
- *Provide equitable learning environments for all Maine students.*

- *Allow teachers to teach without policing phones.*
- *Reduce cognitive distraction and improve school culture.*

A strong bell-to-bell phone-free policy- without loopholes that undermine implementation - is not punitive. It simply *protects learning time and human attention* from a device that is purpose-built to hijack it.

We also know this works in other places.

Across the U.S., states that have adopted comprehensive phone bans including entire school days report *fewer distractions and better classroom engagement*.

International evidence- such as recent studies from Europe- shows that banning phones in schools improves *student focus and social climate*.

A final point:

This policy isn't about demonizing technology- it's about restoring *order, attention, and equitable learning time* during the school day. Phones are powerful tools, but in classrooms they are overwhelmingly a *source of distraction* not educational benefit.

Parents, educators, and students want clarity, consistency, and support- not ongoing battles in every district.

For the sake of Maine's children, I *respectfully urge* you to support a strong **bell-to-bell phone-free school policy without watered-down exceptions**, so that every school can be a place where students learn free from distraction, and teachers can teach without interruption.

Thank you.

Maggie Green, Scarborough
Member, Scarborough Alliance for Thoughtful Tech
Member, Turn the Tide Coalition