

Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of a bell-to-bell phone-free school day. We cannot allow arguments of “local control” to override what is best for our students. Right now, control of our classrooms is slipping from educators’ hands and increasingly rests with technology companies in Silicon Valley. Their products are deliberately designed to be addictive—especially to young people—and their primary goal is profit, not the well-being of our children.

Social media platforms and smartphone apps are not neutral tools. They are engineered using behavioral psychology, variable reward systems, infinite scroll, streaks, push notifications, and algorithmic personalization—all designed to maximize engagement and keep users coming back. These companies invest billions of dollars to capture and hold children’s attention for as long as possible. Their profits depend on it.

When smartphones are accessible throughout the school day, we are asking teachers to compete with some of the most sophisticated attention-harvesting technology ever created. That is not a fair fight—and it is our students who lose.

A bell-to-bell policy is not about punishment or distrust. It is about recognizing the reality that children’s brains are still developing. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to persuasive design and dopamine-driven reward loops. Expecting them to “learn responsible use” while their prefrontal cortexes are not yet fully formed ignores basic developmental science. We would never place children in an environment saturated with substances engineered for dependency and simply tell them to practice moderation. We should not do the digital equivalent.

If we want to retain control of our classrooms, we must reclaim students’ attention. That requires a coordinated state effort.

Other states have already recognized this and implemented similar policies, providing clear, consistent expectations across districts. These states- who also value local control- understood that leaving districts to fend for themselves creates confusion, inequity, and unnecessary conflict. A unified state policy gives educators the backing they need.

Without statewide action, individual districts face intense pressure—from parents, from students, and indirectly from a tech industry that benefits when policies are weak or inconsistent. This results in a patchwork of rules and unequal learning environments.

A bell-to-bell phone-free school day draws a firm line: during school hours, attention belongs to learning. It sends a clear message that our classrooms will be governed by educators—not by algorithms designed to monetize distraction.

If we fail to act, we are effectively allowing corporations—whose primary obligation is to shareholders—to shape the cognitive environment of our children. If we act together, as other states have done, we can restore focus, improve school climate, and return authority over the school day to the adults entrusted with educating our students.

Our children's attention is too valuable to outsource.

Thank you for your consideration.

Margo Leonard, Scarborough, parent