



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 234 (Substitute S-1 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Dayna Polehanki
Committee: Education

Date Completed: 5-13-25

RATIONALE

Many K-12 students carry technology into the classroom; however, phones, tablets, and smartwatches may distract students from their education. According to a recent survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), more than two-thirds of public school leaders felt that cellphones had negatively affected their students' mental health (72%) and attention spans (73%). Fifty-three percent responded that cellphone usage hampered their students' academic performance overall.¹ In a 2017 study, researchers found that the presence of cellphones negatively affected subjects' available working memory capacity and adaptive thinking, which contribute to learning.² The impact was greater on those with higher rates of cellphone use. Michigan students between the ages of 11 and 17 spend an average of four and a half hours on their phones each day.³ Accordingly, it has been suggested that students' access to cellphones and other wireless technologies be limited while in school.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to require the board of a school district or board of directors of a public school academy (PSA) to create, implement, and enforce a policy seeking to limit student cell phone use at its schools.

Specifically, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, the bill would require the board of a school district or the board of directors of a PSA to develop and implement wireless communications device policies for the elementary, middle, and high schools operated by the district or PSA. "Wireless communication device" would mean an electronic device capable of, but not limited to, text messaging, voice communication, entertainment, navigation, accessing the internet, or producing email.

Such a policy would have to seek to limit student cell phone use during school hours and reduce wireless communication device-related distractions in classroom settings. A wireless communications device policy could prohibit students from using a wireless communications device on school grounds during instructional time, breaks between instructional time, lunch, and recess.

"School grounds" would mean a building, playing field, or property used for school purposes to impart instruction to children or used for functions and events sponsored by a school. The term would not include a building used primarily for adult education or college extension.

¹ Josue De La Rosa, "More than Half of Public School Leaders Say Cell Phones Hurt Academic Performance", *NCES*, February 19, 2025.

² Ward, Adrian, *et al.*, "Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity", *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, Volume 2, Number 2, April 2017.

³ Mostafavi, Beata, "Study: Average teen received more than 200 app notifications a day", *University of Michigan: Michigan Medicine*, September 26, 2023.

The board of a school district or the board of directors of a PSA could implement additional restrictions regarding the use of wireless communications devices; however, a policy implemented under the bill would have to provide exceptions for emergency situations, devices necessary for medical use, and devices included in a Section 504 plan or individualized education program (IEP).⁴ A school's principal or chief administrator could implement further exceptions at the principal's or chief administrator's discretion.

A bill also would require a wireless communications device policy to provide details regarding enforcement mechanisms that the school would use to achieve its goals.

Lastly, the bill would require the board or board of directors to post its wireless communications device policy on the school district's or PSA's website.

Proposed MCL 380.1304

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The bill would allow school districts to tailor policies to fit their needs. School districts across the State vary in their access to technology. Some schools implement technology, including student cellphones, into their lessons, while others may not have stable internet access or cellular services. Some schools may rely on parents for transportation, while others have students who walk or bus to school and need cellphones for safety purposes. Cellphones play a unique role in every situation. The bill would grant school districts flexibility to decide how to balance cellphone use and community needs.

Supporting Argument

The bill would support school districts already interested in establishing such policies. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education indicates that the greatest pressure school districts and teachers receive when implementing cellphone restrictions comes from parents, who want to contact their children during the school day. Parents' backlash to the policies can be significant. By requiring a school district to implement a policy to restrict cellphone use, the State would support school districts making these efforts.

Response: Testimony before the Senate indicates that many school districts and classrooms already have cellphone restrictions. School districts do not need to be supported in this way but encouraged to adopt stricter restrictions, which the bill would not do.

Supporting Argument

Requiring school districts to limit student access to cellphones would not only reduce distractions but also disruptions. Testimony indicates that cellphones may facilitate harmful behavior. Students may use their cellphones to film fights and disturbances, including those of an explicit nature. They also may use their cellphones to engage in cheating, cyberbullying, or to connect with dubious individuals outside of the school setting. Students would be able to access their phones in cases of true emergencies. Overall, the bill would keep students safe by limiting harmful behavior, without sacrificing their ability to connect during serious circumstances.

Response: Students should not have cellphones in case of emergencies. Firstly, cellphones may distract students during critical moments, when they should be paying

⁴ Generally, an education plan under Section 504 of Title V of the Federal Rehabilitation Act requires schools to provide accommodations to students with disabilities to ensure equal access to education.

attention to their teachers, administrative staff, and the processes designed to keep them safe. Cellphones may actively endanger students in such situations by drawing attention to them. Secondly, testimony notes that students' abilities to contact their parents during an emergency, while understandable, may do more harm than good. Parents may rush to the site of the emergency, interfering with the efforts of first responders. The bill should prevent these scenarios by prohibiting student cellphone use during emergencies.

Opposing Argument

The bill would not go far enough. Current law does not prevent school districts from adopting cellphone restrictions, and testimony before the Senate indicates that many school districts throughout the State have implemented cellphone restrictions. As such, the bill would effectively do nothing. Instead, the State should implement a stronger, uniform policy to counteract the negative effects of cellphone use on student learning.

Response: Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education indicates that there is no available data quantifying the number of school districts that have implemented school cellphone restrictions, as the Department of Education is not required to collect it. Some school districts may need encouragement to adopt cellphone restrictions, which the bill would do.

Opposing Argument

Introducing cellphone restrictions could inconvenience students. Students, especially those with limited resources and access to other technology, may use their cellphones to record information, work on assignments, or contact their parents and peers. Limiting cellphone use could restrict students in harmful ways.

Response: Ultimately, cellphones do more harm than good to students and their use should be limited. Additionally, the bill would allow school districts to establish their own limits. If a school district had many students with limited access to technology, the school district could allow cellphones to be used for educational purposes like those described.

Legislative Analyst: Abby Schneider

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Ryan Bergan

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.