



1/29/2025

Dear Co-Chairs Fields, Hall, and members of the House Labor and Commerce Committee,

My name is Marcos Lopez, Western Legislative Director for [ExcelinEd in Action](#). Our organization works with state lawmakers and partner organizations to pass legislation that empowers families with educational opportunity, prepares students for college and career, prioritizes early literacy grounded in the science of reading, expands innovation and strengthens school performance.

I am writing to express ExcelinEd in Action's support for House Bill 57, which would limit distractions in the classroom and help protect instructional time to ensure our students are learning.

The rise of cell phone use has been linked to adverse outcomes for young people, particularly impacting their experiences inside the classroom. The constant barrage of notifications disrupts the classroom environment and, as a result, student learning. Evidence from both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic studies suggests that the decline in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores since 2012 correlates with a rise in screen time for students. With both parents and teachers expressing widespread concerns about the detrimental effects on student attention, emotional development and mental health, policymakers must address these issues in order to foster educational environments that are free from harmful distractions. House Bill 57 would help Alaska take a crucial step toward this goal.

Research has increasingly sounded the alarm on the negative effects that excess screen time and ready access to social media platforms are having on adolescents. As an organization that centers students in all that we do, we believe this bill will improve education outcomes.

Strengths of HB 57

HB 57 includes several key provisions that will contribute to its success:

- **Comprehensive Coverage:** The bill explicitly prohibits the use of non-school issued devices during all school hours, including lunch and passing periods, preventing potential loopholes that could undermine the policy's effectiveness.
- **Parental Engagement:** By requiring school districts to share the policy with parents, the bill fosters transparency and encourages family involvement in reinforcing positive student habits.
- **Uniform Implementation:** The bill provides a model policy that will ensure consistency across school districts while still allowing flexibility for local implementation.



Opportunities for Strengthening the Bill

While HB 57 takes significant steps to curb device-related distractions in schools, the following recommendations would enhance its effectiveness and ensure successful implementation:

- **Refine Emergency Use Provisions:** The current provision allowing device use for emergencies should be reconsidered. Instead, exemptions should be limited to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), 504 plans, or documented medical plans that require device use. Allowing broad emergency access to devices can inadvertently disrupt safety protocols and emergency response efforts. Schools should instead establish clear and standardized emergency communication procedures.
- **Clarify the Definition of Non-School Issued Wireless Telecommunications Devices:** The bill should explicitly list examples such as smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, gaming devices, and wireless headphones to ensure clarity in enforcement and compliance.
- **Ensure Universal Applicability to All Grade Levels:** The policy should apply to all students, from kindergarten through 12th grade, to maintain consistency and avoid ambiguity about its enforcement across different school levels.
- **Define Acceptable Device Storage Options:** To streamline implementation and compliance, the bill should specify acceptable storage methods such as:
 - Lockers
 - Lockable pouches
 - A designated storage area within the classroom These measures will help ensure that devices remain inaccessible during school hours while maintaining security.

HB 57 represents a significant step toward fostering a more focused and distraction-free educational environment in Alaska's public schools. By implementing reasonable restrictions on personal device use, students can better engage with their coursework, teachers, and peers. With the recommended refinements, this bill can achieve its intended objectives more effectively while ensuring that schools have clear guidance for enforcement.

We urge you to pass House Bill 57 to strengthen the education of Alaska's students and improve their lifelong outcomes.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this important policy.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcos Lopez".

Marcos Lopez
Legislative Director, West
ExcelinEd in Action

From: [Lessens Kelly](#)
To: [Courtney Owen](#); [Rep. Zack Fields](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Proposed edit to ASD BP 5138 (re cell phones / HB 57)
Date: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 9:30:39 AM

Good morning!

Here is [the version of our under-discussion BP 5138](#) I will ask our Board to discuss tomorrow in our Governance committee meeting. The text in bold reflects items I would like the committee to approve, prior to sending the policy to the Board as a non-action item in our Feb. 4th meeting.

I expect to speak to it this afternoon.

Best,
Kelly

From: [Deadra Browne](#)
To: [Rep. Zack Fields](#)
Subject: Re: HB 0057 information not spoken to
Date: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 7:37:20 PM

Greetings,

I am a parent of an ASD student who also has an IEP. His IEP team has denied our requests for reasonable accommodations and we haven't even gotten to the use of Augmented Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices yet (an AAC device can be a cell phone but the term is more closely associated with non-verbal autistic children)- so when people speak about a student being able to have access to a cell phone as an accommodation that is simply a wish and can never be depended on. But that's a different topic.

My partner is a Math teacher at an ASD school and would be able to speak to the realities of the classroom experience. His name is Christian Haich and is active within AEA.

Cell phone and Canvas use:

Canvas is the school learning management system which allows ASD to create an "intranet" email vs allowing students to use an "internet" based email. It makes it a closed system for security reasons and the like. Districts across the nation use Canvas as their system. Students download the canvas app and log in using their phones so they can check assignments, take photos of their completed assignments which is the easiest way to upload an assignment that may have been a worksheet or like for Algebra 2 the district is using a workbook style textbook where students do the work in a physical book. this means they either have to have a teacher who allows them to turn in a physical page (some math teachers might have 100+ students they are teaching) or they "require" (unless there is an accommodation) the student to turn in the finished homework electronically. Have you ever tried to take a picture of a piece of paper with an embedded webcam? that's where the phone comes in. With the app they can take a quick photo and submit.

A quick google search asking what percentage of students use a cell phone to turn in assignments on Canvas will give you the same numbers I got.

As it relates to HB0057 is assuming they are turning assignments in DURING the school day. But the reality is a lot of them are. If they have a study hall, lunch, study skills, or life skills class they are even more likely to be turning in work during the school day.

Additionally, Canvas has a messaging feature that allows students to send message and request feedback from their teachers - this is not liked by my son as he likes what he was used to which was google chat. But some other students might.

Honestly a state mandate isn't the answer, school policies and a commitment to enforcement to education and appropriate funding to provide an education is. As a genX person we were told video games would rot our brains and skate boarding was a delinquents past time, that simply wasn't true. The reality is large class sizes which do not allow teachers to teach all of the students they have and an under funded educational system will eat away and all attempts to engage students. The other reality is kids are disconnected and struggling in ways they aren't being educated to address. We have to teach and model healthy habits in the home, at school, and socially. Kids are bored and that is a driving force to social media and screens. But schools are struggling to keep art classes and other opportunities that could address that boredom.

What the Palmer principle isn't saying is how much money they wasted on the Yonger pouches that they don't use. What he also doesn't say is, if you did a comparison of his 700 students to the 1600+ at West and the resources and turn over of teachers you would see he has the luxury of being able to institute a sweeping policy addressing cell phone use. ASD spends money on lawsuits that end in NDA's (I speak from experience on that one) and is failing their students partly because of administrative decisions and because of lack of funds to address system wide issues.

Anyway, I have rambled on enough. if you want a teachers perspective I am sure Christian would be happy to provide one.

BTW I've seen ASD's draft policy and it's well meaning but forgot to define what an electronic communication device was and did not provide for exceptions so as it is currently drafted it would inadvertently blame the use of Chromebooks and laptops and tablets needed to actually access instructional materials.

Thanks for reaching out.

Deadra

On Wed, Jan 29, 2025 at 6:47 PM Rep. Zack Fields <Rep.Zack.Fields@akleg.gov> wrote:

Thanks Deadra. Can you provide some more detail—why are school devices not being used? And do you work in the school or have a student there? Thanks for the additional information. Zack

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From: Deadra [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 4:11:43 PM
To: Rep. Zack Fields <Rep.Zack.Fields@akleg.gov>
Cc: Rep. David Nelson <Rep.David.Nelson@akleg.gov>
Subject: HB 0057 information not spoken to

Greetings,

I have a student in ASD and no one seems to be addressing the fact that ASD uses Canvas as their school learning management system and Canvas reports that anywhere from 30-40% of assignments that are turned in using a personal cell phone device on their platform, which many ASD teachers require as the method for turning them in.

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Respectfully,

Deadra Browne

Embrace Differences • We ALL have strengths and challenges

– Emphasis on different, not better or worse

Kelly Lessens

Invited Testimony for HB 57, speaking as an individual member of the Anchorage School Board

January 29, 2025

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 57. For the record, my name is Kelly Lessens and I am a member of the Anchorage School Board.

I am speaking today with general support for the intent of HB 57, but with a recommendation that a committee substitute be offered, allowing for more nuance and discretion.

The intent of HB 57 is admirable.

As currently written it:

- a) Directs DEED to develop and adopt a model policy that prohibits the use of non-school issued wireless telecommunications devices in all public schools during regular school hours, *including* lunch and passing periods, and
- b) Directs each school district to adopt the same.

As a parent and as a policy maker in the ASD, I really support the Bill's intent. I strongly believe that classroom time should be used for learning, and have grown increasingly worried about the distractions that these devices pose to learning and about students' growing dependence on them.

My concerns prompted me to start revising ASD's BP 5138, our policy governing student possession and use of electronic communication devices, including cellular phones, about about eight months ago. My intentions were and remain to increase student engagement in class and improve academic outcomes, to address mental health concerns regarding prolonged use of social media and electronics, and to support ASD principals who have already started to use their authority to limit cell phone access during the school day.

Since starting on this work, I have also become aware that at least 18 states have passed laws banning or restricting cell phones. In Alaska, our own State Board of Education passed a resolution recommending that districts revise their current policies and recently introduced the outline of a model cell phone policy.

So this is timely.

I wanted to explain my recommendation that a committee substitute be introduced by referencing what members of the ASD board and administration are currently assessing.

As of this afternoon, Board members are scheduled to review policy revisions for BP 5138 in tomorrow's Governance Committee meeting. The core of this revision—which I would recommend that HB 57 incorporate—would enable student access to electronic communication devices (ECDs) to vary based on a student's level in school, because “these tools become more essential for performing adult tasks as students progress through school.”

I am however bringing some subtle changes to tomorrow's committee meeting. Those would specify that while “Elementary and middle school students would not be permitted to access ECDs during the school day, but may do so before or after school hours,” (which looks like HB 57 right now, though the word “access” is different than “possess,” and thus would allow an elementary or middle school student to wear a smartwatch but not use it), **high school students**—and especially those with particular academic or curricular needs—would be given a bit more leeway.

“High school students,” the proposed rewrite reads, “are not permitted to access ECDs during class time, unless they are directed by their teacher to do so in order to accomplish a specific academic purpose which cannot otherwise occur with district-provided devices. They may access their ECDs during passing periods and at lunch.”

In addition, I think the language I am proposing allowing teacher directed use of a device would be prudent for a number of reasons, including access to an educational video that they can't access on a chromebook, or to use a phone as a hotspot if a chromebook isn't connecting, or if a student in a course like yearbook or student government needs to access that device to record school activities. It also seems to resonate with the item “E: Authorized for Classroom Use” section of the recent State Board of Education Model Cell Phone Policy definition.

I will also share, anecdotally, that in conversation with high school principals and staff regarding the question of limiting or prohibiting student access to devices at lunch and passing periods, they repeatedly bring up the fact that students greatly outnumber staff and policing device use in those passing periods is exceedingly challenging.

To that point, I'll add that given ASD's forthcoming FY26 budget, which will largely be balanced by massive cuts to staff at our schools, the prospect of having staff available to police high school students' cell phone use in passing periods and at lunch appear to face steeper challenges.

I have shared the most recent draft revision to BP 5138 with the office of Rep. Fields and would be glad to follow up with whatever product arises from the Board's Governance committee tomorrow afternoon. In the meantime, I'd be glad to standby for any questions you may have. Thank you.

BP 5138 STUDENT POSSESSION & USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES, INCLUDING CELLULAR PHONES

The School Board recognizes that many students possess and use cell phones and other electronic communication devices (ECDs).

These devices serve an important purpose in facilitating communication between the student and their family, as well as serving as tools to access electronic information. In the school setting, possession of ECDs and their limited use may be permitted so long as their use is consistent with this policy and does not interfere with the educational process or with safety and security.

(cf. 5030 - School Discipline and Safety)

Educational Uses

Student access to ECDs should vary by age and school level, as these tools become more essential for performing adult tasks as students progress through school.

Elementary and middle school students are not permitted to access ECDs during the school day, but may do so before or after school hours.

High school students are not permitted to access ECDs during class time, but may do so during passing periods and at lunch.

For all ASD students, when ECD use is prohibited, all devices will be put away and not visible and will be either turned off or the ability to receive and transmit data will be disabled. Administrators may require ECDs to be placed in a secure location such as a student locker or other specified location within the school.

ECDs may be approved on a case-by-case basis for student use during the school day by the building administrator when required as an approved medical device or for specific academic needs such as those documented in an IEP, 504, or for language translation support.

(cf. 6159 - Individualized Education Program)

If use of an ECD is required in individual instances (not provided for in an IEP, 504 plan, or as a medical device) to assist a student with the student's education, permission must be obtained in writing from a building administrator prior to use of the ECD at any time when such use would otherwise be prohibited by this policy. In case of an emergency, verbal permission by a teacher or administrator is required in situations where permission can be obtained.

Conditions of Use

ECDs include, and are not limited to, the following: cell phones, smartphones, music players, gaming devices, smart watches, earbuds, and other wearable technologies, etc.

Depending upon grade level, the principal may establish, and school personnel may enforce, additional guidelines limiting or prohibiting the possession and use of ECDs as appropriate to campus needs.

No student may use a cellular phone or ECD in a manner that interferes with or is disruptive of other student's instructional time.

During school and school sponsored activities, students will comply with this policy and with administrative and staff member directives regarding use. Students are required to turn ECDs over to school personnel when requested. Students who refuse to do so are subject to disciplinary action.

An ECD that has been confiscated by the District and not turned over to law enforcement will be released/returned to the parent/guardian when no longer necessary for investigation or disciplinary proceedings. As appropriate, the ECD may be returned directly to the student.

The District assumes no responsibility for loss or damage to personal property of students, including ECDs, whether in the possession of students or if confiscated by school personnel pursuant to this policy. Administrative Regulations shall be developed to promote the safe storage of confiscated ECDs.

Prohibited Conduct

Possession of an ECD by students is a privilege. This privilege will be forfeited by any student who fails to abide by the terms of this policy, or otherwise engages in misuse of the device so as to violate the law or any other school or district rule. In addition to those conduct rules set forth elsewhere, the following actions are strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action:

1. Accessing and/or viewing an Internet site that is otherwise blocked to students at school.
2. Sending an e-mail, text message or other communication that harasses, intimidates, threatens, bullies, or discriminates against another individual.
3. Taking, sending, generating, downloading or uploading a harassing, threatening, or inappropriate photograph and/or video of anyone.
4. Using an ECD or camera to take photos and/or video in a restroom, dressing room, or locker room, or to take a photo of any person who has requested that you not do so.

5. Using an ECD to record, capture and/or share the content of tests, assessments, homework, or class work without express prior permission from the instructor.

6. Hacking or intentionally obtaining, accessing, or modifying files, passwords, or data belonging to others.

(cf. 5131 - Conduct)

(cf. 5131.4 - Campus Disturbances)

(cf. 5131.41 - Violent and Aggressive Conduct)

(cf. 5131.42 - Threats of Violence)

(cf. 5131.43 - Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying)

(cf. 5131.9 - Academic Honesty)

(cf. 5137 - Positive School Climate)

(cf. 6161.4 - Internet)

(cf. 6161.5 - Web Sites/Pages)

Searches

The contents of any ECD may be searched to determine ownership, to identify emergency contacts, or upon reasonable suspicion that a school or District rule or the law has been violated.

(cf. 5145.12 - Search and Seizure)

AASB Master Policy Manual 9/92

Revised 3/2012

Reviewed 2021

Anchorage School District

Palmer High School's Story of becoming "Phone Free" (HL&C 2/5/25)

When I started my career as an educator in 1996 cell phones were relatively new and few people had them. They were simple, had poor service and were considered by most in my friend circle as something not necessary and more of an item people with money could afford. No kids owned them and even sending a text was time consuming and more of a novelty. Fast forward to 2025 and it's considered strange if even children as young as 7th grade do not own the latest and greatest available. They evolved to be incredibly addictive and seem to have taken over the lives of many and especially our children.

When smart phones did become part of our schools I noticed the immediate negative impact they had on schools in regard to engagement, learning and discipline. As teachers it became a battle to be more interesting, more engaging and find ways to keep them from interfering. At first we tried to integrate as tools to release the power they had to be connected to each other and access information. I remember a superintendent I had held up her phone and told us that everything man has ever learned in our time on earth is accessible through her device. She was right. Where she was wrong is that we could stay ahead of those who wanted us to use them and they developed ways to keep our attention and make us feel that they were so necessary we couldn't put them away for any reason.

I became an administrator for the first time as a principal of a small Jr/SR high school in Talkeetna, Alaska in 2016. One of my very first goals was to get the cell phone distraction and the discipline issues they bring out of my school. At that time education was moving to put personal devices in the hands of every student, "One to One". My team called it "One to World". I took this opportunity to ban cell phones from every classroom during the school day. Each student had a device and there was no need to use their personal device for educational reasons. It being such a small school and the veteran staff worked at such a high level, this was all I needed to do. Cell phones were no longer an issue. We had a 100% graduation rate that first year and each staff member was committed to our goal.

I then moved as an assistant principal in a much larger comprehensive high school in Palmer Alaska. This school is not "One to One", the staff is much more diverse with veteran teachers to those with sometimes contracts before they even finish their certification programs. We have larger classes and virtually every student owns personal cell phones. Every day was a game of cat and mouse. We tried several ways to limit cell phone use and increase engagement in classes. Wireless earbuds allowed students to appear engaged all the while they were off engaged in their favorite genre of music or a podcast.

Our first attempt was devices that could only be used when directed by the teacher for educational purposes. Great idea but this will not work. As soon as our students got their phones out they were full of notifications that distracted them and they were off task. Next we moved to become "One to One", and phones were only allowed during passing time and lunch. This helped but not significantly. Research shows that after a student accesses their device the distraction lasts up to 20 minutes. Do the math, 6 passing periods multiplied by 20 is 2 hours of lost time. A third of the school day was wasted because of 5 minutes of cell phone use. Often the cell phone continued in class because they were distracted and they didn't finish whatever it was they started out of class.

During the 2024-25 school year we decided to go completely phone free from the time students enter our building to the last bell. The rest of this story will outline what we have done right,

what we have done wrong and what amazing results we have had just during the first semester of this school year. Based on my experience a phone free school is the only way to go. It is not restrictive on children and enables them to come to school in a safe learning environment and engage and succeed in their classes.

At the end of the 2023-24 school year I read an article about Yondr pouches. I shared with my admin team and we discussed this might be the answer. I sent the article to my supervisor and asked if he would support me in being a pilot. I let him know we had the leadership team and the staff to pull it off. All I needed was the funding and I promised results. It took until late July right when we returned after summer break but we got the green light along with three two other schools: Su Valley Jr/Sr high, and our feeder Palmer junior Middle. Their administrators collaborated with us and set to implementation.

How we did it.

With the green light to use Yondr I was excited and wanted to start right away. First day of school let's get rolling! Do not do that! I worked with a representative from Yondr and they said to slow roll it out. Make a plan with dates and take about 4 weeks from the time we first notify our parents and students. This was essential for success and this is the only way I would do it again. We had to anyway because it took 3 weeks into the school year to get the pouches in and organize them to issue to students. Additionally there was push back from a vocal minority that we needed to explain fully the why, the how and the plan for those that do not follow our expectations.

Our roll out schedule:

YONDR Roll out timeline

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. August 12th | 1st parent notification via Blackboard(facebook?) with addition to the website. |
| 2. August 14th | 1st parent information meeting at 6:30PM |
| 3. Sept 3rd | PL for staff on Yondr Expectationions. |
| 4. Sept 3rd | parent presentation in our little theater. |
| 5. september 4-5 | Class meetings, student training/school wide expectations. |
| 6. September 9 | Issue pouches 1st period. |

I sent the first notification to parents and students two days before teachers reported. At first social media exploded. People reposted my letter and comments were brutal from people connected to our school and even more from people that had no connection. I was pleasantly surprised however that the comments eventually turned to those of support. In the letter I posted dates of two parent forums I hosted at my school to explain our motivations and what the expectations would be for students. Before I was able to host those, however, enough public pushback occurred that I was not given the ability to require all students to use the pouches. They were optional but the phone free school was not. More on this later.

First letter to parents

Dear Parents,

Beginning Monday, **September 9, 2024**, we will be making our school a phone-free space to improve teaching and learning using a program called Yondr. Yondr has been implemented in over 2,000 schools across 16 countries to facilitate an engaged learning environment.

We believe that phones have great utility. We have also found that learning and social behavior improve drastically when students are fully engaged with their teachers and classmates.

The Yondr Program utilizes a simple, secure pouch that stores a phone. Every student will secure their phone in a personally assigned Yondr pouch when they arrive at school. Students will maintain possession of their phones and will not use them until their pouches are opened at the end of the school day. Students are required to bring their Yondr pouch to and from school each day and are responsible for their pouch at all times.

Yondr received responses to their annual surveys from over 1,200 school partners, and after implementing the Yondr Education Program:

- 84% saw a change in student engagement
- 72% saw a positive change in student behavior
- 68% saw a positive change in academic performance

Of their most recent impact survey of over 370 of their school partners:

- 86% saw a positive impact in student safety and wellness

By implementing the Yondr program, we aim to maintain high expectations for all students and provide parents and guardians with the tools and resources to be engaged in their student's education. We are confident that this initiative will support our strategic goals and contribute positively to our school community.

If you have any questions or if there is an emergency and you would like to get in contact with your child, please do not hesitate to contact the Palmer High School front office directly at (907) 746-8400. Additional details about our upcoming parent informational nights will be shared soon.

In an effort to best serve your child, we appreciate your full support in the adoption of the Yondr Program at our school.

Thank you,

David Booth
PHS Principal

How Yondr Works



As students enter school, they place their phone in their assigned Yondr Pouch.



Students close and secure their Pouch, keeping it on them throughout the day.



When leaving school, students tap their Pouch on a Base to retrieve their phone.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is a Yondr pouch?

A Yondr pouch is a magnetic pouch that stores phones and creates a distraction-free climate and culture at Palmer High School. The Yondr system enables teachers to teach and students to focus on their learning without distractions.

What is the daily process for students?

As students arrive at school they will:

1. Turn their phone off/airplane mode and open their personal Yondr Pouch.
2. Place their phone inside their pouch and secure it in front of school staff.
3. Store their pouch in their backpack/on their person for the day.
4. After the final period bell, students will have access to the tool to unlock their Yondr pouch. *Students arriving late or leaving early will pouch/unpouch their phones near the Front Office.

What if my child needs a phone for learning?

Phones are not utilized for learning at Palmer High School. The school provides students with designated one-to-one Chromebook devices.

What if my child needs the phone for medical reasons?

Students who need their phones for medical reasons will have a slightly different pouch that can be opened by the student without the use of the unlocking device.

What if I want to reach my child during the school day?

We want our students to be academically engaged in their learning during the school day. However, in case of an emergency, please contact the main office at (907) 746-8400 to reach your child.

What happens if the pouch is lost, damaged, or forgotten?

Students will be eligible for one replacement pouch free of charge. Any additional replacements will cost \$25. Students who intentionally damage, tamper with, or who fail to arrive with their pouch will be subject to disciplinary action.

Will my student's phone be safe?

Students are in possession of their phone - in their Yondr pouch - for the entire school day. We will advise students to store the pouch in their backpacks where it is completely safe.

What if the Yondr pouch gets damaged?

The Yondr pouch is property of Palmer High School. If a student damages or tampers with a Yondr pouch, they will be held responsible. Replacement pouches will be \$25. If students are seen with a phone, it will be confiscated and discipline procedures will follow as per the Palmer High School Mobile Phone Policy.

What if I have additional questions or need further information?

Please email David Booth at dave.booth@matsuk12.us or call 907-746-8400

We had two meetings with very low turnout. 37 people at the first meeting and less than 20 at the second. It was a mix of support and dissatisfaction but they went well because we were prepared with data, research and a clear message. I felt that at the conclusion of those meetings and continued updates to parents that the resistance was limited to a select few. At the same time we had two meetings with each grade in our school. We covered school expectations, opportunities and explained our cell phone policy. Both at the start of school without pouches and how the school would be completely phone free once the pouches were issued. We issued pouches to students on September 9th, 2023.

Main Complaint From Parents

When implementing a phone free school policy what I felt was the biggest argument and the go to for people against it was the claim that safety would be compromised. You can argue that having a phone and being able to notify someone that a violent threat or act is in your school is enough justification to have cellphones in school no matter how distracting they may be. I argue that our students are more safe with phones out.

The first thing I did was talk to my School Resource officer. From a first responders' point of view he told me that our emergency response system only has two operators. Calls from students would flood the system and getting real time accurate information from adults would be difficult. Additionally he said if students were calling parents that responders would be spread thin due to handling parents trying to get information and help their kids instead of focusing on stopping the threat and evacuating the building. Sadly on September 4th there was a school shooting in Georgia. I watched coverage on the internet and it was a helicopter flying over the school and a group of police were actively holding a crowd back and the sheriff mentioned that it doubled the time to clear the school.

The next thing I talked about was our training in the event that we have a violent event in our school. We use A.L.I.C.E. This technique focuses on how to respond emphasizing evacuation. Our children are trained through drills and our staff goes through formal in person training and online training yearly. The last thing we want is a child on their device, not focusing on reacting or not listening to trained adults which would minimize their ability to survive. Our school is a safer place for children without cell phones. Adults have them and there is a hardwired phone in every room.

Additionally we used some data to show how we can also be protecting students from harming themselves. Research shows a direct correlation between increased social media use and increased levels of anxiety and depression in teenagers. 157,000 school age children were hurt or killed in suicide attempts in 2021, In school shootings 70 were killed or injured during the same year. Alaska experienced zero school shootings in 2022, however, 7,536 attempted suicide. Banning phones for the school day decreases student access to social media fighting this direct correlation.

The evolution of actual implementation

On September 9, 2024, we issued pouches to every student with their identification attached. This really just enforced the expectations we set at the beginning of the school year and at first they worked great. We made a decision as an administrative team to go into every classroom every period even if just checking in. We wanted to take enforcement off the

teacher's plate to make sure they did not become disciplinarians and cause the relationships they have built to be lost. That is our job. Phone infractions dropped to less than 1%. Our policy was if a phone was used or seen we would have it turned into the office. The first 2 times we gave a warning. The 3rd time we had parents come pick them up and progressive discipline would follow. Ex. Lunch detention.

As the semester continued phone infractions suddenly increased in December, and we had to adjust our policy. Children realized they didn't have to put their phone and wireless headphones in a pouch. They carried them in their pockets and the temptation for many was too much. We shifted our policy that children's phones had to be off and not on their person. The requirement is off and stored either in their locker or in their backpack. If we see a phone it is turned into the office and the very first time a parent must come pick up the phone. On the second offense the requirement to have their phone in a pouch. This has worked extremely well and with clear communication with students and families there has been zero pushback. We currently have only 1 student with this requirement.

Our Results

Banning Cell phones has overwhelmingly transformed our school for the better. Below is a bulleted list of some statistics.

Discipline:

- Alcohol offenses down 43%
- Drug offenses down 67%
- Tobacco offenses down 87.5%
- Cyber bullying down 96%

Academics:

- 28% reduction in Failing Grades
- 328 students achieving 3.0 gpa or higher out of 583 enrolled(56%)
- 9th grade PSAT average score above the District, State, National, and Global average
- 76% of 9th graders earned passing grades algebra 1 and above. (34% scored proficient on standardized tests the previous year in 8th grade).
- 77% of 9th graders earned passing grades in English 1((35% scored proficient on standardized tests the previous year in 8th grade).
- ASVAB score average raised from 17-35 to 30-65
- Over 90% of 10th and 11th enrolled grades in advanced classes.

What I would recommend

A total ban is the way to go. This is not our first attempt at limiting cell phone use but this is the only one that impacted Palmer High in so many ways. I would not recommend making every student use a pouch. I do think they are a useful tool for repeat offenders and so far that policy is working very well for us.

David Booth
Principal
Palmer High School
907-746-8400

Kim Whitman - Testimony in SUPPORT of Alaska [House Bill 57](#)

I am a mother of 2 teenagers and I co-founded the nonprofit, the Phone-Free Schools Movement in 2023. I also work alongside Jonathan Haidt and The Anxious Generation team. We, along with the Becca Schmill Foundation, recently developed a model bill for phone and social media free schools. I fully support House Bill 57 because it aligns with our model bill by prohibiting phones for the entire school day.

Studies have found that:

- 97% of students use phones during the school day for an average of 43 minutes.
- Those 43 minutes are spent on social media, YouTube and gaming.
- One third of teens report being exposed to pornography at school.
- 35% of teens admit to using their phone to cheat.
- 65% of students report being distracted by digital devices in class.
- And according to the Pew Research Center, 72% of U.S. high school teachers say cell phone distraction is a major problem in the classroom.

And that is backed by research. In 2017 the Brain Drain Study found that:

- The mere presence of a cell phone, even when it is silenced and stored out of sight, reduces cognitive capacity.
- Students performed best when the phone was in a separate room.
- They found this to be important when taking tests but even more crucial when learning something new.

The majority of teachers want phones out of the classroom as well. In 2024, the National Education Association conducted a poll that identified:

- 83% of the members support prohibiting cell phone and personal device use during the entire school day, from the first bell to the last bell.
- Over 90% of educators feel student's mental health is a serious issue at their school and a majority also say there has been a significant increase in concerns related to student mental health in the past few years.

And here's why:

- 95% of teenagers are on social media and 40% of 8-12 year olds are as well.
- On average teens spend nearly 5 hours per day on social media apps.
- According to the American Psychological Association, when teens spend more than 3 hours per day on social media, their risk of poor mental health DOUBLES. Meaning they are twice as likely to become depressed or anxious.

Even the US Surgeon General who issued an Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health has stated "Schools should ensure that classroom learning and social time are phone-free experiences."

House Bill 57 would do just that. Ensure students are free from distractions during class and during social times like lunch and passing periods.

However, we do suggest modifications to the proposed exceptions.

Phones can hinder crisis management, not help so we recommend removing the exception for students to use wireless telecommunication devices for emergency purposes. While it makes perfect emotional sense for parents to want to talk to their kids during an emergency, first responders and experts suggest that

- students should be focused on listening to instructions during emergencies, not calling or texting parents.
- Also, if in hiding the ding of a phone could alert an intruder to the student's location.
- In addition student/parent communication could cause an influx of parents to the school, which may interfere with evacuation efforts.
- Another concern is high call volumes can overwhelm the communication systems and potentially block phone lines.

The exception we feel is imperative to add to HB 57 is for students that have a documented medical or IEP need that requires the use of a personal device. An example of this would be a child with diabetes that uses a phone to track their insulin levels.

In addition it is optimal to require the phone to be stored off the person. It is nearly impossible for students to resist the addictive algorithms when the phone is in their pocket or backpack.

Lastly we suggest adding a provision to prohibit students from accessing social media during the school day as well restricting schools from communicating with students via social media. Given the risks social media poses to our youth, parents should have the choice for their students to NOT be on social media platforms. Many parents have tried to keep their kids off of social media, only to be frustrated by school communications requiring them to use those very platforms. Parents deserve a true choice and adding that provision, which we have language for in the model legislation, would make the overall bill stronger.

In closing, I want to thank Representative Fields and the legislators behind HB 57 for their important efforts in this area. I fully support this bill and would be glad to know how we can further aid legislators in crafting the best legislation possible.

From: [Beth Gambrell](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB 57
Date: Thursday, February 6, 2025 2:19:54 PM

To the Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature;

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

As an educator I cannot express enough the need to ban cell phones, and iWatches, in schools. From the damage to school bathrooms and buildings, that is learned, and shared via Tik Tok, to the interference of student learning by being distracted by phones in classrooms, it is out of hand. Not to mention the myriad of students who set their phones timers to play loud music at various times of the day. The in-school bullying via text, as well as taking and distributing child pornography, in school!

Our school's policy is for phones to be up and away all day, and these problems persist despite this school policy. If this wasn't bad enough, some parents encourage children to use their phones during the day and call their students' cell phones during the school day. Students can always use the phone in classrooms, and in the office to contact parents, and parents can always call the office to leave a message for their child. Every teacher and front office staff can access the students' parents telephone numbers. It's astounding the number of middle school students who don't know their parents phone numbers and their own address.

Some parents want their child to have access to their phones if there is a school shooting. This is the absolute worst position to put a child in during an emergent situation. Instead of students hiding and remaining quiet, phones will be ringing in their pockets allowing their whereabouts to be made known in such an unlikely event. Parents will be trying to talk to their children who should remain quiet. Children who would normally remain calm (from experienced teachers and great training) will become upset by well-meaning parents who don't know how a dangerous situation can become worse with distracted children.

Students also use phones as status symbols making many students feel unworthy because they don't have the latest model or a phone at all.

Nothing good can come from any student with a phone in their possession during school hours. And also include iWatches in this ban. Photos, recordings, bullying, and cheating can also occur with an iWatch and many of my 6th graders have iWatches on in class.

Thank you for your help keeping all children safe in school.

Very respectfully,

Beth Gambrell

[REDACTED]
Fairbanks, AK [REDACTED]

Mrs. Beth Gambrell, M.Ed.
6th Grade English Language Arts (ELA)
CTE: Career Exploration

Tanana Middle School

[REDACTED]
[Attendance Policy](#)
[Parent Square Instructions](#)
[PowerSchool Instructions](#)

*“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel.”
- Maya Angelou*

From: [Sy Rich](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Cell Phones for Students
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 3:58:55 PM

Dear House Labor and Commerce Committees:

I started as a superintendent in the mid 1960s before cell phones.

For Student Safety we fought to get radios on school busses and telephone lines to all

families rural and in the towns across rural ranch and reservation residences in the 60's. We never know

When we can be faced with life saving situations during student, transportation, in schools and especially

On activity trips. Cell phones in a Childs pocket made all of this a much easier safety feature for

Our children both as individuals and groups traveling in the most remote regions of this our most remote state.

The State of Alaska can not assure us that our schools and public safety offices of out students

Safety at all times from an act of nature (fire, flood, storm, bus wreck and etc) and acts of crazed individuals against our most vulnerable citizens our students.

A blanket policy of this nature would endanger students you hope to protect. It would be far better to establish at each districts

Choice a class to train student in the proper use of cell phones in an emergency and not allow there use in classrooms other than for

Eudcational or emergency use. Students can be sneaky about cell phone use as they are usually better at using technology than adults including

Legislators and governors. I would bet on the students.

It would make far better sense to have a policy that all students 3rd grade and above have a cell phone they know how to use in

An emergency and teach them to use them when needed for an emergency and at no other time if it becomes an issue.

Your blanket policy is dangerous and could very well cost far more lives that it would save. They should not be used while a class is in session and

A teacher is present and conducting instruction. Unless you can predict the next

School shooter. What universal policy do you recommend for that situation — that they hide under their desk or in a closet. Or jump out a window and call a parent or

an officer.

And Legislator I would bet that you could not administer the policy in any school with 10 year olds and older. They just turn the buzzer on and the sound off And text away unless you have a really good teacher in that classroom.

What a wonderful tool for a principal to have in an emergency where that principal could have a message to every student, parent and teacher in an emergency situation.

Learn how to use this technology better do not condemn it!!!!

Or Just have every legislator check their phone at the door when they come into the senate and house chambers!!!

Sincerely. Spike

Dr. Spike Jorgensen
Mile 1313.5 Ak Hwy #132
Tok, Alaska 99780
907-322-7004

From: [Rebecca Vano](#)
To: [Rep. Zack Fields](#)
Subject: HB 57
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 9:30:19 AM

Dear Representative Fields,

As someone who has been a teacher at Bartlett High School for 23 years, and as a parent, I want to thank you and express support for HB 57. At the high school level, it is a continual battle, and having legislation supporting our efforts is a step in the right direction. We still have to contend with enforcement, but having state law on our side will make a difference. I appreciate your ongoing support of public education, not just in this bill, but consistently throughout your time in office.

Rebecca Vano

From: [Elizabeth Earl](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Public comment on HB 57
Date: Friday, January 31, 2025 7:49:48 AM

To the House Labor and Commerce Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Chilson, and I am a high school teacher in Kenai. I support the passage of HB 57, requiring districts to ban cell phone usage during school hours. However, it will require some amendments for practical implementation across the state, especially in high schools.

As you are all aware, educators are struggling with cell phone use. It is distracting, harmful, and ubiquitous. At the high school level, where I teach, it takes away from both student focus and educator time. Teachers have been left to enforce their own policies, which is exhausting and often a fight, and students do not see it uniformly enforced by districts, teachers, or administrative staff. Having a requirement across the state would reduce burden on teachers, as would make expectations uniform and more of a social norm than a single teacher "being old-school."

However, I am concerned about the effect on high schoolers if cell phones are completely banned during lunch time. Many high schoolers have jobs or other responsibilities, including sibling pickup or coordinating about transportation. While they can use the district phones or try to coordinate ahead of time, that could create a bottleneck and additional stress for office staff as well as frustration for students. I would encourage to keep it an all-day ban for elementary and middle school students, as those years are critical to social and educational development, and additional responsibilities like work and childcare are less common.

I would encourage you to amend the bill to extend a small concession to high schoolers, allowing them to use cell phones during their lunch periods. They would benefit from no cell phones during class or passing periods, and I believe most teachers would appreciate the change.

The other piece I would encourage you to clarify in the bill is that districts must establish a disciplinary procedure for violations. Cell phone use at inappropriate times is the social norm now, even among adults-- I am concerned that even if districts set up this policy, it will not be enforced, and therefore will not be taken seriously. While I understand cell phones may be used for standing procedures like turning in digital assignments and playing review games, that is a small pro against a long, long list of academic and social cons. As a teacher, I will gladly do without cell phones and find other ways to assign things if I can avoid the manifold problems they present.

Thank you for your time and work, and thanks to Rep. Zack Fields' office for tackling this major issue in education.

Elizabeth Chilson
Kenai

From: [Kathi Kuhns](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB57
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 10:02:25 AM

Dear Committee Members,

I want to voice my strong support for the above mentioned bill to keep cell phones out of public schools! Personally, I think they should be banned the whole school day, but certainly at least during class! There are other avenues for parents and students to communicate when necessary, and phone should have no place in student to student communication during the school day!

I also think there should be significant penalties/deterrents which would help the students to police themselves.

Thank you for your diligence on honing this bill!

Kathi Kuhns, Fairbanks

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: [Marianne and Mike Post](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Vote in favor of HB57
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 10:09:20 AM

To Whom it may concern,

I am emailing you to show my support of HB57 and in favor of banning cell phones in schools. As a mother of 5 I have not seen any positive effects in kids having access to phones throughout the entire day, especially during school hours. Common sense tells us it has no place in schools as it takes the focus away from learning and is very distractive, as well as addictive.

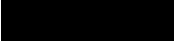
Please support families by passing this measure.

Thank you,

Marianne Post

From: [mel.C](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: No phones in school
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 10:22:19 AM

Common sense tells us how distracting cell phones are. please consider having rules to implement a No cell phone in school policy.

Thank you. Lisa wharton 

From: [Dawn Ernst](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Getting phones out of school...simple & free change
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 10:24:33 AM

Please take the bold move to remove student cell phones from K-12 public schools.

Cell phones are causing so many social and academic problems for kids. Please make Alaskan schools better with this **simple, free change** — cell phones should be “checked at the door” when Alaskan kids enter school each day, K-12. There is little if any beneficial to students in having a cell phone during school hours or between classes when students are already struggling to learn what they should.

Teachers then will have more of the students’ attention. There will be less real-time “drama” flowing in the kids’ minds underneath the effort to educate them. Time outside of class will be spent actually conversing, rather than using their thumbs.

Our kids in Alaska need to live in the real world, not vicariously living through other people on the internet, not getting sucked in to and/or damaged by the “mean culture” of kids who have nobody watching what they text. What they do at home is not your concern; but what they do in school IS.

Please make this happen — it’s common sense now that we’ve seen the problems cell phones in school cause.*

Thank you.

Dawn Ernst



**"Smartphones in schools are increasingly wreaking havoc on both the academic and social development of America's children. They are distracting students from learning, inhibiting students from healthy socializing, and causing student discipline issues in class and on campus. Teachers are frustrated, students are suffering, and parents feel like they're fighting an uphill battle against technology and peer pressure."*

From [Getting Phones Out Of Schools Policy Memo](#) Ethics and Public Policy Center

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From [Getting Phones Out Of Schools Policy Memo](#) Ethics and Public Policy Center

From: [Prairie Daugherty](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: PLEASE SUPPORT HB57 TO GET CELL PHONES OUT OF SCHOOLS
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 10:42:57 AM

Please vote YES on HB57 to get the DISTRACTIONS of CELL PHONES out of our classrooms and support us helping students LEARN. As a TEACHER I have a front row seat to the massive distraction cell phones in schools are to students. I could write hundreds of pages of testimony about the hindrance to teaching and learning they are in the classroom. Please help our society create an environment for learning again for our public schools by supporting HB57.

--

Prairie Daugherty
singerscompany.com
<http://eagleriver.singerscompany.com>



From: drawna714@gmail.com
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB57
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 11:48:08 AM

To the Committee,

As a parent to school aged children in the FNSB School District, I fully support banning cell phones from schools. It is absolutely correct that they only act as a distraction and take from the learning experience that is so important for school aged children to develop mentally into successful adults. I think the education stats clearly show the correlation between the rise in cellphone usage among kids/teens and the decline in math/reading abilities of today's youth. Obviously, there is more at play than just cell phones in the hands of children and teens, but it certainly isn't helping the matter. Please consider passing this bill as it is essential for the future of our children in the education system.

Amanda Ward
North Pole, AK


From: drawna714@gmail.com
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB57
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 11:48:08 AM

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Amanda Ward
North Pole, AK


From: [Audrey Mauer](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: In Support of HB57
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 7:12:58 PM

Hello,
I live in the North Pole area in the Interior.

I am in support of banning cell phones in the classroom. They are a distraction to the student and teacher, and discourage person-to-person, face-to-face conversations and interactions.

Teachers have a hard enough time holding a classroom's attention.

Audrey Mauer

[REDACTED]
North Pole, AK [REDACTED]

From: [Audrey Mauer](#)
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Subject: In Support of HB57
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Audrey Mauer

[REDACTED]
North Pole, AK [REDACTED]

From: [Kathy Newman](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB57
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 9:07:51 AM

Dear Committee Members

Respectfully I request that you support HB57. Although cell phones can be used for learning, unless they are used for a specific project they are a huge distraction during school hours. Without them students will be more attentive in class and they will also be able to have actual conversations with others which is a much more real connection than texting. Learning outcomes will be much better if this bill is passed. That is something that should be important to all Alaskans.

Sincerely,
Kathy Newman
Sitka

From: [Vickie Becker](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB57
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 10:31:38 AM

Please help pass this bill. This situation of cell phones In schools, was an obvious disaster before weak school districts allowed the entrance of cell phones. Now that it is a big problem, we have to deal with it. Let's get the children back on track with education they need and will need in their future. Communicating in person, face to face really needs to be a priority right now. Thank you for your help.

From: [James and Shannon Miller](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Support for HB57
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 10:54:57 AM

Please make a positive change for students' emotional, physical, and academic developmental health by keeping phones out of classrooms.

Shannon Miller

From: [Joe Krause](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB 57, Cell Phones...
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 12:48:22 PM

To Whom it Concerns:

I've spent over 30 years as a teacher and administrator across five states, with nearly 20 of those years in Alaska.

I strongly support this bill, and most educators I know feel the same. This issue is almost certain to stir strong emotions among students and parents, but having it as a formal policy would take the burden off teachers and principals. We can enforce it while pointing to state policy, reducing the perception that we're the "bad guys."

Joe Krause
[REDACTED]

"The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's "own," or "real" life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life." CS Lewis

From: [Jon and Ruth Ewig](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#); [Rep. Frank Tomaszewski](#); [Rep. Mike Prax](#); [Rep. Maxine Dibert](#); [Rep. Ashley Carrick](#); [Rep. Rebecca Schwanke](#); [Rep. Kevin McCabe](#); [Rep. Will Stapp](#); [Jon and Ruth Ewig](#)
Subject: We support HB 57 removing cell phones from schools due to their addictive nature which "takes over," (reduce socialization) and are a distraction in school.
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 1:22:49 PM

From: Jon and Ruth Ewig

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]