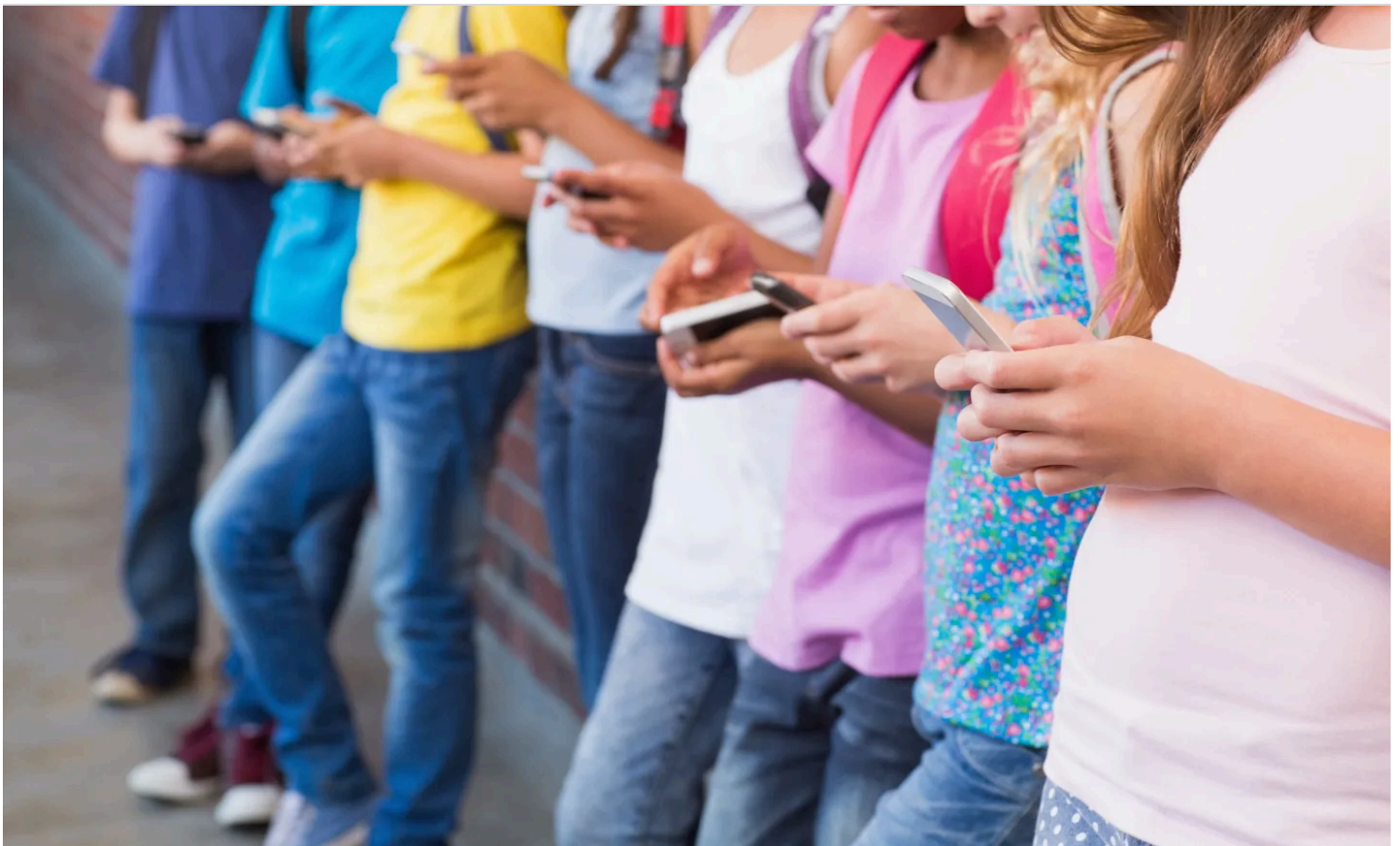


U.S. EDUCATION

U.S. States Across the Political Spectrum Are Enacting or Considering School Cellphone Bans

TIME

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BY **ANDREW DEMILLO / AP**

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Arkansas' Republican Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders and California's Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom have little in common ideologically, but the two have both been vocal supporters of an idea that's been rapidly gaining bipartisan ground in the states: Students' cellphones need to be banned during the school day.

At least eight states have enacted such bans over the past two years, and proposals are being considered in several more states this year.

Here is a look at the push by states for such bans.

Why are states banning cellphones at schools?

The push for cellphone bans has been driven by concerns about the impact screen time has on children's mental health and complaints from teachers that cellphones have become a constant distraction in the classroom.

Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, who has called on Congress to require warning labels on social media platforms about their effects on young people's lives, has said schools need to provide phone-free times.

Nationally, 77% of U.S. schools say they prohibit cellphones at school for non-academic use, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. But that number is misleading. It does not mean students are following those bans or all those schools are enforcing them.

Kim Whitman, co-founder of the Phone Free Schools Movement, said the issue is catching on because parents and teachers in both red and blue states are struggling with the consequences of kids on mobile devices.

"It doesn't matter if you live in a big city or a rural town, urban or suburban, all children are struggling and need that seven-hour break from the pressures of phones and social media during the school day," she said.

What states are enacting bans?

At least eight states—California, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, Ohio, South Carolina and Virginia—have enacted measures banning or restricting students’ use of cellphones in schools.

The policies range widely. Florida was the first state to crack down on phones in school, passing a 2023 law that requires all public schools to ban cellphone use during class time and block access to social media on district Wi-Fi.

A 2024 California law requires the state’s nearly 1,000 school districts to create their own cellphone policies by July 2026.

Several other states haven’t banned phones, but have encouraged school districts to enact such restrictions or have provided funding to store phones during the day.

Sanders announced a pilot program last year providing grants to schools that adopt phone-free policies, and more than 100 schools signed on. In her state of the state address this week, Sanders proposed an outright ban.

“We will ban cellphones in our schools, bell to bell, so that our kids are not distracted, in class or out of it,” Sanders said.

Other governors recently calling for bans include Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire, who was sworn in this month, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds and Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul has suggested she’ll seek a statewide policy, but has not offered specifics.

What is the opposition to the bans?

The cellphone bans have faced opposition from some parents who say they need to be able to contact their children directly in case of emergency.

Some parents have pointed to recent school shootings where having access to cellphones was the only way some students were able to communicate with

loved ones for what they thought might be the last time.

But supporters of the bans have noted that students' phones could pose additional dangers during an emergency by distracting students or by revealing their location during an active shooter situation.

Parents opposed to the ban have also said they want their children to have access to their phones for other needs, such as coordinating transportation.

Keri Rodrigues, president of the National Parents Union, said she agrees about the dangers of social media on children but that the bans sought by states are taking too broad of an approach. Banning the devices during the school day is not going to solve underlying issues like bullying or the dangers of social media, she said.

"We have not done our job as grown-ups to try to teach our kids the skills they need to actually navigate this technology," she said. "We've just kicked the can down the road and thrown them into the deep end of the pool when they're by themselves after school."

—Associated Press writers Hannah Fingerhut, Margery Beck, Holly Ramer and Anthony Izaguirre contributed to this report.

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