



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 classroomThese 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,

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

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; **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** ~~but~~ may ~~do so~~ **access their ECDs** 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

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