
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1644	Hearing Date:	July 1, 2026
Author:	Muratsuchi, et al.		
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Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Therresa Austin		

Subject: Pupils: use of smartphones: prohibition: report.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the governing board or body of a local educational agency (LEA) to adopt a policy to prohibit pupil smartphone use for pupils in transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 8, inclusive, and requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to conduct a statewide study and report on LEA smartphone policies.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Requires, no later than July 1, 2026, an LEA to adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use by its pupils of smartphones while the pupils are at a schoolsite or while the pupils are under the supervision and control of an employee or employees of that school district, county office of education (COE), or charter school. Requires this policy to be updated every 5 years. Requires a pupil to not be prohibited from possessing or using a smartphone under any of the following circumstances:
 - a) Unless explicitly addressed in a comprehensive school safety plan, in the case of an emergency, or in response to a perceived threat of danger;
 - b) When a teacher or administrator of the school district, COE, or charter school grants permission to a pupil to possess or use a smartphone, subject to any reasonable limitation imposed by that teacher or administrator;
 - c) When a licensed physician and surgeon determines that the possession or use of a smartphone is necessary for the health or well-being of the pupil; and
 - d) When the possession or use of a smartphone is required in a pupil's individualized education program (IEP). (Education Code (EC) § 48901.7)
- 2) Authorizes the governing board of each school district, or its designee, to regulate the possession or use of any electronic signaling device that operates through the transmission or receipt of radio waves, including, but not limited to, paging and signaling equipment, by pupils of the school district while the pupils

are on campus, while attending school-sponsored activities, or while under the supervision and control of school district employees. (EC § 48901.5)

- 3) Requires that no pupil may be prohibited from possessing or using an electronic signaling device that is determined by a licensed physician and surgeon to be essential for the health of the pupil and use of which is limited to purposes related to the health of the pupil. (EC § 48901.5)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

Smartphone use policy:

- 1) Recasts the existing requirement for the governing board of a school district, county board of education, or the governing body of a charter school to adopt and update its policy to prohibit or limit the use of smartphones, to require that the adopted policy apply only to pupils in any of grades 9 to 12, inclusive, commencing July 1, 2028.
- 2) Amends the existing requirement for the governing board of a school district, county board of education, or the governing body of a charter school to update its smartphone use policy every five years to instead require that it be updated at least every five years.
- 3) Strongly encourages governing boards and bodies, in the creating and updating of their smartphone use policies, to adopt a bell-to-bell ban on smartphones for all pupils, including the time from the start of the schoolday until final dismissal, including class, time between classes, lunch, and recess.
- 4) Requires governing board of a school district, county board of education, or the governing body of a charter school that serves pupils in transitional kindergarten (TK), kindergarten, or grades 1 to 8 inclusive, no later than July 1, 2028, to develop and adopt a policy that prohibits the use of smartphones by pupils in TK, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 8 inclusive, while those pupils are at a schoolsite or under the supervision and control of an employee or employees of that school district, COE, or charter school.
 - a) Specifies that the policy shall apply to time from the start of the schoolday until final dismissal, including class, time between class, lunch, and recess.
 - b) Requires that the goal of the policy be to create a bell-to-bell ban of smartphone use for those pupils to support pupil learning and well-being.
 - c) Authorizes the developed and adopted policies to include enforcement mechanisms that restrict access to smartphones.

- 5) Requires that the policy adopted or updated pursuant to #4 above includes at least one method for parents and guardians to contact their pupils while smartphones are prohibited during the school day. Authorizes such methods to include, but not be limited to, contacting the pupil through employees of the LEA.
- 6) Prohibits instruction provided to pupils in TK, kindergarten, and any of grades 1 to 8 inclusive from requiring the use of a smartphone by a pupil, commencing July 1, 2028.
- 7) Clarifies that the existing circumstances under which a pupil shall not be prohibited from possessing or using a smartphone include when the possession or use of a smartphone is required in a pupil's education plan developed pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (United States Code (USC) Title 29 § 794).
- 8) Requires that the smartphone use policy adopted or updated pursuant to this bill be included in the pupil handbook, if one is provided.

Report on smartphone use policies:

- 9) Requires the CDE to examine the adopted pupil smartphone policies of at least 30 selected LEAs that have provided consent to participate. Requires the CDE to ensure that selected LEAs are representative of the demographic and geographic diversity of the state, including but not limited to all of the following:
 - a) LEAs with schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings.
 - b) LEAs that are large- and small-sized school districts.
 - c) LEAs that are school districts or COEs with traditional public schools.
 - d) LEAs that are charter schools.
 - e) LEAs with schools that serve pupils in elementary, middle, and high schools.
- 10) Requires the CDE to survey each selected LEA and obtain the following information related to the LEA's pupil smartphone policy:
 - a) The way that stakeholder input occurred when the LEAs developed or updated the policy.
 - b) The enforcement methods that the policy includes and the effectiveness of those methods.
 - c) Initial challenges or successes that have arisen since the policy was enacted.
- 11) Requires the CDE to consult with relevant stakeholder groups of the selected LEAs, including, but not limited to, the following:

- a) Currently credentialed public school teachers and classified staff.
 - b) School district, COE, or schoolsite administrators.
 - c) Pupils enrolled in the LEA.
 - d) Parents or guardians of students enrolled in the LEA.
- 12) Requires CDE, on or before January 1, 2029, to submit to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature, and post on their website, a report with all of the following information:
- a) A description of the pupil smartphone use policies of selected LEAs, including a copy of each LEA's policy language where possible.
 - b) The results of the surveys conducted pursuant to #10 above.
 - c) The CDE's recommended best practices for future LEA pupil smartphone use policies.
- 13) Authorizes the CDE, in preparing its report, to collaborate with organizations that have relevant expertise, including but not limited to, survey design, data collection and analysis, and educational or technology policies.
- 14) Defines "local educational agency" as a school district, COE, or charter school.
- 15) Sunsets the provisions of this bill pertaining to the CDE examination and report on January 1, 2033.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, "AB 1644 is a bipartisan bill to enact a school bell-to-bell smartphone ban for California schools. Research clearly shows that excessive smartphone use leads to negative academic and mental health outcomes, including reduced focus, increased depression and anxiety, and lower overall social and emotional well-being. Schools that have adopted bell-to-bell smartphone bans report improved academic outcomes, especially in disadvantaged communities, as well as a reduction in cyberbullying and other disciplinary problems."
- 2) ***Bell-to-bell smartphone use bans.*** This bill requires the governing board of an LEA that serves students in TK, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 8, inclusive, to adopt a policy that prohibits the use of smartphones by students in those grade levels while they are at a schoolsite or under the supervision or control of an LEA employee. The bill also specifies that this prohibition must apply to the start of the schoolday until final dismissal, including class, time between classes, lunch, and recess—aligning with the bill's stated goal of a "bell-to-bell ban."

In recent years, 35 states have enacted legislation or policies to limit or outright ban the use of smartphones or cellphones during school hours, with some variations based on what grade spans or applicable time periods. For instance:

Florida: In May 2023, the Florida State Legislature passed HB 379—the nation’s first statewide student cell phone or wireless communications device ban. The law prohibits students from using a wireless communications device during instructional time, except when expressly directed by a teacher solely for educational purposes. It also required district school boards to adopt rules governing the use of a wireless communications device by a student while the student is on school property or in attendance at a school function.

Alaska: In March 2025, the Alaska State Legislature passed HB 57, requiring school districts to establish a policy that regulates the possession and use of non-school-issued wireless telecommunications devices during regular school hours, including lunch and passing periods.

Hawaii: In February 2026, the Hawaii State Department of Education adopted a policy prohibiting elementary and middle school students from using their cellphones during the school day. For high school students, the prohibition policy applies to cellphone use during instructional time but allows schools to exercise discretion regarding the use of cell phones outside of instructional time, including before and after school hours, designated breaks, recesses, lunch, and free periods.

In February 2025, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the United States Department of Education reported that 77% US public schools surveyed as part of the School Pulse Panel (SPP) had policies prohibiting students from using cell phones during any class, with a higher percentage of elementary schools (86%) implementing such a policy compared to high/secondary schools (55%).

- 3) ***California’s student smartphone use policies.*** In 2019, California authorized the governing boards of LEAs to adopt policies to limit or prohibit student use of smartphones while a student is on a schoolsite or is under the supervision of an LEA employee (AB 272 (Muratsuchi, Chapter 42, Statutes of 2019)). In 2024, that authorization became a requirement, thus requiring LEAs, to develop and adopt a smartphone use policy by July 1, 2026, and update that policy every five years thereafter (AB 3216 (Hoover; Chapter 500, Statutes of 2024)). In accordance with the statute, LEAs solicited significant stakeholder engagement in the years that followed to ensure that the adopted policies were responsive to the unique needs and desires of students, parents, and educators in each community. The adopted smartphone use policies ranged from limiting student smartphone use during instructional time, depending on grade level, to policies that ostensibly served as bell-to-bell bans.

This bill would maintain the applicability of these adopted policies for students in grades 9 through 12, inclusive, but would require the governing boards and

bodies of LEAs to adopt a separate policy that explicitly prohibits smartphone use for students in TK, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 8, inclusive.

The Committee may wish to consider whether establishing an outright “bell-to-bell ban” for students in kindergarten and grades 1 through 8 after an extensive stakeholder engagement process that allowed schools to set a policy that worked best for their community may lead the public to perceive an LEA’s or the state’s view of community input as a perfunctory exercise rather than a substantive action.

- 4) **Arguments in support.** In a letter of support submitted to this Committee, Common Sense Media notes the following:

“A growing body of research shows that unrestricted smartphone access undermines academic engagement, increases anxiety, and fuels cyberbullying and social comparison. New national data reinforces these findings. Recent educator surveys on school phone policies, researchers have found that as bell-to-bell bans expand, educators are seeing meaningful improvements in student behavior and social interaction. Bell-to-bell policies are rapidly becoming the national norm, rising from 60% to 74% of schools in just one year—one of the fastest shifts in school policy nationwide [...]

“California’s educators and families deserve a clear, statewide framework that supports learning and well-being. AB 1644 delivers that clarity while aligning the state with national best practices and emerging research.”

- 5) **Arguments in opposition.** In a letter of opposition submitted to this Committee, the California School Boards Association notes the following:

“Although we appreciate and understand the intent behind this effort, this bill effectively eliminates local control and the ability of local school district and county boards of education to determine the best policy that meets the needs of their students, their families and the greater school community. These decisions are best made at the local level by people who understand, reside, are invested in, and accountable to the communities they serve. This legislation is counter to the precepts of local control by taking the decision-making process out of the hands of duly elected local governing boards.”

- 6) **Prior and related legislation.**

SB 1128 (Stern, 2026) prohibits LEAs from requiring a pupil in kindergarten to take home a school issued electronic device. The bill also requires the CDE to develop and post on its internet website, model policies for the age-appropriate use of school-issued electronic devices in schools, as specified. *SB 1128 is pending a hearing in the Assembly Education Committee.*

AB 3216 (Hoover, Chapter 500, Statutes of 2024) requires the governing body of a school district, COE, or a charter school to adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use by its pupils of smartphones, except in specified circumstances.

AB 272 (Muratsuchi, Chapter 42, Statutes of 2019) provides that a student shall not be prohibited from possessing or using a smartphone under specified circumstances, and authorizes governing bodies to adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use of smartphones by students while at school.

SB 1253 (Figueroa, Chapter 253, Statutes of 2002) allows school district governing boards to regulate the possession and use of electronic signaling devices (cell phones, pagers, etc.) by pupils while on campus or attending school functions.

SUPPORT

Bright Light Strategies
CFT – A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
Common Sense Media
Distraction-Free Schools California
End Chronic Disease
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OPPOSITION

California School Boards Association

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