
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1644 (Muratsuchi) - Pupils: use of smartphones: prohibition: report

Version: June 22, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: ED. 5 - 0

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill Summary: This bill requires the governing board or body of a local educational agency (LEA) to adopt a policy that prohibits the use of smartphones for students in transitional kindergarten (TK) through grade 8, inclusive.

Fiscal Impact:

- The California Department of Education (CDE) estimates General Fund costs of \$141,000 and .75 of a position to comply with the bill's requirements. There could be additional one-time General Fund costs ranging from \$25,000 to \$50,000 to procure survey technology and conduct data management activities on the information received from LEAs regarding their cell phone policies.
- This bill could result in one-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for LEAs to adopt or update their smartphone policies and issue guidance to parents, including enforcement mechanisms that restrict access to smartphones. There may be additional ongoing costs for LEAs depending on the enforcement mechanisms that are adopted.

Background: Existing law 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 school site 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. The law requires this policy to be updated every 5 years and for pupils to not be prohibited from possessing or using a smartphone under any of the following circumstances:

1. Unless explicitly addressed in a comprehensive school safety plan, in the case of an emergency, or in response to a perceived threat of danger;
2. 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;
3. 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
4. When the possession or use of a smartphone is required in a pupil's individualized education program.

Existing law 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.

Existing law 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.

Proposed Law: This bill 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. The bill also 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.

This bill 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.

This bill requires the 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.

This bill 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, and 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. The bill authorizes the developed and adopted policies to include enforcement mechanisms that restrict access to smartphones.

This bill requires that the policy include at least one method for parents and guardians to contact their pupils while smartphones are prohibited during the school day. It authorizes such methods to include, but not be limited to, contacting the pupil through employees of the LEA.

This bill 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. The bill also 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).

This bill requires that the smartphone use policy adopted or updated pursuant to this bill be included in the pupil handbook, if one is provided.

This bill requires the CDE to examine the adopted pupil smartphone policies of at least 30 selected LEAs that have provided consent to participate. It requires the CDE to ensure that selected LEAs are representative of the demographic and geographic diversity of the state, including but not limited to the following:

1. LEAs with schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings.
2. LEAs that are large- and small-sized school districts.
3. LEAs that are school districts or COEs with traditional public schools.
4. LEAs that are charter schools.
5. LEAs with schools that serve pupils in elementary, middle, and high schools.

This bill requires the CDE to survey each selected LEA and obtain the following information related to the LEA's pupil smartphone policy: the way that stakeholder input occurred when the LEAs developed or updated the policy; the enforcement methods that the policy includes and the effectiveness of those methods; and initial challenges or successes that have arisen since the policy was enacted. The bill also requires the CDE to consult with relevant stakeholder groups of the selected LEAs, as specified.

This bill 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 description of the pupil smartphone use policies of selected LEAs, including a copy of each LEA's policy language where possible; the results of the surveys; and CDE's recommended best practices for future LEA pupil smartphone use policies.

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 in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 3216 (Hoover), Chapter 500, Statutes of 2024, requires, by July 1, 2026, an LEA governing board or body to adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use of smartphones by its students while students are at school or under the supervision of the school, with certain exceptions.

Staff Comments: Existing law requires LEAs 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. This bill recasts that requirement to provide that the adopted policy shall apply only to pupils in any of grades 9 to 12,

inclusive, commencing July 1, 2028. Further, this bill requires LEAs to adopt a policy that prohibits the use of smartphones for students in transitional kindergarten (TK) through grade 8, inclusive. 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.”

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