

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 962 (Hoover)

As Amended September 4, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes a prohibition on smartphone use of a student in the case of emergency or in response to a perceived threat of danger, if that circumstance is explicitly addressed in a comprehensive school safety plan.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Specify that a pupil may not be prohibited from possessing or using a smartphone in the case of an emergency or in response to a perceived threat of danger, unless it is explicitly addressed in a school's comprehensive school safety plan.
- 2) Other technical changes related to the appropriate governance bodies of local educational agencies.

COMMENTS

Smartphones and emergencies. School safety experts suggest that students use of cell phones can impact school safety in a number of ways. Potential positive impacts may include the following:

- 1) During a crisis, cell phones allow students to notify their parents that they're safe and keep family members updated on the situation;
- 2) Allows students to clarify to their parents any rumors that may be circulating on social media;
- 3) Allows emergency responders to send directions to the students; and
- 4) Students can stay updated on the situation through news outlets, as they may otherwise not have access to such information.

There are also potential negative consequences of students having access to smartphones during an emergency, including:

- 1) Student use of cell phones during an unfolding emergency can distract their attention from safety and emergency response directions being given by school staff;
- 2) Cell phone use by students can hamper rumor control and, in doing so, disrupt and delay effective public safety personnel response;
- 3) A ringing or vibrating cell phone can reveal to a shooter where hiding places are; and
- 4) Cell phone use by students can impede public safety response by accelerating parental and community arrival at the scene of an emergency during times when officials may be attempting to evacuate students to another site.

In addition, it is possible that hundreds or thousands of students and others rushing to use their cell phones in a crisis could potentially overload cell phone systems in some areas and thus hamper first responders' lines of communication. Therefore the use of cell phones by students and others in the immediate school community could potentially decrease, not increase, school safety during a crisis.

According to the Author

"AB 3216 was signed into law in 2024 requiring all schools to adopt a student smartphone policy limiting their use during the school day by July 2026. With this forthcoming requirement, there is anticipated confusion in regards to any potential conflicts between student smartphone policies and school safety plans when responding to an emergency. AB 962 would provide that unless a school's comprehensive safety plan includes language that addresses student smartphone use during a school emergency, the student smartphone access requirements set by law in 2024 must apply. Eliminating this confusion will ensure smooth coordination amongst emergency responders (police, fire, EMTs) and school officials, and further protect the collective safety of students, teachers, and administrators."

Arguments in Support

The Association of California School Administrators writes, "Under current law, all schools serving K-12 students are required annually to adopt a Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) to address campus risks, such as natural and man-made disasters, to prepare for emergencies, and to create a safe, secure learning environment for students and school personnel. The CSSP, developed in collaboration with school communities and emergency responders, often includes policy limiting student smartphone use during emergencies unless at the direction of school personnel. This is for several reasons including mitigating the spread of misinformation as well as protecting against location sharing that could inadvertently increase the risk for a student and those around them.

AB 962 is proactively helping LEAs avoid confusion that may arise with the annual CSSP adoption process and July 1, 2026, deadline to enact a student smartphone limitation policy (pursuant to Education Code Section 48901.7). This is because current law related to student smartphone use policies provides some exceptions to restricting smartphone use, including in the case of an emergency, or in response to a threat of danger. Our members have expressed concerns about potential inconsistencies with their CSSP and we believe addressing the issue now will help ensure a more seamless policy adoption and revision process.

To be clear, AB 962 does not seek to create additional content for the CSSP, nor mandate smartphone restrictions in emergencies. Rather, the measure seeks to limit confusion by stating that a CSSP may address smartphone use in an emergency as a permitted exception to mandatory access requirements."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

The Office of Legislative Counsel has keyed this bill as non-fiscal.

VOTES:

ASM EDUCATION: 9-0-0

YES: Muratsuchi, Hoover, Addis, Alvarez, Bonta, Castillo, Garcia, Lowenthal, Patel

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 75-0-4

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Chen, Gallagher, Harabedian, Lackey

UPDATED

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