

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 79 (Senator Benson)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements

This bill requires each local board of education to develop and adopt a policy prohibiting or limiting the use of personal electronic devices, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, smartwatches, or smartglasses, during school hours. The policy must include a prohibition for middle and elementary school students and a limitation for high school students on the use of a personal electronic device during school hours. The policy may not prohibit a student from using a personal electronic device in specified situations. A policy developed in accordance with the bill must be published on the website of each local board of education and in each public school student handbook. Every two years, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must review policies developed in accordance with the bill for elementary and middle school students and local boards of education must review such policies for high school students. Each local board of education must also establish policies and procedures for enforcement, such as appropriate disciplinary measures for violations, including in-school suspension. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE can review local board policies as specified with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local boards of education can develop, adopt, publish and regularly review electronic device use policies as specified with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A personal electronic device policy developed in accordance with the bill may not prohibit a student from using a personal electronic device (1) for any purpose documented in the student's individualized education program or section 504 plan; (2) to monitor or address a student's documented health issue; or (3) when directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes.

Current Law: Most local school systems have policies governing the use of cell phones in schools or on school grounds, which are aligned with local codes of discipline. Policies vary across school systems and schools and typically cover definitions, guidelines, compliance procedures, and consequences for violations. They also generally cover procedures for notifying parents and staff, and the responsibilities of school administrators and may provide differing levels of flexibility for elementary, middle, and high school students.

MSDE and the State Board of Education convened the Task Force on Student Cell Phone Use in Schools in spring 2025 to review policies across the State on allowable student use of cell phones in schools and develop guidance and recommendations. In August 2025, the State Board passed a [resolution](#) reinforcing the recommendations from the task force's [guidance document](#) and encouraging local school systems to regularly revisit and assess their current policy to ensure it satisfies community needs and aligns with task force recommendations; and requesting that school systems clearly define expectations for their student cell phone use policies.

Additionally, MSDE advises that the agency has partnered with Phones in Focus, a national research study that gathers educators' input on school cell phone policies, with a goal of developing evidence-based recommendations for policies that support academic learning, social well-being and student focus.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 147 of 2025.

Designated Cross File: HB 163 (Delegate Wu, *et al.*) - Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Maryland Center for School Safety; Maryland State Department of Education; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Baltimore City Public Schools; Frederick County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Prince George's

County Public Schools; Wicomico County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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