

REQUIRE SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE POLICY

Phone: (517) 373-8080
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House Bill 4141 (H-2) as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. Mark A. Tisdell

Committee: Education and Workforce

Complete to 6-5-25

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

House Bill 4141 would amend the Revised School Code to require the board of a school district or the board of a public school academy (PSA, also commonly referred to as a charter school) to implement a *wireless communications device* policy that governs device use on *school grounds*.

Wireless communications device would mean an electronic device capable of text messaging, voice communication, entertainment, navigation, accessing the internet, sending and receiving photos and videos, or producing email. A *basic telephone* would not be considered a wireless communications device.

Basic telephone would mean a device primarily used for voice calling that cannot support third-party applications, except those preinstalled, and does not support access to internet platforms via applications or web browsers.

School grounds would mean a building, playing field, or property used for functions and events sponsored by a school, but would not include a building used primarily for adult education or college extension courses.

For students enrolled in elementary or middle school, the policy would have to prohibit use of a wireless communications device on school grounds during all of the following:

- Instructional time.
- Breaks between instructional time.
- Lunch.
- Recess.

For students enrolled in high school, the policy would have to prohibit use of a wireless communications device during instructional time.

A school that enrolls students from multiple elementary, middle, and high school grades would meet the bill's requirements by implementing a policy that prohibits use on school grounds during instructional time. In addition to the above required limitations, boards could implement additional restrictions regarding the use of a wireless communications device.

The bill would require the following exemptions as part of a wireless communications device policy:

- Medically necessary devices.

- District-owned devices, such as school-issued tablets and laptops.
- Devices designated by the district to be used for instructional purposes.
- Devices used for special education programming or provided as an accommodation to students as required under section 504 of Title V of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 794).
- Lesson-specific academic assignments, at the limited and direct discretion of a classroom teacher.

Finally, the bill would repeal section 1303 of the Revised School Code, which allows the board of a school district or PSA to adopt and implement its own local policy concerning whether a student can carry a pocket pager, electronic communication device, or other personal communication device in school.

Proposed MCL 380.1303a and repealed MCL 380.1303

BACKGROUND:

In 2023, Florida became the first state to ban the use of cell phones during instructional time in schools. As of January 2025, eight other states have joined Florida in passing a statewide ban or restriction.¹ Implemented bans vary in type, with some states prohibiting cell phone use during certain times of the school day, and others requiring that schools have a policy regulating cell phone use by students. In Michigan, schools are allowed to set their own policies governing the student use of mobile devices, including cell phones.

During testimony taken in committee, representatives of both public and private schools testified to the policies they presently use regarding cell phones. Some schools require students to check their devices in at the start of the school day before picking them up after school has concluded, while others allow phones to be used during passing periods only, with phones being placed into pouches or boxes in each classroom that are unlocked once the class ends.

While eliminating the distraction that can be caused by phone usage is cited as an immediate benefit of phone bans, some also believe that excessive cell phone use, especially by students in elementary and middle school, adversely impacts students developmentally and leads to an inability to focus on lessons and schoolwork. Additionally, the ease of access to social media and messaging applications can facilitate bullying and harassment, as derogatory comments and memes can be created and spread through the student body during the school day and significantly impact the mental health of students who are the subject of these ill-intentioned activities.

According to a recent survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 53% of school leaders surveyed reported “negative impacts of cell phone use on academic performance” with 72% reporting that, overall, cell phones have had a negative impact on their students’ mental health.²

¹ Andrew Demillo, “Banning cellphones in schools gains popularity in red and blue states,” Associated Press, April 24, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/school-cell-phone-bans-states-e6d1fe8ddfde33f086d5cd2a19f4c148>.

² “More than Half of Public School Leaders Say Cell Phones Hurt Academic Performance,” NCES, April 24, 2025, https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/2_19_2025.asp.

BRIEF DISCUSSION:

Supporters of the bill say that cell phone use creates distractions from learning, both for the user and for other students who are focusing on the content being shared to their device. Additionally, the role that mobile devices play in facilitating bullying can lead to further detrimental behaviors during school that then continue

Supporters also argue that having a state mandate will make enforcement of local cell phone bans more effective, as school leaders are able to set policies that facilitate a state law more efficiently than having to convince parents and students of the need for a ban and then getting buy-in from their community to the local prohibition.

There are two main arguments that have been made against the bill. First, school boards oppose the loss of local autonomy in their oversight and decision-making regarding schools in their district. By requiring a ban during certain times of day for high schoolers and a total ban for elementary students, there is no room for nuance in creating carveouts and exemptions for populations that may need devices in unique situations.

The second argument against the bill is that phones themselves can be positive tools in learning and creating educational experiences if students are taught how to responsibly use technology. The mental health and distraction issues in schools are caused by students not knowing how to responsibly use phones and mobile devices, and, by mandating a ban on their use, the bill would deprive educators and students of the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue and learning about phones and mobile applications.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state and could create costs for local school districts and public school academies. Districts and PSAs could incur costs to develop and implement cell phone policies, but these costs would likely be absorbed using existing staff time.

POSITIONS:

Representatives of the following entities testified in support of the bill (4-23-25):

- Avondale School District
- Northville Christian School
- Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals

The Michigan Association of School Social Workers indicated support for the bill. (4-23-25)

The following entities indicated a neutral position on the bill (5-14-25):

- Michigan Department of Education
- ACLU of Michigan

The Michigan Association of School Boards testified in opposition to the bill. (4-23-25)

The following entities indicated opposition to the bill (4-23-25):

- Detroit Public Schools Community District
- Michigan Association of Superintendents

Legislative Analyst: Josh Roesner
Fiscal Analysts: Jacqueline Mullen
Noel Benson

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.