



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

Cellphone Ban in PA Schools

Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director, PASA

Good morning Chairwoman Culver, Chairwoman Williams, and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Dr. Michael Vuckovich, Superintendent of the Windber Area School District and here today representing the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). Dr. Raymond Omer, Superintendent of the Reynolds School District and the West Middlesex School District joins us virtually today to share his district's story (Reynolds SD) on an implemented cellphone ban, requested by his students.

Thank you for convening this hearing and for inviting PASA to share the perspective of more than 1,100 members, including over 600 currently serving as school superintendents, assistant superintendents, and executive directors across the Commonwealth.

My testimony today aims to highlight the growing evidence and concerns of excessive cellphone use by students during the school instructional day. Concerns include the interference with learning, social development, and mental health. We agree that we must address these growing concerns to protect the integrity of the learning environment and student well-being.

At the same time, PASA urges the Senate to ensure that any statewide - policy preserves local flexibility—allowing school districts to tailor implementation based on their unique communities, resources, and student populations.

Local flexibility ensures that the intent of a cellphone restriction - reducing distraction and improving focus— can be achieved in ways that are practical and sustainable for each district.

A successful policy requires attention to practical and financial realities:

- Some districts use locking pouches like *Yondr*, which cost approximately \$20 per student annually.
- Others use classroom storage bins, secure lockers, or technology-based monitoring systems.
- Many lack the staff or facilities to collect and store thousands of phones each morning.

Without flexibility, a cellphone ban risks becoming an unfunded mandate that burdens staff and disrupts daily school operations. District leaders must retain discretion to choose methods that are feasible, cost-effective, and aligned in local capacity.

As school leaders, we understand that successful policies require community trust. Families, students, and teachers must feel that rules are reasonable and responsive to their realities.

Effective policies are rooted in community engagement and shared ownership. Local autonomy allows school leaders to:

- Partner with parents, teachers, and school boards to design policies that reflect community expectations.
- Phase in restrictions gradually, allowing time for communication and adjustment.
- Develop consistent, fair, and developmentally appropriate enforcement practices.

Policies created with our local community input are far more likely to be followed than those imposed upon them. Flexibility allows our school leaders to cultivate that buy-in, ensuring the policy's long-term success.

A uniform ban may unintentionally disadvantage certain students:

- Those who rely on translation apps, health monitoring, and/or accessibility tools on their phones.
- Students who need to contact parents about work schedules, transportation, and/or safety after school.
- Families without reliable home communication systems, particularly in rural areas.

District flexibility allows us to provide **clear, compassionate exemptions** that protect safety and accessibility while maintaining instructional focus.

While restricting phone use during instruction may be essential to improve focus and social connections, we must also teach responsible technology use. Many districts are experimenting with balanced approaches, such as allowing limited use in designated classes or during non-instructional times of the school day.

Flexibility allows schools to integrate digital citizenship and self-regulation education, ensuring that students not only learn *without* phones—but eventually learn *how to manage* them responsibly.

Flexibility should not mean the absence of accountability. The state can set clear expectations:

- Require every district to adopt a cellphone policy addressing instructional time use.
- Mandate annual public reporting on implementation and outcomes.
- Provide grants, professional development, or technical assistance for best practices.

This framework preserves local control while ensuring consistent statewide progress toward healthier, more focused learning environments.

Conclusion

A school-day cellphone ban can improve academic focus, reduce distractions, and support student well-being —particularly for students most affected by distraction—but it should be implemented with common-sense exceptions (e.g., health needs), clear enforcement, and paired with digital-literacy and mental-health initiatives to maximize impact.

As school leaders, we see daily how deeply technology affects our students’ attention, relationships, and well-being. It is time to reduce distractions during the school day for the welfare of our students.

However, the success of any statewide policy will depend on how it’s implemented at the local level. Districts must have the flexibility to choose the tools and strategies that make sense for their schools, families, and communities. A one-size-fits-all mandate risks unintended consequences; a flexible framework guided by shared goals ensures both effectiveness and fairness.

Thank you for your attention and your continued commitment to public education system. We would be happy to answer any questions.

Addendum A: Carlisle Area School District – Cellphone Ban Policy Story

Addendum B: Reynolds School District – Cellphone Ban Data and Policy (testifying at hearing)