

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20

H.54

Introduced by Representatives Arsenault of Williston, Birong of Vergennes,
Bishop of Colchester, Bluemle of Burlington, Boutin of Barre
City, Brady of Williston, Burditt of West Rutland, Burke of
Brattleboro, Burkhardt of South Burlington, Burt of Cabot,
Campbell of St. Johnsbury, Chapin of East Montpelier, Christie
of Hartford, Coffin of Cavendish, Demar of Enosburgh,
Dobrovich of Williamstown, Dodge of Essex, Duke of
Burlington, Galfetti of Barre Town, Goldman of Rockingham,
Goslant of Northfield, Graning of Jericho, Harrison of
Chittenden, Higley of Lowell, Hooper of Randolph, Hunter of
Manchester, Krasnow of South Burlington, Labor of Morgan,
Masland of Thetford, McCoy of Poultney, Minier of South
Burlington, Morrow of Weston, Mrowicki of Putney, Nigro of
Bennington, North of Ferrisburgh, Nugent of South Burlington,
Oliver of Sheldon, Pezzo of Colchester, Pouech of Hinesburg,
Priestley of Bradford, Pritchard of Pawlet, Rachelson of
Burlington, Satcowitz of Randolph, Stone of Burlington,
Surprenant of Barnard, Torre of Moretown, Waters Evans of
Charlotte, White of Waitsfield, and Winter of Ludlow

1 Referred to Committee on

2 Date:

3 Subject: Education; cell phone-free schools

4 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to prohibit the
5 use of cell phones and personal electronic devices during the school day in
6 public schools, independent schools, career and technical education centers,
7 and prequalified private prekindergarten programs, as well as to prohibit
8 schools from communicating with students through social media.

9 An act relating to cell phone-free schools

10 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

11 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

12 (a) Findings. The General Assembly finds that:

13 (1) The National Education Association reported in August 2024 that 83
14 percent of its members support a policy to prohibit use of cell phones and
15 personal electronic devices for the entire school day.

16 (2) In June 2024, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy called on
17 Congress to pass legislation requiring warning labels on social media because
18 these products have not been proven safe for children. He also called on
19 schools to “ensure that classroom learning and social time are phone-free
20 experiences.”

1 (3) Youth in Vermont are in a mental health crisis. According to the
2 2023 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 63 percent of high
3 school students said that their mental health was sometimes to always “not
4 good.” Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Vermont’s youth.

5 (4) The youth mental health crisis is driving up education costs in
6 Vermont. A 2024 Legislative Education Costs Survey conducted by the
7 Vermont Agency of Education found that the number of positions dedicated to
8 mental and behavioral health in the 48 responding supervisory unions and
9 districts was 142 in fiscal year 2022. By fiscal year 2025, that number had
10 risen to 790. Extrapolated to include the four remaining supervisory unions,
11 those positions account for close to \$53,000,000.00 of education spending.

12 (5) The Vermont YRBS also found that 80 percent of high school
13 students use social media several times a day, with 40 percent using social
14 media at least one time every hour. 60 percent of middle school students
15 reported using social media several times a day, with 32 percent using it at
16 least once per hour.

17 (6) Phone-free policies have been shown to reduce the incidence of
18 hazing, harassment, and bullying in some schools. Lamoille South
19 Supervisory Union instituted a phone-free school day policy in August 2024.
20 Data from one of the supervisory union’s high schools showed nine hazing,
21 harassment, and bullying claims from August to October 2023, before the

1 policy, and just two such claims during the same period in 2024, after the
2 policy was enacted.

3 (7) Use of social media by school employees runs the risk of violating
4 the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Given this risk, as well as the
5 growing body of research that shows social media is not safe for kids, schools
6 and students are best served by utilizing communication tools other than social
7 media.

8 (8) As of November 2024, eight states have passed laws that ban or
9 restrict cell phone use in schools.

10 (b) Intent. It is the intent of the General Assembly for all students in
11 Vermont to access the benefits of a phone- and social media-free school
12 environment, which promotes focus, improved mental health, and increased
13 social cohesion.

14 Sec. 2. 16 V.S.A. chapter 9, subchapter 7 is added to read:

15 Subchapter 7. Cell Phone and Personal Electronic Device Use in Schools

16 § 581. DEFINITIONS

17 As used in this subchapter:

18 (1) “Cell phone” means any device capable of using cellular technology
19 to facilitate voice service through a commercial telecommunications company,
20 regardless of whether the device can access internet services and electronic
21 mail.

1 (2) “Electronic device” means any device that:

2 (A) transmits sounds, images, texts, messages, videos, or electronic
3 information;

4 (B) electronically records, plays, or stores information; or

5 (C) accesses the internet or private communication or information
6 networks.

7 (3) “Parent” means a parent of a student and includes legal guardians
8 who are legally authorized to make education decisions for the student.

9 (4) “School” means any public school, independent school, career and
10 technical center, or prequalified private prekindergarten provider located in
11 Vermont.

12 (5) “Social media” means a website or internet medium that:

13 (A) permits a person to become a registered user, establish an
14 account, or create a profile for the purpose of allowing users to create, share,
15 and view user-generated content through such an account or profile;

16 (B) enables one or more users to generate content that can be viewed
17 by other users of the medium; and

18 (C) primarily serves as a medium for users to interact with content
19 generated by other users of the medium.

20 (6) “Student” means an individual currently enrolled or registered at a
21 school located in Vermont, as defined under subdivision (4) of this section.

1 § 582. PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

2 (a) Policy requirement. Each school board or governing body of an
3 independent school or prequalified private prekindergarten provider shall
4 develop, adopt, and ensure implementation of, and make available in the
5 manner described under subdivision 563(1) of this title, a policy to prohibit
6 student use of cell phones and personal electronic devices at school from
7 arrival to dismissal. The policy may prohibit a student from bringing a
8 personal electronic device to school, require personal electronic devices to be
9 placed in a designated area on school property, or allow for utilization of a
10 product that functions to secure the personal electronic device such as a device
11 locker or lockable pouch.

12 (b) Exceptions.

13 (1) The policy shall provide an exception for students to possess and use
14 a cell phone or personal electronic device if a licensed physician or licensed
15 advanced practice registered nurse determines such possession or use is
16 necessary for the health of the student. A school may require documentation to
17 support an exception under this subdivision.

18 (2) The policy shall also provide an exception for students to possess
19 and use a cell phone or personal electronic device if such possession or use is
20 required as part of a student's individualized education program or 504 plan,
21 which shall be documented according to applicable State and federal law.

1 § 583. PROHIBITION OF INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

2 PLATFORMS INTO EDUCATION

3 (a) Schools, school districts, and supervisory unions are prohibited from:

4 (1) utilizing social media for communication with students directly; and

5 (2) asking, requiring, or permitting students' use of social media for

6 school activities, out-of-school academic work, homework, school sports, or

7 extracurricular clubs and any other school-sponsored activities.

8 (b) Schools shall have in place measures to prevent students from accessing

9 social media while on school-issued electronic devices and while under the

10 supervision of the school.

11 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATES

12 (a) This section and Sec. 1 (findings) shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

13 (b) Sec. 2 (cell phone and personal electronic device use in schools) shall
14 take effect on December 1, 2025.