

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Education to which was referred House Bill No. 54
3 entitled “An act relating to cell phone-free schools” respectfully reports that it
4 has considered the same and recommends that the bill be amended by striking
5 out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

6 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

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

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

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

16 (3) Youth in Vermont are in a mental health crisis. According to the
17 2023 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 63 percent of high
18 school students said that their mental health was sometimes to always “not
19 good.” Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Vermont’s youth.

20 (4) The youth mental health crisis is driving up education costs in
21 Vermont. A 2024 Legislative Education Costs Survey conducted by the

1 Vermont Agency of Education found that the number of positions dedicated to
2 mental and behavioral health in the 48 responding supervisory unions and
3 districts was 142 in fiscal year 2022. By fiscal year 2025, that number had
4 risen to 790. Extrapolated to include the four remaining supervisory unions,
5 those positions account for close to \$53,000,000.00 of education spending.

6 (5) The Vermont YRBS also found that 80 percent of high school
7 students use social media several times a day, with 40 percent using social
8 media at least one time every hour. Sixty percent of middle school students
9 reported using social media several times a day, with 32 percent using it at
10 least once per hour.

11 (6) Phone-free policies have been shown to reduce the incidence of
12 hazing, harassment, and bullying in some schools. Lamoille South
13 Supervisory Union instituted a phone-free school day policy in August 2024.
14 Data from one of the supervisory union's high schools showed nine hazing,
15 harassment, and bullying claims from August to October 2023, before the
16 policy, and just two such claims during the same period in 2024, after the
17 policy was enacted.

18 (7) Use of social media by school employees runs the risk of violating
19 the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Given this risk, as well as the
20 growing body of research that shows social media is not safe for kids, schools

1 and students are best served by utilizing communication tools other than social
2 media.

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

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

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

10 Subchapter 7. Cell Phone and Social Media Use in Schools

11 § 581. DEFINITIONS

12 As used in this subchapter:

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

17 (2) “Individualized health care plan” means a written document
18 developed by a school nurse, in collaboration with parents, students, and other
19 relevant professionals, to outline specific health care needs and management
20 strategies tailored to the unique health condition of a student.

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

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

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

8 § 582. **STUDENT USE OF CELL PHONES IN SCHOOLS**

9 (a) Model policy.

10 (1) The Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Vermont School
11 Boards Association, shall develop and, from time to time, update a policy to
12 limit or prohibit the use of cell phones by students while on school property or
13 while students are under the supervision of an employee of the school district,
14 supervisory union, or approved independent school.

15 (2) The model policy shall provide exceptions for students to use a cell
16 phone if such possession or use is:

17 (A) required as part of a student’s individualized health care plan,
18 individualized education program, or 504 plan, which shall be documented
19 according to applicable State and federal law; or

20 (B) approved by an administrator for an academic purpose.

1 (3) The model policy may also include guidance or directives regarding
2 the use of personal electronic devices other than cell phones.

3 (b) Policy adoption.

4 (1) Beginning with the 2026–2027 school year, each school board shall
5 develop, adopt, ensure the enforcement of, and make available in the manner
6 described under subdivision 563(1) of this title a student cell phone use policy
7 that shall be at least as stringent as the model policy developed by the
8 Secretary. Any school board that fails to adopt one or more of these policies
9 shall be presumed to have adopted the most current model policy or policies
10 published by the Secretary.

11 (2) Approved independent school policy. Beginning with the 2026–
12 2027 school year, each approved independent school shall develop, adopt, and
13 ensure the enforcement of a student cell phone use policy that shall be at least
14 as stringent as the model policy developed by the Secretary. Any approved
15 independent school that fails to adopt one or more of these policies shall be
16 presumed to have adopted the most current model policy or policies published
17 by the Secretary.

18 § 583. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN EDUCATION

19 (a) Model policy.

20 (1) The Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Vermont School
21 Boards Association, shall develop and, from time to time, update a policy to

1 govern the use of social media within and by schools. The model policy shall
2 prohibit schools, school districts, and supervisory unions from:

3 (A) utilizing social media for communication with students directly
4 unless the program or platform is approved for such communication by the
5 school district or governing body of an independent school or prequalified
6 private prekindergarten; provided, however, that any approved communication
7 program or platform shall allow school officials to archive all communications
8 and prevent all communications from being edited or deleted once a
9 communication has been sent; and

10 (B) requiring students to use social media for out-of-school academic
11 work, homework, school sports, extracurricular clubs, or any other out-of-
12 school school-sponsored activities.

13 (2) The model policy may also include guidance or directives regarding
14 the use of social media to promote school-sponsored activities and events.

15 (b) Policy adoption.

16 (1) Beginning with the 2026–2027 school year, each school board shall
17 develop, adopt, ensure the enforcement of, and make available in the manner
18 described under subdivision 563(1) of this title a social media use policy that
19 shall be at least as stringent as the model policy developed by the Secretary.
20 Any school board that fails to adopt one or more of these policies shall be

1 presumed to have adopted the most current model policy or policies published
2 by the Secretary.

3 (2) Beginning with the 2026–2027 school year, each approved
4 independent school shall develop, adopt, and ensure the enforcement of a
5 social media use policy that shall be at least as stringent as the model policy
6 developed by the Secretary. Any approved independent school that fails to
7 adopt one or more of these policies shall be presumed to have adopted the most
8 current model policy or policies published by the Secretary.

9 **Sec. 3. CELL PHONE AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

10 **IMPLEMENTATION**

11 (a) On or before January 1, 2026, the Agency of Education shall develop
12 and publish both a model student cell phone use policy and a model social
13 media use policy pursuant to Sec. 2 of this act.

14 (b) On or before July 1, 2026, school boards and approved independent
15 schools shall adopt both student cell phone use policies and social media use
16 policies, as required pursuant to Sec. 2 of this act, to be effective in the 2026–
17 2027 school year.

18 **Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE**

19 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

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6 (Committee vote: _____)

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Representative _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE