

1 S.21

2 Introduced by Senators Williams, Brennan, Collamore, Cummings, Douglass,

3 Hart, Ingalls, Lyons, Norris, Perchlik and White

4 Referred to Committee on

5 Date:

6 Subject: Education; cell phone-free schools

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

12 An act relating to cell phone-free schools

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

14 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

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

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

19 (2) In June 2024, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy called on  
20 Congress to pass legislation requiring warning labels on social media because

1 these products have not been proven safe for children. He also called on  
2 schools to “ensure that classroom learning and social time are phone-free  
3 experiences.”

4 (3) Youth in Vermont are in a mental health crisis. According to the  
5 2023 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 63 percent of high  
6 school students said that their mental health was sometimes to always “not  
7 good.” Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Vermont’s youth.

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

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

1           (6) Phone-free policies have been shown to reduce the incidence of  
2           hazing, harassment, and bullying in some schools. Lamoille South  
3           Supervisory Union instituted a phone-free school day policy in August 2024.  
4           Data from one of the supervisory union’s high schools showed nine hazing,  
5           harassment, and bullying claims from August to October 2023, before the  
6           policy, and just two such claims during the same period in 2024, after the  
7           policy was enacted.

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

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

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

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

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

3           § 581. DEFINITIONS

4           As used in this subchapter:

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

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

10           (A) transmits sounds, images, texts, messages, videos, or electronic  
11           information;

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

13           (C) accesses the internet or private communication or information  
14           networks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10       § 582. PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

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

21       (b) Exceptions.

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

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

10       § 583. PROHIBITION OF INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

11           PLATFORMS INTO EDUCATION

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

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

14           (2) asking, requiring, or permitting students' use of social media for  
15       school activities, out-of-school academic work, homework, school sports, or  
16       extracurricular clubs and any other school-sponsored activities.

17       (b) Schools shall have in place measures to prevent students from accessing  
18       social media while on school-issued electronic devices and while under the  
19       supervision of the school.

20       Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATES

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

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