

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6923

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF SMART DEVICES IN SCHOOLS.

**Vote Date:** 3/21/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/19/2025

**File No.:** 591

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

## REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill outlines several key provisions regarding the use of smart devices by students in schools. It mandates that local and regional boards of education adopt policies that limit the use of smart devices during school hours. At present, there are no statewide uniform regulations governing smart device usage in schools, leaving individual districts to establish their own policies. This bill aims to create consistent guidelines that minimize distractions, prevent disruptions to classroom activities, and enhance student focus. By requiring school boards to implement clear, standardized policies, the bill seeks to foster a more structured learning environment that prioritizes academic engagement. While recognizing the important role of technology in education, the bill does not impose a complete ban on smart devices. Instead, it ensures that these devices are used in a manner that supports, rather than detracts from, learning. Additionally, the bill allows school districts the flexibility to tailor their policies to meet local needs, all while striving to reduce non-educational screen time.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**State Department of Education (SDE), Commissioner, Charlene M. Russell-Tucker:** supports the proposal to make the Governor's position on cell phone policies official. This would require schools to adopt policies that follow the State Board of Education's guidelines on personal technology use in schools. The Governor's budget also includes a \$100,000 grant to help schools implement these policies. Data collected by the Department shows that nearly 90% of schools already have policies on personal technology use. Schools without a district policy are either creating one or have school-specific guidelines. Two-thirds of schools that have policies say they are effective in improving student engagement and learning.

Additionally, 45% of schools reported fewer behavior problems in class, and 29% saw a decrease in overall discipline issues.

**Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), Acting Child Advocate, Christina D. Ghio:** Supports this bill's effort to limit unnecessary smart device use in schools, citing research on the negative impact of cell phones on children's development and engagement. OCA emphasizes the need to balance restrictions with ensuring that special education students can access assistive technology without facing social stigma.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Connecticut Voices For Children, Emily Bryne:** supports this bill and states that research shows excessive phone use disrupts learning, harms mental health, and lowers attention spans. Schools that have implemented restrictions, like Manchester, report increased engagement and reduced cyberbullying. CT Voices urges passing the bill while ensuring policies avoid harsh disciplinary measures.

**Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc., VP for Government Relations, Lon Seidman:** support this bill, which aligns with SDE guidance from August 2024, requiring districts to implement policies with varying levels of smart device restrictions. CABA views this as a responsible approach, as districts have considered parent input, medical needs like diabetes monitoring, and students' social-emotional well-being.

**ConnCAN, Executive Director, Steven Hernández:** emphasizes the need to distinguish between smartphones, which cause distractions, and educational technologies that support student learning and future careers. While concerns about technology use are valid, policymakers should avoid overcorrection and consider ongoing inequities in technology access. A balanced approach can both engage students and integrate beneficial technologies into the school day.

**UCONN, Assistant Professors, Department of Educational Leadership, Adam McCready and Katherine Rohn:** states they are researching middle and high school students' social media use and mental health. It shows that while smartphone restrictions in schools may reduce behavior issues and increase peer interaction, they alone do not fully address adolescent well-being or the development of healthy digital habits. A comprehensive policy should pair age-appropriate smart device restrictions with digital literacy and citizenship education. Findings also support clarifying the definition of "smart devices" to include all internet-connected wearable and portable technology. The researchers are continuing their study and will provide a full report to the General Assembly in October, analyzing the impact of smartphone prohibitions and digital literacy curricula on student well-being.

**Center for Youth Leadership, Jaya Iyer:** They recommend that school districts update their smart device policies for grades 9-12 to avoid a total ban, as many students rely on their devices for work, medical needs, or family responsibilities. Instead, they suggest a balanced approach, including integrating digital citizenship education, banning smart devices from classrooms during instructional time (unless needed for academic purposes), and allowing access before and after school, during passing periods, and at lunch. Teachers should be responsible for enforcing policies with support from administrators and student government.

Rather than confiscating devices, schools should use a graduated response for violations, though if confiscation is implemented, a proper chain of custody should be established. Given the rapid evolution of technology, districts should update policies annually and consult neighboring schools for best practices. Additionally, teacher-student-administrator teams should regularly review, and revise regulations as needed.

**The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPPS), Executive Director, Fran Rabinowitz:** supports this bill, as it aligns with its priorities for improving Connecticut's public education system. The bill aligns with their priorities by reducing classroom distractions, enhancing student mental health, promoting academic performance, and establishing clear policies on smart device use. Many districts have already implemented such policies, recognizing their benefits. CAPSS views this bill as a proactive approach to managing technological challenges in education, ultimately fostering healthier and more effective learning environments.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed.

**Reported by: Ashley Naranjo**

**Date: 04/02/25**