

# Focus First: Maximizing Student Potential with Phone-Free Schools

## Why do statewide phone-free school policies matter?



It takes approximately 23 minutes and 15 seconds to regain focus after a distraction, according to a University of California study.

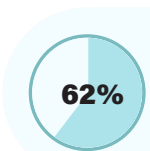
The rise of smartphones and social media has been linked to adverse outcomes for young people.

Research, including findings from the American Academy of Pediatrics and insights from social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, associates **excessive screen time** with **increased rates of anxiety, depression and sleep deprivation** among children and teenagers. Young girls are particularly vulnerable to the harms of social media.

OECD data suggest a strong correlation between **high screen time** and **lower academic performance**, particularly in mathematics. Causal research supports this claim. The presence of cell phones in classrooms disrupts the learning process, as evidenced by declining test scores and increasing reports of classroom distractions, with low-income students most affected.

Several states have already taken legislative steps to mitigate these issues. In 2024, at least 19 states passed bills or enacted policies that restrict cell phone use in schools statewide or encourage local districts to establish their own restrictions. In 2025, many more states are following suit.

## Phone-free school policies help students.



Students not using their phones during class wrote down 62% more information and scored a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple choice test, according to a study by University of Ohio and University of Nebraska researchers.



It's increasingly alarming and concerning that I have seen on many occasions a whole group of people sitting at a table, pressing away or scrolling on their phones, and all I hear is silence. Consequently, this adds to the overarching problem of mental health issues because of how attached students are to devices. They lose the skill of communication and therefore are not able to converse very well in the long-term.

Alex, Manchester student, The New York Times



If you need phones to do online classes, then use a computer. If older generations were able to make it 8 hours without checking an Instagram story, then so can we.

Emmies, Midtown High School student, The New York Times

## Phone-free school policies help teachers, too.

Teachers overwhelmingly express concerns about the negative impact of cell phones on student attention and students' social-emotional development and mental health.

72%

72% of high school teachers nationwide report cell phones are a major distraction in the classroom

83%

83% support an all-day phone-free policy

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We have recently implemented a no cell phone policy in our district, and it has been life-changing. The kids are working in class, talking to one another, and keeping out of trouble—for the most part.

Ohio High School Teacher, Education Week

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## Want to get started in your state?

We designed our [Distraction-Free Education Act](#) to help states create focused learning environments in K-12 schools, improve academic outcomes and boost student engagement. By restricting personal device use during the school day, this Act supports improved concentration, meaningful peer interactions and the development of essential skills needed for success in college, careers and life. It aims to contribute to improved mental health by reducing the negative effects of excessive screen time and social media exposure.



Use this QR code  
to access ExcelsinEd's  
Model Policy

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