A Policy Analysis of Banning Cell Phone Use in K-12 Schools in the State of New Avery

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To Governor: Avery

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1. Problem Definition: Background Information: In the wake of decreasing student performance and rising mental health concerns, policymakers are studying how students' endless connectivity to digital devices shapes knowledge and well-being. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that average scores for 13-year-olds has reduced in both mathematics and reading compared with 2020 [8]. At the same time, the CDC's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) documents high rates of stubborn sadness and electronic bullying among high schoolers [4]. A peer-reviewed analysis of YRBS data finds that heavy daily social media use correlates with elevated bullying victimization and suicide risk [15]. These trends represent a public problem. As the U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 advisory warns, the risks to youth attention, sleep, and mental health are significant enough to warrant institutional protections. Declining test scores threaten the state's future workforce, and the youth mental health crisis carries long-term social costs. Because these impacts extend beyond individual families to statewide education and public health, the issue demands policy action. *Policy Problem* Would implementing a bell-to-bell ban on student cell phone use in public high schools in New Avery be an efficient and effective way to increase standardized test scores and improve youth mental health outcomes? *Analyst's Problem* This analysis will determine whether a statewide high-school phone ban is a prudent policy for New Avery. Specifically, the analyst will: (1) Examine causal evidence on academic and mental-health impacts of in-school phone restrictions [1][3][10][15].(2) analyze the feasibility, costs, and benefits of a statewide mandate, drawing on other states' implementation. [6][12][14]. (3) Assess the political environment and positions of key stakeholder groups [9][11][13]. (4) identify potential externalities, offsetting behaviors (e.g., smartwatches), and legal considerations [5][13]. (5) explore alternative or complementary policies such as digital citizenship education. [2]. **Background Information** *(a) Legislative History and Current Policy Landscape* States are moving quickly to curb phone use during the school day. Recent guidance and actions at the state level including Virginia's complete implementation playbook [14] and Oregon's statewide guidance provide concrete models for districts. Nationally, most schools already restrict phones in some way, and public support has grown. A recent Pew survey shows two-party majorities favor limits during class time, [11]. and a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) brief reports that most school leaders believe phones harm academic performance[7]. For comparison across jurisdictions, Education Week's 2025 scan reports that

most students now face some form of school phone limit, whether at the district or state level [12]. These experiences supply applied lessons on definitions (e.g., 'bell-to-bell'), exceptions (health and IEP needs), and communication with parents.*(b) Political Environment* Arguments for the policy (stakeholders): • Educators' unions and teacher associations argue phones weaken attention, participation, and classroom climate[9]. Parent groups concerned with bullying and academic focus support removing phones during instruction[11]. Public-health advocates emphasize risks to sleep, anxiety, and social comparison during the school day[9]. Arguments against the policy (stakeholders):• Some civil-liberties organizations raise concerns about over-reach, phone searches, and equitable enforcement[13]. • Certain parent organizations prefer local control and worry about emergency communication and after-school logistics[6].• Student advocacy groups argue that bans should be paired with digital literacy rather than stand alone[2].**3. Research Design**: *Academic & Mental Health Impact* Question: What effect do high-school phone bans have on academic outcomes and mental-health indicators? Data & Methods: Review would-be-experimental evidence, including Beland & Murphy's difference-in-differences study of English schools [3] and Abrahamsson's event-study from Norway; triangulate with OECD monitoring and CDC YRBS analyses [4][15]. Evaluative Criteria: Evidence of test score or GPA gains (particularly for lower-achieving students) and reductions in bullying or school-based mental-health utilization indicates effectiveness. *Objective #2: Costs, Feasibility, and Implementation*Question: What are the costs and operational challenges of a statewide mandate? Data & Methods: Synthesize state implementation guidance (e.g., Virginia) [14] and media reports [12] with concrete cost ranges (e.g., locking pouches at roughly $25–$30 per student annually [14]) and lower-cost options (classroom caddies). Evaluative Criteria: The policy is efficient if modest costs generate meaningful academic and climate benefits; it is feasible if enforcement and communication challenges are manageable with known best practices [6][12][14]. *Objective #3: Externalities, Offsetting Behaviors, and Alternatives* Question: What workarounds or unintended effects should New Avery anticipate, and what complementary policies might achieve similar goals? Data & Methods: Review reports on smartwatch circumvention and relevant student-privacy case law (New Jersey v. T.L.O.) [13]; examine independent evaluations of digital citizenship programs [2]. Evaluative Criteria: A robust policy anticipates and mitigates workarounds and is complemented by education that builds students' self-regulation[2].**Research Results and Analysis** *(a) Reporting of Results* Academic Performance: Beland & Murphy find that phone bans in England

raised test scores, with the largest gains among lower-achieving students akin to adding roughly an hour of instruction per week [3]. Recent evidence from Norway reports GPA gains, particularly for girls, under school-day phone restrictions [1]. OECD monitoring notes contextual variation but acknowledges that reducing digital distraction can improve classroom engagement [10]. Mental Health and Behavior: The Norwegian study documents decline in bullying and reduced demand for psychological services following restrictions, again with larger effects for girls [1]. These results align with CDC findings that heavy social-media use is associated with greater bullying and mental-health risks [15]. Implementation and Legal Context: Reports from U.S. districts show that narrow phone-only bans can be skirted via smartwatches [5]. Successful policies therefore define covered devices broadly. Regarding searches, New Jersey v. T.L.O. establishes a 'reasonable suspicion' standard [13]; policies must codify privacy protections and staff training. *(b) Analysis* For New Avery, a well-designed, bell-to-bell restriction is a high-impact, low-cost lever to reclaim attention in the classroom and narrow achievement gaps [3]. Benefits appear strongest for students who struggle most with self-regulation, advancing equity goals [1][3]. On well-being, removing phones during the day is not a cure-all, but it targets two key stressors cyberbullying and constant social-media comparison that the Surgeon General and CDC highlight [9][4]. Personal and Local Context: This policy question also resonates with my own experience as a student at McKinley Technology High School in Washington, D.C. During my years there (2021–2024), the school enforced a phone-collection policy at the start of each day. This created a focused learning environment that helped me concentrate on advanced coursework, including AP classes. Alongside other top DCPS high schools with similar practices, McKinley's structured approach fostered an atmosphere of accountability and discipline. I believe this policy contributed to my academic growth and eventual admission to Cornell University, providing firsthand evidence of the long-term benefits of limiting phone distractions in high school settings.In addition, drawing on the precedent of top-performing Washington, D.C. high schools like McKinley Technology High School, which have long enforced daily phone-collection policies, New Avery can strengthen its case for adopting similar measures. These policies not only supported my personal academic success in AP-level coursework but also reflect broader practices among schools with high college acceptance rates. Following this model would reinforce the state's commitment to equitable learning environments and long-term student achievement. Costs and Benefits Direct Costs (Schools): One-time or recurring costs for storage/locking solutions; staff

time for rollout and family communications. Direct Benefits (Schools/Students): Higher instructional time-on-task; improved classroom climate; reduced in-school cyberbullying incidents. Indirect/Social Costs: Transition friction; concerns about equitable enforcement; parent anxiety about emergency contact routines. Indirect/Social Benefits: Potential narrowing of achievement gaps; fewer behavior incidents; improved well-being during school hours. Policy Externalities, Implementation Problems, and Offsetting Behaviors Feasibility: Successful state and district rollouts emphasize clear definitions (covering all personal internet-enabled devices), consistent enforcement, and proactive parent communication, including standardized exceptions for medical and IEP needs. Equity safeguards (e.g., transparent discipline protocols and data monitoring) are essential. Offsetting Behaviors: Students may shift to smartwatches or hidden devices. Policies should require storage of all personal networked devices and provide staff with practical scripts and procedures. Externalities: Positive spillovers include calmer hallways and more peer interaction; potential negative spillovers include initial pushback and equity concerns if enforcement is inconsistent. **Conclusions** *Regarding Proposed Policy* The preponderance of causal evidence indicates that bell-to-bell phone restrictions can meaningfully improve academic outcomes especially for lower-achieving students and reduce bullying and school-day mental-health strain. Costs are modest relative to likely benefits, and implementation challenges are surmountable with clear state guidance. *Conclusions Regarding Alternative Policies* Digital citizenship programs show complementary benefits by building students' habits and judgment outside school hours. A ban without instruction risks short-term compliance but long-term workarounds; paired together, the policies are more durable and equitable. **Recommendations** Enact a Statewide High-School "Phone-Free School Day." Define coverage to include smartphones, smartwatches, earbuds, and other personal networked devices [14]. Provide standard exceptions for documented medical and IEP needs [14] Fund Implementation for Equity. Offer one-time grants for storage solutions [14]; share procurement options for locking pouches and lower-cost caddies [12]. Publish a Model Policy and Communications Toolkit. Adapt Virginia-style guidance: definitions, FAQs, family letters, emergency-contact procedures, and staff training [14]. Pair with Required Digital Citizenship Instruction. Adopt a vetted curriculum and progress-monitoring to cultivate students' self-regulation and online safety skills [2].

A1. Federal Legislation

Bill or Act	Legislative Summary	Last Action
Restoring our Educational Focus on Children of U.S. Servicemembers at DoDEA (REFOCUS DoDEA) Act	A proposed bill aims to ban student cellphones in Department of Defense (DoDEA) K-12 schools to enhance focus and learning. (Senator Jim Banks)	Introduced in Senate (2025) (Senator Jim Banks)

A2. State Legislation

State	Bill or Act	Legislative Summary	Last Action
Alabama	N/A	N/A	N/A
Alaska	N/A	N/A	N/A
Arizona	N/A	N/A	N/A
Arkansas	N/A	N/A	N/A
California	AB 3216 (2024)	Mandates school districts restrict student smartphone usage by July 1, 2026.	Enacted; district policies due 07/01/2026.
Colorado	N/A	N/A	N/A
Connecticut	N/A	N/A	N/A
Delaware	N/A	N/A	N/A
Florida	CS/HB 379 (2019–2023)	Authorized restrictions on student phone use during instructional	Enacted; in force statewide.

		time; expanded in 2023.	
Georgia	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hawaii	N/A	N/A	N/A
Idaho	Executive Order (2024)	Executive order issued; bill pending.	Pending.
Illinois	N/A	N/A	N/A
Indiana	SB 185 (2024)	Requires districts to restrict student use of portable wireless devices during instructional time, with exceptions.	Enacted; effective 07/2024.
Iowa	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kansas	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kentucky	N/A	N/A	N/A
Louisiana	Act 313 (2024)	Prohibits student phone possession and use during the instructional day with limited exceptions.	Enacted; statewide in force.
Maine	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maryland	N/A	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts	N/A	N/A	N/A
Michigan	N/A	N/A	N/A
Minnesota	Stat. 121A.73 (2024)	Mandates all districts and charters adopt a student cellphone	Enacted; district policies required.

		policy by March 15, 2025.	
Mississippi	N/A	N/A	N/A
Missouri	N/A	N/A	N/A
Montana	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nebraska	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nevada	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Hampshire	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Jersey	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Mexico	N/A	N/A	N/A
New York	N/A	N/A	N/A
North Carolina	HB 959 (2025)	Requires districts to prohibit student wireless device use during instructional time and includes social media literacy.	Enacted; in force 2025–26.
North Dakota	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ohio	HB 96 (2025)	Requires districts to adopt policies prohibiting student cellphone use during the instructional day by January 1, 2026.	Enacted; implementation underway.
Oklahoma	N/A	N/A	N/A
Oregon	ODE Guidance (2024); Executive Direction (2025)	ODE recommends limits on cellphone use; Executive	Guidance active; executive direction issued.

		Direction establishes phone-free school day standards.	
Pennsylvania	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rhode Island	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	State Board Policy (Proviso 1.103)	Model policy adopted in September 2024; districts must implement to maintain state funding.	Adopted; implementation underway.
South Dakota	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tennessee	N/A	N/A	N/A
Texas	HB 1481 (2025)	Mandates districts prohibit use of personal communication devices during the school day.	Enacted 08/2025; TEA guidance issued 07/2025.
Utah	State law (2025)	Bans phones and smartwatches during instructional time; districts may impose stricter rules.	Enacted; statewide in force.
Vermont	N/A	N/A	N/A
Virginia	Executive Order 33 (2024); VDOE	Directs cell phone-free education; guidance defines	Guidance final; divisions implementing.

	Final Guidance (2025)	terms and exceptions.	
Washington	N/A	N/A	N/A
West Virginia	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wisconsin	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wyoming	N/A	N/A	N/A

A3. Court Rulings

Case	Year	Holding
Riley v. California, 573 U.S. 373	2014	The Supreme Court ruled that police generally cannot lawfully search the digital contents of a cell phone that has been seized from an arrested person without a warrant. (Source)
People v. Diaz, 51 Cal. 4th 84	2011	In People v. Diaz, decided in 2011 by the California Supreme Court, the court held that a warrantless search of a cell phone during an arrest was permissible under prior case law. However, this ruling was later superseded by the landmark case Riley v. California. (Source)

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