
BILL REQUEST - CODE REVISER'S OFFICE

BILL REQ. #: Z-0040.3/27 3rd draft

ATTY/TYPIST: CC:jlb

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Enacting the phone-free schools act.

1 AN ACT Relating to ensuring a distraction-free learning
2 environment by restricting personal electronic device, including
3 mobile device, use by public school students during the school day;
4 amending RCW 28A.320.135 and 28A.650.010; creating new sections;
5 providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that student use
8 of personal electronic devices in schools has a multitude of negative
9 effects on student academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Personal
10 electronic devices, such as mobile devices, create a constant
11 distraction that disrupts the learning environment for all students.
12 According to research from the London School of Economics and
13 Political Science, the mere presence of a smartphone by a neighboring
14 student lowers a nonphone-using student's test performance by
15 approximately six percent. Furthermore, data published by the journal
16 of the American medical association indicates that adolescents spend
17 an average of 70 minutes of their school day on their personal
18 electronic devices.

19 (2) The legislature further finds that high personal electronic
20 device and social media use among children and adolescents is
21 directly linked to severe adverse effects, including clinical

1 depression, anxiety, inadequate sleep that disrupts neurological
2 development, low self-esteem, poor body image, eating disorders,
3 online harassment, and cyberbullying. The resulting mental health
4 crises represent a public health emergency that transcends municipal
5 boundaries.

6 (3) The legislature acknowledges that precedent for uniform
7 statewide school policies exists within historical tobacco and
8 antibullying legislation. Over half of the nations worldwide, at
9 least 30 other states, and multiple school districts within
10 Washington have already enacted limits on student mobile device
11 usage. Therefore, the legislature intends to complement local efforts
12 by establishing a uniform statewide minimum standard to guarantee
13 that every Washington public school student enjoys a safe, focused,
14 and distraction-free learning environment.

15 **Sec. 2.** RCW 28A.320.135 and 2026 c 225 s 5 are each amended to
16 read as follows:

17 (1) ~~((School))~~ Beginning with the 2027-28 school year, school
18 district boards of directors ((may)) shall adopt and implement
19 policies and procedures that ((limit the possession and use of (a)
20 paging telecommunication devices by students that emit audible
21 signals, vibrate, display a message, or otherwise summons or delivers
22 a communication to the possessor, and (b) mobile devices by students.
23 When considering the adoption of policies and procedures that limit
24 student possession or use of mobile devices during instructional
25 hours, school district boards of directors are encouraged to review
26 recommendations provided by the office of the superintendent of
27 public instruction to the legislature in accordance with section 4,
28 chapter 225, Laws of 2026.

29 ~~((2) For purposes of this section, "instructional hours" has the~~
30 ~~same meaning as in RCW 28A.150.205, and "mobile device" has the same~~
31 ~~meaning as in RCW 28A.650.010.))~~ restrict student possession and use
32 of personal electronic devices during the school day.

33 (2) School district policies and procedures must, at a minimum:

34 (a) Prohibit students from using personal electronic devices
35 during the school day except as provided in (c) of this subsection;

36 (b) Require students' personal electronic devices to be off and
37 stored away in a secure and inaccessible location during the school
38 day;

1 (c) Provide for exceptions allowing students to access and use
2 personal electronic devices where reasonable and appropriate in the
3 following circumstances:

4 (i) If a student has an individualized health care plan
5 documenting a medical necessity required under applicable state or
6 federal law;

7 (ii) If a student's individualized education program or section
8 504 accommodations plan explicitly identifies a documented
9 educational or assistive technology need under applicable state or
10 federal law, and no reasonable alternative option exists; and

11 (iii) Upon approval of the school psychologist, school social
12 worker, school counselor, or school principal, for a student
13 caregiver who is routinely responsible for the care of a family
14 member, or for a student whose personal safety has been documented to
15 be at risk;

16 (d) Establish clear communication protocols to allow parents and
17 guardians to contact their child during the school day;

18 (e) For the 2027-28 school year, specify that students may not be
19 suspended or expelled solely for violating the school district's
20 policy regarding the use of personal electronic devices during the
21 school day; and

22 (f) Beginning in the 2028-29 school year, describe enforcement
23 measures and disciplinary responses for violations that are
24 consistent with chapter 28A.600 RCW and state and federal disability
25 laws.

26 (3) This section governs school operation and management under
27 RCW 28A.710.040 and 28A.715.020 and applies to charter schools
28 established under chapter 28A.710 RCW and state-tribal education
29 compact schools subject to chapter 28A.715 RCW.

30 (4) The definitions in RCW 28A.650.010 apply throughout this
31 section.

32 **Sec. 3.** RCW 28A.650.010 and 2026 c 225 s 2 are each amended to
33 read as follows:

34 Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the definitions in
35 this section apply throughout this chapter.

36 (1) "Digital citizenship" includes the norms of appropriate,
37 responsible, and healthy behavior related to current technology use
38 and use of mobile devices, including digital and media literacy,
39 ethics, etiquette, and security. The term also includes the ability

1 to access, analyze, evaluate, develop, produce, and interpret media,
2 as well as internet safety and cyberbullying prevention and response.

3 (2) "Instructional hours" has the same meaning as defined in RCW
4 28A.150.205.

5 (3) "Learning device" means an internet-accessible computer,
6 tablet, or other device, with an appropriate operating system,
7 software applications, and data security, that can be used to access
8 curricula, educational web applications and websites, and learning
9 management systems, and with telecommunications capabilities
10 sufficient for videoconferencing.

11 (4) ~~((("Mobile"))~~ "Off" means a personal electronic device is
12 powered down, or otherwise entirely inoperable.

13 (5) (a) "Personal electronic device" means any personal mobile
14 ((telephone)) device or other portable electronic ((communication
15 device with which a user engages in a call or writes or sends a
16 message, or any device in which the user plays a game or watches a
17 video. "Mobile device" does not include school-issued devices.))
18 equipment capable of providing voice, messaging, or other data
19 communication between two or more parties or devices, or capable of
20 connecting to a smartphone, the internet, or a cellular or wireless
21 network. This includes, but is not limited to, smartphones, mobile
22 cell phones, bluetooth-enabled devices, tablets, smartwatches or
23 other wearable technology, portable gaming devices, and other
24 existing and emerging technologies.

25 (b) "Personal electronic device" does not include school-issued
26 devices provided to a student for education purposes including
27 laptops or chromebooks.

28 (c) "Personal electronic device" does not include portable
29 devices meeting the legal definition of a medical device under
30 section 201(h) of the federal food, drug, and cosmetic act, 21 U.S.C.
31 Sec. 321(h).

32 (6) "Secure and inaccessible location" means:

33 (a) Individual secure locked pouches provided or approved by the
34 school district;

35 (b) Main administrative office group lock boxes;

36 (c) A designated location in the classroom, not including
37 students' backpacks; or

38 (d) Alternative secure storage systems that prohibit student
39 access to personal electronic devices during the school day.

1 (7) "School day" covers all instructional time consistent with
2 RCW 28A.150.205 and noninstructional time, including lunch. "School
3 day" does not include extracurricular activities as defined in RCW
4 28A.320.530 held before or after school.

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** This act may be known and cited as the
6 phone-free schools act.

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** This act is necessary for the immediate
8 preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of
9 the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes
10 effect July 1, 2027.

--- END ---