





October 25, 2024

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

TO: Jennifer A. Jenkins
Council Administrator

Colette R. Gresham, Esq.
Deputy Council Administrator

THRU: Josh Hamlin 
Director of Budget and Policy Analysis

FROM: David Noto 
Legislative Budget and Policy Analyst

RE: Policy Analysis and Fiscal Impact Statement
CR-095-2024 Public School Cell Phone Ban

CR-095-2024 (*Proposed by: Council Member Fisher*)

Assigned to the Education and Workforce Development (EWD) Committee

A RESOLUTION concerning a Public-School Cell Phone Ban for the purpose of encouraging Prince George's County Public Schools to institute procedures to ban cell phone use by children in the public schools during school hours.

Fiscal Summary

Direct Impact

Expenditures: No anticipated expenditure impact.

Revenues: No anticipated revenue impact.

Indirect Impact

No anticipated indirect impact.

Legislative Summary:

CR-095-2024¹, proposed and sponsored by Council Member Fisher, was introduced on October 22, 2024, and was referred to the Education and Workforce Development (EWD) Committee. This resolution would encourage Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) to ban the use of cellphones in all public schools in the County.

Background/Current Law:

Relevant legislation from Other Jurisdictions:

According to a 2023 study by Common Sense Media, the average student receives 60 notifications and spends 43 minutes on their phone during school hours in an average day². Nationwide, roughly 77 percent of school had some sort of prohibition on the nonacademic use of smartphones in place by the 2021-2022 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics³. However, only 43 percent of high schools had such policies. Over the past year, 16 states have set forth policies aimed at limiting smartphone usage in schools, including Delaware, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. These policies have ranged from incentives to create policy, to required policies, to statewide restriction, although a full ban currently only exists in Florida and Louisiana⁴.

Some states have coupled stricter smartphone policies with mental health supports and digital literacy education. States that have incentivized restrictions of smartphone usage during the school day have often provided funding for local education agencies (LEAs) to buy equipment⁵, such as a magnetic pouch in which a person's phone may remain in their possession but is locked and unusable⁶. Virginia will funnel a half a million dollars toward offering guidance for LEAs to adopt policies establishing "cell phone-free education"⁷. Delaware has dedicated a quarter of a million dollars to create a pilot program to encourage public schools to limit smartphone use during school hours. The program allows school districts to apply for funding to purchase storage pouches for students' phones during school hours⁸.

¹ [CR-095-2024](#)

² [2023-cs-smartphone-research-report_final-for-web.pdf \(commonsensemedia.org\)](#)

³ [Percentage of public schools with various safety and security measures: Selected school years, 1999-2000 through 2021-22](#)

⁴ [Map Shows Which States Have School Cellphone Bans - Newsweek](#)

⁵ [Which States Ban or Restrict Cellphones in Schools? \(edweek.org\)](#)

⁶ [How It Works — Yondr \(overyondr.com\)](#)

⁷ [Virginia governor issues executive order to keep phones out of classrooms \(nbcnews.com\)](#)

⁸ [Which States Ban or Restrict Cellphones in Schools? \(edweek.org\)](#)

Neighboring municipalities have a range of policies regarding smartphone usage in schools. In Fairfax County Public Schools, smartphones can't be used in class, bathrooms, or locker rooms, but smartwatches are still allowed⁹.

The Montgomery County Public Schools' policy states that "personal mobile devices" cannot be turned on until the end of the school day "for independent use." In middle and high school, teachers can allow phone use for instructional purposes, and phones can be used during lunch¹⁰.

The Howard County Public School System's Policy 8080 permits high school students to use their devices during non-instructional times, such as lunch or between classes, and during class when approved by a teacher, but both middle and elementary school students are prohibited from using devices entirely¹¹. However, this policy is currently under review¹².

Anne Arundel County Public Schools requires elementary and middle school students to keep their phones turned off or on silent and out of sight throughout the school day, while high school students may use their phones only during lunch¹³.

Current school policy:

The current Board of Education policy on portable electronic devices (PEDs) in classrooms, Policy 5132¹⁴, states that, "Students are encouraged to use PEDs for instructional purposes, with school administrator approval. Students are permitted to use PEDs while riding to and from school on PGCPSS buses, as long as it does not impact the safe operation of the school bus. The school principal or designee may allow additional times for students to use PEDs at school in approved designated areas"¹⁵. PEDs in this case include the following: cell phones, paging devices, electronic emailing devices, radios, tape players, CD players, DVD players, video cameras, iPods, MP3 players, portable video game players, laptop computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), cameras, iPads, tablets, e-readers, and any device that provides a connection to the Internet¹⁶. This policy was last amended in 2014.

Resource Personnel:

- Leroy Maddox, Legislative Officer

⁹ [Student Rights and Responsibilities \(SR&R\) | Fairfax County Public Schools \(fcps.edu\)](#)

¹⁰ [COG-RA \(montgomeryschoolsmd.org\)](#)

¹¹ [Policy 8080 Responsible Use of Technology, Digital Tools, and Social Media - HCPSS](#)

¹² [Student Personal Device Use – HCPSS](#)

¹³ [CELL PHONE GUIDELINE CHANGES AIMED AT MAXIMIZING FOCUS ON INSTRUCTION | Anne Arundel County Public Schools \(aacps.org\)](#)

¹⁴ [Board Policy 5132 - Portable Electronic Devices in the Schools \(pgcps.org\)](#)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

Discussion/Policy Analysis:

Public opinions are divided on the relative benefits of allowing smartphones in schools. A recent Pew Research Center study found that nearly three quarters (¾) of high school teachers call smartphones a major problem, but only about a third of middle school teachers feel the same¹⁷. About two-thirds of the high school teachers surveyed also felt that a smartphone restriction policy would be very difficult to enforce. In a separate study, Pew also found that most parents favored a ban on phones during class, but not over the course of the whole school day¹⁸. Parents who opposed a ban most frequently cited the need to be able to reach their child in case of an emergency. A national survey of parents by the National Parents Union found mixed support of restrictive smartphone policies: 56 percent of parents believe students should sometimes be allowed to use their smartphones in school, like during lunch or recess, and in class for academic purposes approved by their teacher.¹⁹

However, there is surprisingly little research on how smartphone usage affects classroom performance. A 2017 study from Rutgers found that college students that split their attention between a device and lectures had more difficulty in retaining a lecture's information and thus tended to perform less well on final exams²⁰. While there is research showing that children spending an unhealthy amount of time on social media is associated with depression, isolation, and thoughts of self-harm²¹, as evidenced by the Surgeon General's recent Advisory²², so far, none of that evidence is causal. Nonetheless, digital interconnectedness is making bullying different and more damaging than ever before. Untrue gossip or altered photos can be shared widely in a matter of seconds and can potentially be available online forever.

As illustrated above, there currently isn't a consensus as to the best path forward when it comes to protecting schoolchildren from the distractions a smartphone in class creates, or from the bad actors who prey on vulnerable minds via social media. CR-095-2024 recognizes that PGCPS last updated their policy on PEDs ten years ago and that the policy ought to be amended regularly, to keep pace with the ever-changing digital landscape. However, a full ban of smartphones is likely to be unpopular with parents and difficult for PGCPS to enforce without additional financial and legal supports from the state and the County, such as those discussed above.

Fiscal Impact:

- *Direct Impact*

Adoption of CR-095-2024 will not have any direct fiscal impact.

¹⁷ [High school teachers say phone distraction in class is a big problem in the US | Pew Research Center](#)

¹⁸ [Cellphones in schools: Most Americans favor class bans, but not all-day bans | Pew Research Center](#)

¹⁹ [New Poll Shows Parents Are Against Cell Phone Ban in Schools; Raise Alarm Over Negative Effects of Social Media on Children - National Parents Union](#)

²⁰ [Dividing attention in the classroom reduces exam performance: Educational Psychology: Vol 39 , No 3 - Get Access \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

²¹ [Teens are spending nearly 5 hours daily on social media. Here are the mental health outcomes \(apa.org\)](#)

²² [Social Media and Youth Mental Health \(hhs.gov\)](#)

- *Indirect Impact*

Adoption of CR-095-2024 will not have any indirect fiscal impact.

Effective Date of Proposed Legislation:

The proposed Resolution shall be effective upon its adoption.

If you require additional information, or have questions about this fiscal impact statement, please reach out to me via phone or email.