

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

## California Gov. Gavin Newsom Nudges School Districts to Restrict Student Cellphone Use

Source: Associated Press, August 13, 2024

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom sent letters Tuesday to school districts, urging them to restrict students' use of smartphones on campus — a move that comes amid an ongoing nationwide debate about the mental health impacts of social media on teens and young children.

In South Carolina, the State Board of Education took up guidelines to tell local districts to ban cellphone use during class time, but postponed a final vote until next month to take more time to craft the proposal.

The efforts mark a broader push by officials in Utah, Florida, Louisiana and elsewhere to try to limit cellphone use in schools in order to reduce distractions in the classroom.

But progress can be challenging. Cellphone bans are already in place at many schools. But they aren't always enforced, and students often find ways to bend the rules, like hiding phones on their laps. Some parents have expressed concerns that bans could cut them off from their kids if there is an emergency.

Districts should "act now" to help students focus at school by restricting their smartphone use, Newsom said in the letter. He also cited risks to the well-being of young people, a subject which garnered renewed attention in June after U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy called on Congress to require warning labels on social media platforms.

"Every classroom should be a place of focus, learning, and growth," Newsom, a Democrat, said in his letter. "Working together, educators, administrators, and parents can create an environment where students are fully engaged in their education, free from the distractions on the phones and pressures of social media."

Newsom said earlier this summer that he was planning to address student smartphone use, and his letter says he is working on it with the state Legislature. Tuesday's announcement is not a mandate but nudges districts to act.

Newsom signed a law in 2019 granting districts the authority to regulate student smartphone access during school hours.

The debate over banning cellphones in schools to improve academic outcomes is not new. But officials often resort to bans as a solution rather than find ways to integrate digital devices as tools for learning, said Antero Garcia, a professor at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education.

"What I'm struck by is society's inability to kind of move forward and find other kinds of solutions other than perpetually going back to this 'Should we ban devices?' conversation as the primary solution to something that hasn't worked," Garcia said.

"Suggesting curtailing cellphone use in schools is a great thing to say," he added. "What that means for the middle school teacher come next week when many schools start is a very different picture."

But some parents say banning cellphones would help their kids focus during class. Jessica French, a parent of a 16-year old and a 12-year-old living in the Northern California town of Palo Cedro, said her son has played games on a classmate's phone while at school, further distracting him from learning. There should be a statewide ban on phones in class, she said.

Nathalie Hrizi, a parent and teacher in San Francisco, said phone bans can help minimize distractions in class and that parents would still be able to get in touch with their children if needed by calling the school.

Some schools and districts in California have already taken action. Los Angeles Unified, the second-largest school district in the nation with more than 500,000 students, recently passed a ban on student cellphone use during school hours that is set to take effect in January. District staff are working out how to implement the policy, but the goal is to avoid the onus of enforcing it to fall on teachers, school board Member Nick Melvoin said in a statement.

Troy Flint, a spokesperson for the California School Boards Association, said decisions about student device access “are very specific to certain schools and certain communities” and should “be made at a local level.”

It’s important to limit distractions in class, but cellphone bans that don’t have parameters could burden some students who are learning English as a second language, said Laurie Miles, a spokesperson for the California Association for Bilingual Education. For example, some teachers allow phones in class for help with translation, she said.

South Carolina lawmakers this summer passed a one-year rule in the state budget requiring schools to ban student cellphone use or lose state funding. The schools have until the start of 2025 to get their specific rules and punishments for breaking them in place. Lawmakers will either have to make the cellphone-free requirement permanent or pass another proposal forcing school districts to keep the rule to continue getting state money.

The state school board rushed to get the proposal together so districts would have time to tailor their own rules around the state guidelines.

But Chairman David O’Shields said Tuesday there was no need to rush and give the districts “runny eggs” when a little more time could be spent working on the rules, getting more input from teachers, parents and administrators.

“Let’s get these eggs right. I want a good omelet,” O’Shields said. He added that he didn’t want the rules to cause a situation where students “might take a suspended day” as punishment for not following the policy “when they need to be in the classroom.” There are questions about whether to ban cellphones during bus rides or field trips or only during class time.

A brief survey of South Carolina teachers in May showed 92% supported limiting cellphone access in classrooms and 55% wanted a total ban. The survey from Education Superintendent Ellen Weaver also found 83% of teachers think cellphones are a daily distraction to learning, the Education Department wrote in a memo to the board.

### **Possible Response Questions**

- What are your thoughts about banning cellphones in schools? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.