

Senate Bill 2354
Sen. Michelle Axtman
House Education Committee
March 25, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Axtman, Senator from District 7. I am excited to be here today to present this legislation to this committee, to our schools, our communities, and our state as it is an opportunity to make a positive step to address the public health emergency we have been facing since 2012, the reliance on and addiction to personal electronic devices and social media, particularly in our youth. "We all understand the joys of our always-wired world—the connections, the validations, the laughs ... the info. ... But we are only beginning to get our minds around the costs." Andrew Sullivan ([2016](#))

You all have been handed a copy of a hog house amendment to SB 2354, which I will be thorough discuss momentarily. But first, I want to direct you to the final lines in the current version of the bill. Lines 14-15 of page 2 states that schools must: " Annually review and update policies based on emerging research and data regarding personal electronic device use in schools."

I started drafting this legislation in the fall, and it didn't even take the length of an entire year to receive the latest emerging research and data from across the world, that clearly demonstrates that the most effective way to reverse the negative trends we have been witnessing and start increasing test scores, combating mental

health issues, and reducing classroom disturbances is to support our schools and our students by enacting a clear and concise state wide, bell to bell device free policy.

The average American teen now spends nearly 8 and a half hours a day on screens, usually on their phone, often in school. Spending three or more hours a day on social media doubles a kids' risk of mental health problems. Since smartphones became widespread, suicide rates have tripled among young teens, self-harm among girls has gone up nearly 200%, and depression among teenagers has increased 150%. A [meta-analysis of 26 such studies](#) found that the risk of depression increased by 13% for each hour increase on social media for adolescents (and that increase was even higher for girls).¹ Young people receive an [average of 237 notifications](#) everyday. Teen's math, reading, and science scores have dropped in the United States since 2012, and yet school alienation has risen across the board.

AMENDMENT DISCUSSION

Now you may be wondering why we wouldn't just limit student phone use *during instructional time*, but this approach has shown to be unproductive and in some cases even counterproductive as it still allows for students to rush to their phones between classes, at lunch, or during recess, costing them valuable opportunities to connect with one another face-to-face.

A classtime-only rule also doesn't give teachers as much benefit as they might expect. [Research from the National Education Association](#) found that 73% of teachers in schools that allow phone

use BETWEEN classes report that phones are disruptive DURING class. It's only when students have 6-7 hours away from their phones that they fully turn to each other and to their teachers.

Kids in phone-free schools sometimes say that after they turn in their phones, it takes a little while for them to forget the drama and turn their attention fully to what's happening around them. But if the drama is refreshed every 50 minutes, between classes, then many students will spend very little of the school day being fully present.

You may ask, what about local control?

The amendment still allows for the local district a high level of discretion on how they implement the bell to bell policy. However, a state wide requirement eliminates any confusion across districts, it sets a norm for entire schools, districts, communities, and our state. It allows students to relax, knowing that they will not be missing activity from friends at other schools. It allows teachers to not have to decide how they will enforce it in their classrooms. It allows school and district leaders to rely on clear guidance and intent from our state law. I hope it gives our teachers and school leaders a sigh of relief.

...It all has sucked a lot of joy out of teaching, because it's no longer teaching. It's phone addiction management. And that's not my cup of tea.

I know that there will be plenty of questions as we ask our schools to implement, but I think we are all ready to rally together to help tackle those questions and come up with solutions because, truthfully, for the sake of our youth, I don't think we can afford to wait.

