

Lindsey,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the new school cell phone policy draft language. We provided feedback on the original proposal and were neutral on the most recent version of SB2427. Our concerns with the draft you've shared reflect the original feedback we provided, specifically the need to prioritize flexibility. Many of our members already have cell phone policies in place that are working well for their districts. Outlined below are our members' concerns. Without additional flexibility on the following items, this will be difficult to implement and will negatively impact the hard work that has already been done to address this issue in many of our school communities:

1. The broader definition of "school time" (a "bell-to-bell" mandate) is a significant shift from our previous negotiations around "instructional time" and is a concern. In order to ensure that there is no usage between class periods, districts will need to hire additional staff for hallway monitoring, and possibly need to purchase pouch systems or add additional storage space which is costly. School boards need to have the discretion to decide if students may use phones during passing periods; similar to the language that allows flexibility at lunch. Additionally, this new definition could cause confusion as to whether it includes before and after school hours that students spend at school meetings with teachers or attending school activities.
2. Districts need local discretion and cost efficient options to store devices during instructional time. Several districts already have policies in place that work, some store the phones in bags, some require the devices to be put in lockers at the beginning of the day. The specificity of the new definition of "safe and accessible" could lead to additional operational issues and added costs for schools.
3. Clarification is needed on when students can use personal cell phones under one of the exemptions and when the district needs to provide a phone for a student to access. Many districts, for a variety of reasons in different educational courses and circumstances, allow use of personal devices for regular instructional time and we want to ensure that will continue to be allowable under this language.
4. Flexibility on when devices can be used by students needs to be at the discretion of local school officials. We have to acknowledge the difference in student needs between elementary, middle and high school.
5. To respect staff time and avoid duplicative training requirements, we recommend covering policy updates during annual in-service orientation at the beginning of the school year. This will provide sufficient clarity without creating an additional training burden. Similar to all other new or modified policies, parent and student notification of the new wireless device policy will be included in board policies and student handbooks, which are updated as needed. It is unnecessary to require a separate notification for this policy.

6. To ensure districts can meaningfully engage in the development of the required policy, the timeline for the ISBE model policy will not provide adequate time with the current June 1, 2027 deadline if districts are to have a policy in place for the 2027-2028 school year. Districts need nine months to complete the process and we would need ISBE to complete that model policy much earlier (i.e. September 1, 2026 to ensure districts have an approved board policy in place by July 1, 2027).
7. We need clarification to distinguish between possible consequences for a strict violation of the cell phone policy and a student's use of a cell phone or other wireless communication device to engage in other more serious prohibited school conduct (i.e. bullying, cheating, taking inappropriate pictures of individuals in a locker room, etc.). Additionally, in lieu of using the language "no school district may enforce the wireless communication device policy through fees, fines, suspensions, expulsions or the deployment of a school resource officer or local law enforcement officer", we ask that we reference school code: 10-22.6 of the School Code (suspension or expulsion of students), 105 ILCS 5/27-23.7 (Bullying Policy), Public Act 104-0430 (Ticketing Bill).

We look forward to engaging in further discussions on this issue to bring the voice of our school districts to the table. We would respectfully request a meeting among school stakeholders after the holidays.

Best,

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