

The Impact of Cell Phone Bans (Condensed)

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Paragon Health Institute

Full study found ([here](#)).

Introduction

Smartphones are nearly universal among teens, with over 95% owning one. Educators report that phones contribute to distractions and mental health concerns. Since the pandemic, these issues have intensified, prompting policymakers to consider restrictions on phone use during school hours.

Why Schools Consider Bans

Phones disrupt attention and classroom engagement. Notifications compete with instruction, and students often use free time for social media instead of learning. Teachers in schools with bans report improved focus and less time spent policing devices.

Public Opinion and Policy Trends

Support for bans is growing: 68% of U.S. adults favor banning phones during class. As of late 2025, 31 states and D.C. require districts to limit or ban phone use. Policies vary from full-day (bell-to-bell) bans to class-time-only restrictions.

Evidence from Studies

- **Academic Achievement:** Some studies show gains in test scores after bans, especially for low-achieving students. Others find no significant change, suggesting results depend on implementation.
- **Mental Health:** Evidence is mixed. While bans reduce distractions and social comparison stressors, studies show little direct impact on anxiety or depression without broader support systems.
- **Behavior:** Many schools report fewer disruptions and bullying after bans, though enforcement challenges remain. Initial spikes in discipline often stabilize over time.

Policy Models

- **Bell-to-Bell Ban:** Phones stored all day; most effective but costly and harder to enforce.
- **Instructional-Time Ban:** Phones allowed during lunch and breaks; easier to implement but less impact.
- **Targeted Restrictions:** Phones banned during recess or testing; promotes specific outcomes like physical activity or test security.

Key Challenges

Concerns include emergency communication, cost of storage systems, and student stress. Parents worry about safety and convenience, while teachers cite enforcement burdens and loss of instructional flexibility.

Recommendations

- Engage community input early.
- Define clear goals and rules.
- Ensure consistent enforcement and provide teacher support.

Conclusion

Cell phone bans aim to reduce distractions and improve focus. Evidence suggests academic benefits, but mental health impacts are less clear. Success depends on clear policies, consistent enforcement, and strong communication with families and staff.

What Research Really Shows About School Phone Bans

The evidence doesn't support removing devices as a fix for student problems.

Updated July 29, 2025

Reviewed by Tyler Woods

Psychology Today

Key points

- Countries with high smartphone use like Singapore maintained strong academic performance over time.
- English schools with phone restrictions showed no improvements in wellbeing, anxiety, or achievement.
- Students turn to phones because school fails to provide autonomy, connection, and meaningful content.

This is Part 3 of our series reviewing *The Anxious Generation*. In [Part 1](#), we looked at the evidence for the [teen](#) 'mental health crisis'. In [Part 2](#), we reviewed the evidence for whether [social media](#) is causing the so-called 'teen mental health crisis'. Now we turn to one of the most popular proposed solutions: banning phones in schools.

[Twenty-one states are now studying or have already enforced school phone bans](#). The logic seems straightforward: if phones are distracting students and harming their mental health, removing them should help. But what if we're addressing the symptom while missing the deeper problem?

The "Golden Age" That Wasn't Golden for Everyone

Jonathan Haidt argues we should return to a "golden age" of [childhood](#) when children played freely without adult supervision. [He describes his 1960s childhood in suburban Scarsdale](#), riding bikes and going on neighborhood adventures. [Peter Gray recalls the 1950s](#), playing pickup games with no adults around.

But this idealized childhood wasn't available to everyone. It was primarily the experience of White, middle-class boys.

Girls had far less freedom due to cultural expectations that kept them closer to home. Even today, young men and boys spend 85% more time outdoors than young women and girls. Black and immigrant children faced segregation and [discrimination](#) that made many public spaces unsafe. [In 1945, Washington D.C. officially segregated public recreation spaces](#), and four Black boys were arrested when their ball accidentally hit a street lamp outside a park they were banned from entering.

[Working-class children often worked from young ages](#), as child labor wasn't federally regulated until 1938.

Even for those who experienced this "golden age," completely unsupervised play had its own problems.

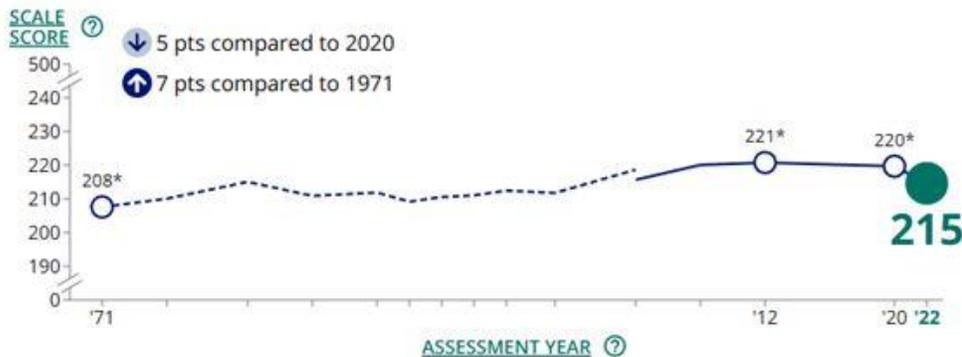
Research on recess, one of the few times kids still play with minimal adult oversight, shows [boys taking over sports fields while girls and non-athletic boys are marginalized](#), racial hierarchies being established and reinforced, and [bullying of children with less social capital](#) or [neurodivergence](#) being normalized.

The Academic Argument Doesn't Hold Up

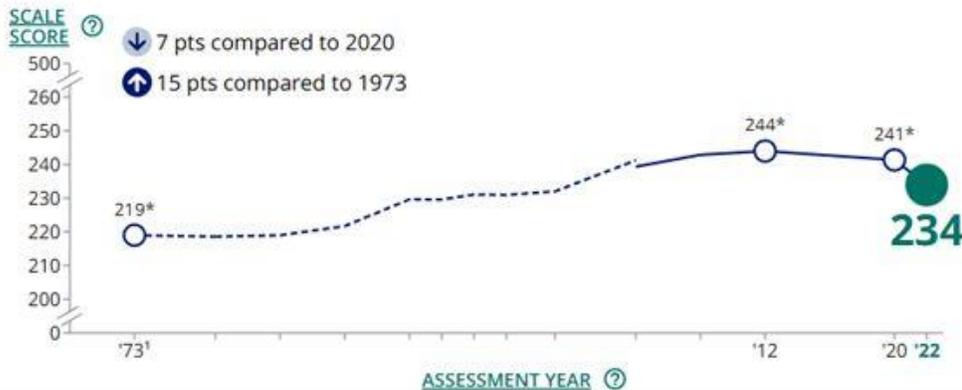
Jonathan Haidt claims that declining test scores since 2012 prove phones are destroying [education](#), pointing to [National Assessment of Educational Progress data](#). But when we examine the numbers closely, the "decline" is barely measurable.

For 9-year-olds, reading scores dropped by just one point from 2012 to 2020 on a scale of 0 to 500. Math scores dropped by three points.
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READING



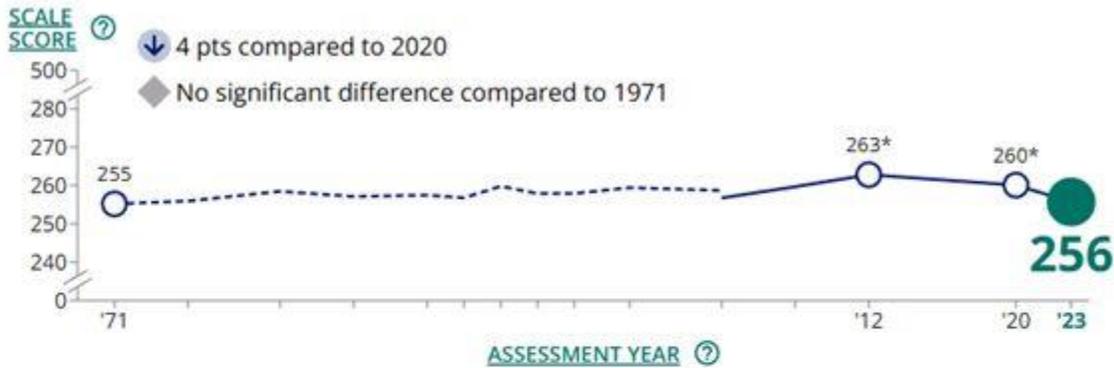
MATHEMATICS



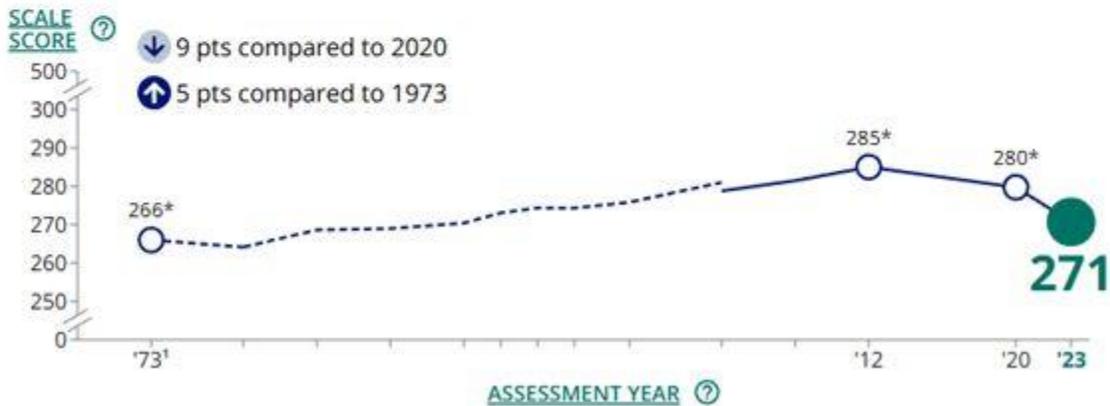
Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education

For 13-year-olds, reading dropped three points and math dropped five points over eight years. These aren't substantial declines—they're tiny changes on a massive scale.

READING



MATHEMATICS



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education

International data also fails to support the smartphone theory. If phones were driving academic decline, we'd expect to see it in countries with high smartphone [adoption](#). Instead, [Singapore](#) and [Norway](#) maintained or improved their high scores despite high phone use. The [UK](#), [Hong Kong](#), and [Israel](#) had flat or improving trends. [Sweden](#) rebounded from a 2012 low point with smartphone penetration eight points higher than the U.S. Haidt ignores that both Common Core standards and the Race to the Top program were implemented in 2010, exactly when they claim phone-related decline began. These programs cost \$10-20 billion federally plus billions more at the state level, fundamentally changing how teachers taught and students learned.

[Research indicates that these programs](#) (especially Common Core) have not improved students' learning outcomes, and [may have done harm](#).

What Research Actually Shows

The limited research on school phone bans reveals mixed results at best. [A study in Denmark found increased moderate physical activity during a four-week smartphone ban](#), but only 68% of students actually complied, there were no control schools for comparison, and four weeks isn't long enough to determine lasting effects.

In England, [researchers compared 30 schools with restrictive versus permissive phone policies](#) and found no significant differences in student mental wellbeing, [anxiety](#), [depression](#), academic achievement, disruptive behavior, sleep, or physical activity.

The "restrictive" schools often still allowed phones in bags or lockers, and while in-school phone use decreased, overall daily usage didn't change—suggesting kids just used phones more outside school.

The most positive results came from [a study commissioned by Yondr, the company that makes phone-locking pouches](#). But this "research" had no control group, didn't account for other variables, and displayed data in [marketing](#) style rather than rigorous analysis, revealing a clear financial conflict of interest.
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The Real Problem: Unmet Needs

Kids turn to phones because phones meet needs that school doesn't. Phones provide:

- Autonomy: Choice over what to engage with and when
- Connection: Real relationships with peers on their terms
- Relevance: Content that feels meaningful to their lives
- Agency: The ability to shape their own experience

School, by contrast, often provides:

- Forced compliance with predetermined curricula
- Limited choice in activities or pace of learning
- Minimal opportunity for authentic peer connection
- Content disconnected from students' interests and experiences

When researchers in Spain worked with middle schoolers to study the school experience, one student explained:

"I learn little in school. I spend most of my time looking for information... I look for things not explained at school on the internet... In the class, I listen, but not too much, because just being attentive, you get the picture. I know too much."

An adult researcher observed:

"What the students learn in school somehow helps them to understand the outside world, but what they learn outside is not usually incorporated and taken into account at school... At school, they learn things to pass exams, but once passed, they find it difficult to remember them. They tend to remember what they learn outside, because for them this learning is more meaningful."

Final Thoughts

If your teen seems checked out from school, their phone probably isn't the main problem. Look for signs they feel unheard, overwhelmed, or disconnected from learning. The solution likely means pushing for better school experiences, not just taking away their device.

Phone bans in schools are treating the symptom, not the disease. When we focus on removing devices instead of addressing why kids turn to them in the first place, we miss the opportunity to create genuinely engaging learning environments. The research shows us that kids thrive when they have supportive relationships with adults, meaningful choices in their learning, and content that connects to their lives and interests.

Over 30 States Now Ban Phones in Schools. Here's What's Working and What Isn't.

(Condensed)

Jan 2 2026

GovFacts

Full article found ([here](#)).

Overview

American schools have rapidly shifted from permissive phone policies to widespread restrictions. By late 2025, over 30 states enacted laws or executive actions limiting student phone use. This change reflects concerns about academic recovery, mental health, and school safety.

Why the Crackdown?

- *Attention:* Even silent phones impose a cognitive load, reducing focus and learning.
- *Mental Health:* Rising anxiety and depression among teens correlate with heavy social media use.
- *Safety:* Phones can hinder emergency response and fuel performative violence by broadcasting fights.

Implementation Models

- *Bell-to-Bell Ban:* Phones restricted from arrival to dismissal; strong social benefits but costly (e.g., Yondr pouches).
- *Instructional-Time Ban:* Phones allowed during lunch/passing periods but banned in class; easier but less effective.
- *Local Control Mandates:* States require districts to adopt policies but allow flexibility.

State Examples

- *Florida:* Ban during instructional time; blocks social media on school Wi-Fi.
- *Indiana:* Strict enforcement during class.
- *Virginia:* Executive order promotes bell-to-bell bans with funding support.
- *California:* Requires districts to adopt policies by 2026.

State Approaches (November 2025)

State	Legal Mechanism	Scope of Restriction	Effective Date	Funding Support	Medical Exceptions
Florida	Statute (CS/HB 379)	Instructional Time	In Effect	No specific allocation	Yes (IEP/504)
Indiana	Statute (SB 185)	Instructional Time	July 2024	No specific allocation	Yes
Virginia	Executive Order 33	Bell-to-Bell (Guidance)	2024-2025	\$500,000 grant pool	Yes

State	Legal Mechanism	Scope of Restriction	Effective Date	Funding Support	Medical Exceptions
New York	Statute	Bell-to-Bell (Planned)	2025-2026	\$13.5M for storage	Yes
South Carolina	Budget Proviso	Bell-to-Bell	Jan 2025	Tied to State Aid	Model Policy Varies
Delaware	Pilot Program	Voluntary Pilot	2024-2025	Pilot Grants	Pilot dependent
California	Statute (AB 3216)	Policy Adoption Mandate	July 2026	None	Yes
Texas	Statute (HB 1481)	Policy Adoption Mandate	Sept 2025	Priority Points for Rural	Yes

Impact and Challenges

- *Academic Gains: Modest test score improvements and reduced failure rates.*
- *Behavior: Fewer disruptions and bullying, but initial spike in suspensions raises equity concerns.*
- *Teacher Support: 90% favor bans for reducing classroom conflict.*
- *Costs: Enforcement tools create financial and logistical burdens.*
- *Medical Exceptions: Students with conditions like diabetes need phones for health monitoring.*

Parent and Student Views

- *Parents: Support bans for reducing cyberbullying but worry about safety and communication.*
- *Students: Initial resistance often shifts to relief as social pressures ease.*

Future Outlook

Expect more states to adopt bell-to-bell bans, refine medical exceptions, and explore tech solutions like smart lockers. After years of integration, schools now see smartphones as competitors to learning.

Principals See Many Benefits of Cell Phone Policies, but Youth Remain Skeptical (Condensed)

Oct 7 2025

Melissa Kay Diliberti, Heather L. Schwartz, Pauline Moore, Brian A. Jackson
Rand

Full article found ([here](#)).

Overview

RAND surveyed principals and youth nationwide during the 2024–2025 school year to understand cell phone policies and perceptions. Nearly all schools allow students to bring phones, but most restrict use during the day. The report highlights differences in policy strictness, perceived benefits, and youth attitudes.

Current Policies

- 95% of schools allow students to bring phones.
- 67% enforce bell-to-bell bans (no use during school hours).
- 16% allow use during lunch or transitions.
- 9% permit use in class at teacher discretion.

Elementary and middle schools are more restrictive than high schools: Bell-to-bell bans:

- Elementary (82%), Middle (78%), High (23%). High schools often allow use during non-class time (49%).

Principals' Views

- 86% report safety-related benefits from phone restrictions:
 - Positive impact on school climate (70%).
 - Reduced inappropriate phone use (67%).
 - Reduced cyberbullying (54%).
 - Lower distraction during drills/emergencies (44%).
- Drawbacks: Parent concerns about communication (21%), Student anxiety over lack of access (10%).

Youth Perspectives

- 60% support some restrictions during class.
- Only 11% support full-day bans.
- Middle school students favor stricter measures (e.g., lockers) more than high school students.
- Main reason for supporting restrictions: reducing distractions.

Key Tensions

- Principals overwhelmingly endorse bans for safety and climate benefits.
- Youth prefer lighter restrictions, especially in high school.
- Parent concerns center on emergency communication.

Takeaways

- *Policies vary widely by grade level and state.*
- *Strong bans correlate with perceived safety improvements but face resistance from students and parents.*
- *Future efforts should balance safety, learning, and communication needs.*