



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

August 13, 2024

Dear School Leaders,

As we strive to create the best learning environment for all students this new academic year, I write today to raise an urgent issue that affects their well-being: the pervasive use of smartphones in schools.

Excessive smartphone use among youth is linked to increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. A recent Pew Research Center survey found that 72% of high school and 33% of middle school teachers report cell phone distractions as a major problem. Common Sense Media found that 97% of students use their phones during the school day for a median of 43 minutes. Combined with the U.S. Surgeon General's warning about the risks of social media, it is urgent to provide reasonable guardrails for smartphone use in schools.

As I work with the Legislature to further limit student smartphone use on campus, there is no reason for schools to wait. In 2019, I signed AB 272 (Muratsuchi) into law, which grants school districts the authority to regulate the use of smartphones during school hours. This legislation was a crucial step in our efforts to minimize distractions and foster a more conducive environment for our students to learn. It is imperative that school districts take full advantage of this law to address the growing concerns surrounding student well-being and academic performance.

Leveraging the tools of this law, I urge every school district to act now to restrict smartphone use on campus as we begin the new academic year. The evidence is clear: reducing phone use in class leads to improved concentration, better academic outcomes, and enhanced social interactions. Schools and districts, including Santa Barbara Unified and Bullard High in Fresno, have seen positive impacts of limiting smartphones on campus, with some reporting higher test scores, grades, and student engagement, and less bullying and damage to school facilities. I applaud these districts, and others like LA Unified, for their leadership.

Every classroom should be a place of focus, learning, and growth. 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. Thank you for your continued dedication to our students and support in making our schools the best they can be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Newsom', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gavin Newsom