

California poised to consider banning smartphones in schools with Newsom's backing

By Eric He

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This Pro Bill Analysis covers two bills: [AB 3216](#) and [SB 1283](#).

California could be the latest state to ban smartphones in schools after Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) came out [strongly in favor](#) of curbing the devices on campus. Newsom's stance, first reported by POLITICO, came after U.S. Surgeon General [Vivek Murthy](#) called on Congress to [require cigarette-type warning labels](#) on social media platforms, citing the harm that the apps have on children.

The governor said he would work with the Legislature to restrict the use of smartphones during the school day, stating that when kids are in school, "they should be focused on their studies — not their screens."

Studies have identified cell phones as a growing problem inside schools. Common Sense Media, a leading nonprofit organization for parents and educators, found that [97 percent of students used their phones during the school day](#) — for a median of 43 minutes.

Newsom has not yet identified a legislative vehicle for his proposal, but there are two bills currently working their way through the Legislature that could be options: One would [require school districts](#) to restrict or ban smartphones by 2026, and the other would [allow schools to curb](#) students' use of social media while on campus. Both measures have bipartisan support.

Assemblymember [Josh Hoover](#) (R-Folsom), who introduced the measure on smartphones, is willing to work with the governor on the legislation — a rare sign of bipartisan collegiality in a Democrat-dominated statehouse. Hoover told POLITICO that having three school-aged children was a "huge motivator" for him in introducing the bill.

"I think parents really need an assist from their state Legislature on this to really make sure that schools — not just parents — are helping them enforce these restrictions and limit exposure to these devices while they're at school," Hoover said.

WHAT'S IN THE BILL?

This Pro Bill Analysis is based on the [text of AB 3216](#) as amended on May 16.

The bill states in its declarations that smartphone use by students during the school day is detrimental to the educational mission and leads to a number of issues, such as cyberbullying, lower performance and an increase in teenage anxiety. It cites existing smartphone [bans in France](#) and [Spain](#), along with [research indicating that](#) after bans in select high schools in England, standardized test scores went up an average of 6 percent — and 14 percent for low-achieving students (Sec. 1).

The measure would amend the [California Education Code](#) to require that school districts develop and adopt a policy to limit or ban the use of smartphones by students while they are on campus. Currently, the Education Code makes such a policy optional. The policy would need to be in place by July 1, 2026 and updated every five years. Smartphones would be prohibited while students are at a school site, or under the supervision of school staff (Sec. 2).

As with current law, a ban would not be able to bar a student from possessing or using a smartphone: in the event of an emergency, with permission of a teacher or administrator, under the guidance of a doctor or as part of a student's individualized education program (Sec. 2).

The goal of the policy would be to promote smartphone practices that support student learning and well-being, and there would be significant stakeholder participation to ensure that individual districts have policies fitting the unique needs and desires of the school community (Sec. 2).

This Pro Bill Analysis is based on the [text of SB 1283](#) as amended on May 20.

The bill would amend the [California Education Code](#) to allow school districts to limit or ban the use of social media by students while they are on campus — in addition to the current policy, which allows schools to limit or ban smartphone use.

Schools would have to comply with the [California Electronic Communications Privacy Act](#) when requesting to access a student's electronic information unless otherwise stated in the [state Penal Code](#) (Sec. 1).

Students would be allowed to refuse to grant the school access to their information, and would have the right to consult a parent, guardian and attorney before providing access. The school would need to provide the student with a disclosure explicitly outlining their rights and their ability to “say no” to the request.

The bill includes model language for this disclosure, which notes that if the student agrees, they: “give the government the right to look through your phone and possibly use what they find as evidence against you or others, consistent with state law.”

WHO ARE THE POWER PLAYERS?

Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) has offered his full support for a policy restricting smartphone use in schools, and has long warned about the dangers of social media for children. His wife, First Partner [Jennifer Siebel Newsom](#) [has also pushed](#) for regulating social media over their potential harm to children.

“They are our most vulnerable, and it is incumbent upon us to protect them when we create products that are being sold to them,” she told POLITICO in May.

The Newsoms join a partisan group of state lawmakers sounding the alarm on the issue. Assemblymember [Josh Hoover](#) (R-Folsom) told POLITICO that Newsom's announcement was a “game-changer” and that he was grateful for the governor's stance. Hoover's bill could be one option for Newsom to further his proposal.

“We're seeing a strong consensus building around [the harms of social media on children] because it is so obvious to anyone who's either read the research or just raised a child, that has seen the impact this stuff has had,” Hoover said.

Assemblymembers [Josh Lowenthal](#) (D-Long Beach) and [Al Muratsuchi](#) (D-Rolling Hills Estates) are joint authors on Hoover's bill, AB 3216, and state Sens. [Ben Allen](#) (D-Santa Monica) and [Henry Stern](#) (D-Sherman Oaks) are co-authors.

Stern, who is authoring the measure to restrict social media use in school settings, called the governor's backing a “big shot in the arm.” He hopes that if legislation passes, teachers will no longer have to be the “Facebook police” in class.

“It's hard enough to teach kids history and science and get through the world,” Stern told POLITICO. “They've got to also be the phone cops? It's just too much to ask them to do.”

State Superintendent [Tony Thurmond](#) appears to be on board, as well — [posting on X](#) that removing phones from schools would “prioritize our students' mental health and academic success.”

Common Sense Media has pushed for legislation around the country aimed at protecting children from the harms of social media, and is currently [sponsoring a separate measure](#) in California that would hold social media companies legally responsible if they are negligent.

“The truth is, these platforms are a really important part of our lives — all of our lives, particularly our young people's lives,” CEO [Jim Steyer](#) told POLITICO. “But they need to be regulated. There needs to be guardrails, period, full stop.”

Hoover's bill has no registered opposition. He said that the school districts he's spoken with generally support the policy, adding that while his proposal would require policies limiting smartphone use, there is no specific guidance on how they should enforce it. Hoover added that the bill is intentionally vague so that schools can decide what makes the most sense for them, such as requiring students to put their phones in pouches versus keeping phones in their backpacks for the school day.

“We wanted to provide flexibility for school districts to pass a policy that works best for their teachers and their administrators while also making sure they are taking action,” Hoover said.

Stern's social media measure was initially opposed by the **ACLU** over privacy concerns, but the group removed its opposition after amendments to better align access to a student's smartphone with the state's Electronic Communications Privacy Act.

WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR?

Newsom's decision came a day after Murthy warned that the threat social media poses to kids is so acute that Congress should compel apps to include warning labels similar to those on cigarettes and alcohol.

The Newsoms have cautioned against the dangers of social media for children, pointing to various studies and contending that tech companies have been blocking efforts to protect them. The governor wrote a letter last May [calling on the tech industry to drop a lawsuit](#) against the [children's online safety law](#) he signed in 2022.

Three years earlier, he signed [legislation encouraging schools](#) to develop policies limiting or outright banning student use of smartphones on campus during school hours.

Newsom's announcement links him with a fierce political rival — Florida's Republican Gov. [Ron DeSantis](#), whose state last year [passed a nation-leading ban](#) on [students using their cell phones](#) during class hours.

DeSantis' team took the opportunity to jab at California.

"There may still be a chance to come back from the brink," DeSantis spokesperson [Bryan Griffin wrote online](#), a reference to the low esteem they hold California in.

At the Village School of Naples — a private school in Naples, Fla. that instituted its own ban two years ago — there was a 94 percent improvement in mental well-being as measured by mental health interventions, [reports show](#).

Similarly, Indiana lawmakers [passed a bill](#) earlier this year authorizing school districts to restrict cell phone use, and in Ohio, school districts must [restrict cell phone use](#) during school hours.

But some parents across the U.S. have also expressed serious concerns about the bans — driven in part by their worst nightmares of needing to contact their children during an emergency like a mass shooting.

Hours after Newsom shared his plans with POLITICO, Los Angeles' school board — which governs the nation's second-largest district — moved to ban cellphones on campus, aiming to put the policy in place by January 2025.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Each bill has passed through the Legislature so far with bipartisan support and no dissenting votes. The two measures are scheduled to be heard on June 26 — AB 3216 in the Senate Education Committee and SB 1283 in the Assembly Education Committee.

Hoover and Stern both reached out to Newsom's office following the governor's announcement. It's possible that ideas from these bills, along with other legislation around the issue, could be unified in one measure that makes it to Newsom's desk to sign.

WHAT ARE SOME STORIES ON THE BILL?

Read POLITICO news on [AB 3216](#) and [SB 1283](#).

Christopher Cadelago contributed to this report.