

# Cellphones expelled from school

The Carillon

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Cellphone usage in schools is changing, with full bans in elementary and middle schools across Manitoba.

The province becomes one of the last in Canada to put in province or territory-wide measures, following seven other provinces who put in measures this summer.



MIKAELA MACKENZIE WINNIPEG FREE PRESS - Education minister Nello Altomare shows new school signage (related to the cellphone ban) in his office at the Manitoba Legislative Building on Aug. 15.

The government sent out a press release on Aug. 15 announcing that cellphones won't be allowed during school hours for kindergarten to Grade 8 students.

For high schoolers, there's a bit more leniency, with phones allowed during breaks and lunch, as well as for educational purposes, as directed by teachers.

"We want young people to be able to focus in class so they can learn more and feel confident. We know cellphones can be a real distraction for students, studies show it can take up to 20 minutes for a child to refocus on what they were learning once distracted," said Education Minister Nello Altomare in the press release.

"These provincial guidelines will give teachers the tools they need to keep students focused and ensure class time is spent on learning."

Colin Campbell, assistant superintendent for Hanover School Division (HSD) said he's glad to see the province take these steps.

In June, the division announced cell phone bans for K-8, similar to how the province implemented its ban.

"For the province to take the initiative in implementing restrictions for (high schoolers), we are more than willing to support that decision," said Campbell.

"We might start to see more time for the teachers to spend on teaching the students, building relationships with the students and less time reminding students to put their devices away."

While HSD didn't change its policy for high schoolers in June, it's happy to see the change for the province, even if it goes further than its own rules.

"I think what the province has come out with is a good first step, to provide some restrictions as well as autonomy if a teacher needs to use them for educational purposes," he said. "I think it's a nice balance."

PC education critic Grant Jackson said in a statement that he's happy these measures were put in place but asked for more to be done.

"After months of NDP delay and deflection, I'm glad to see the premier finally listened to parents and teachers, and stepped forward with a plan to eliminate cellphone distractions in the classroom," Jackson said in a press release. "This will refocus students off their screens and onto their studies, and improve educational outcomes in our province."

Jackson also asked for the NDP government to restore funding to nine new schools across the province, including a school in Ste Anne. He also asked for \$10 a day childcare and for \$4 million in Green Team funding for student summer jobs.

While Manitoba was one of the last provinces to put in measures, only Quebec and Nunavut announced the decision before 2024. Quebec implemented the change in January, and Nunavut was ahead of its time, implementing rules in 2016.

Seine River School Division didn't respond to calls on the ban.