
TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools

DATE: April 29, 2025

SUBJECT: Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools Final Report



Purpose

The purpose of this item is to provide an update on Maryland's Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools' final report.

Background

This presentation will provide the Board an update on the status of the joint Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools' final report. The Task Force - which consisted of teachers, administrators, parents, students, superintendents and other educational experts across all grade bands and 11 counties - launched in January 2025 and met four times throughout the winter and early spring. Over the course of three months, the Task Force analyzed the current cell phone policies of counties across the state as well the statewide policies and guidance many states have enacted. Through this process, the Task Force has developed research-informed, actionable guidance that will support school districts in addressing this issue.

Recognizing that every school district in the state has an existing policy to govern the use of cell phones in schools or on school grounds, the Task Force decided to focus its guidance document on how to support districts in strengthening the implementation of such policies, increasing opportunities for stakeholder engagement to drive enduring support, and creating a cohesive policy that considers the needs of all student groups. Throughout the guidance document, promising practices in Maryland's districts are highlighted.

Executive Summary

The Task Force's guidance includes the following sections:

- Definition of Terms
- Checklist for Developing the Policy
 - This is an easy-to-reference section for school and district leaders to review the recommended components of a comprehensive district policy.
- Leveraging Stakeholder Engagement
 - This section guides practitioners through the steps and considerations for building a team of diverse, representative stakeholders to design the cell phone policy, including how to define specific goals of the policy, develop a shared understanding of its need, and ensure all decision-making and evaluation is informed by various sources of data.

- **Model Policy Options**
 - The policy and strategy options featured in this section are not meant to be an exhaustive list or to limit the scope of policies that districts can choose to pursue.
 - The policies outlined include a full-day cell phone prohibition and a schedule-based cell phone restriction, with several supporting strategies such as implementing classroom or whole-school storage areas or magnetic locking pouches.
- **Considerations for Grade Level Differentiation**
 - This section outlines age- and developmentally-appropriate restrictions and implementation guidance that aligns with the structure of the school day in each grade-band.
- **Considerations for Related Discipline Policies**
 - This section includes examples of tiered discipline interventions schools and districts may consider when outlining responses to student behaviors. The list is intended to illustrate the kind of responses schools and districts can consider when designing their policies and is not an exhaustive list.
- **Considerations for Emergency Preparedness Policies**
 - This section details procedures and components of crisis communication and management plans to support families, students, and staff in responding and staying connected during school-based and family-based emergencies.
- **Considerations for Legal Exemptions and Accommodations for Student Groups**
 - Here, the Task Force detailed allowable exemptions and accommodations schools and districts policies restricting students' cell phone use should include when necessary to comply with a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 plan (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act), medical plan, or to ensure a student's equal access to instruction and a safe learning environment, such as for multilingual students.

Action

No action is required; this information is for discussion only.

Attachments

Task Force and Report Board Update Power Point

Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools

April 29, 2025

Presented By |

Hannah Oakley, Deputy Director of the Maryland State Board of Education

Laurel Cratsley, Blueprint Implementation & Strategic Initiatives Coordinator, Maryland State Department of Education





Presentation Outline

1. MD LEA Policy Trends
2. Updated State Scan
3. Overview of Task Force
4. Outline of Guidance Document
5. Questions

Maryland LEA Policy Trends

- The overwhelming majority districts have recently updated their cell phone policy.
- Many districts are in the initial stages of implementing new or revised policies.
- Several districts are piloting a policy in a subset of schools.
- Common language around phones being turned off and not visible
- Differentiation by grade band (e.g. cell phone use allowed at lunch and during passing periods in some high schools)
- Some districts piloting use of cell phone pouches, lockers, or “hotels”.
- Some policies also address smart watches and earbuds.

State Scan

Active state policies on cellphones at-a-glance

Incentives policy	Policy recommended	Policy required	Statewide restriction
Delaware	Alabama	Arizona	Florida
Idaho	Alaska	Arkansas	Louisiana
Pennsylvania	Connecticut	California	South Carolina
3 states	Kansas	Indiana	Utah
	Oklahoma	Kentucky	4
	Oregon	Minnesota	
	South Dakota	New Mexico	
	Washington	Ohio	
	8	Tennessee	
		Virginia	
		10	

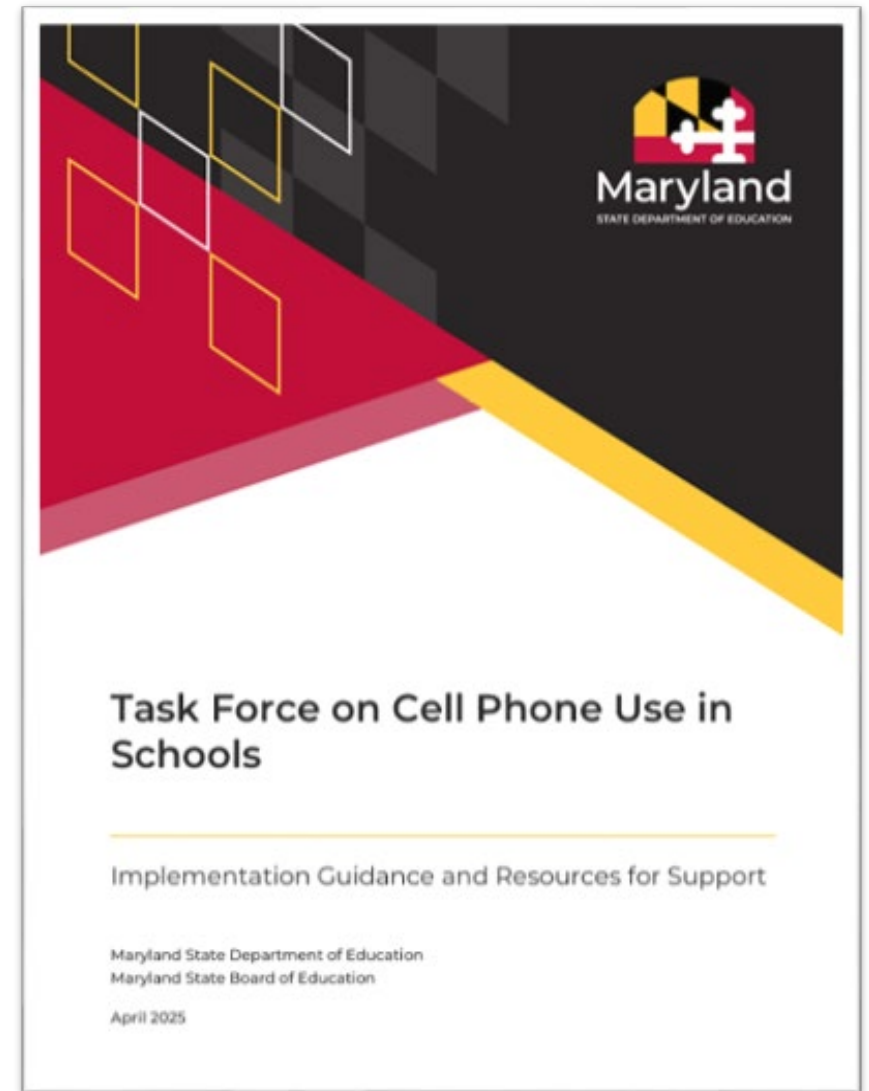
[EdWeek Analysis](#)

Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools

- Included experts from across 11 counties—parents, students, teachers, principals, and superintendents—representing all grade levels.
- Met four times (Jan.–Mar. 2025) to review promising practices from MD LEAs and other states and provide feedback on each draft of report; final guidance previewed with Task Force, Board, and PSSAM and now published the MSDE website.
- Emphasized flexibility, allowing each district to design a unique policy informed by local input.
- Aims to help districts strengthen their existing cell phone policies, boost stakeholder engagement, and address needs of all students.
- MSDE experts from Divisions of Student Support, Special Education, Multilingual Education, and Digital Learning also contributed.

Outline of Guidance Document

- Definition of Terms
- Checklist for Developing the Policy
- Leveraging Stakeholder Engagement
- Model Policy Options
- Considerations for Grade Level Differentiation
- Considerations for Related Discipline Policies
- Considerations for Emergency Preparedness Policies
- Considerations for Legal Exemptions and Accommodations for Student Groups
- Policies in Action Around Maryland Districts
- Statewide Resources



Essential Components of a Comprehensive Policy

In developing their plans, districts should aim to address each of the following:

- Identification of goals and metrics
- Stakeholder engagement plan
- Policy outline of permitted and restricted use
- Communication plan
- Related discipline policy
- Policy review schedule
- Accommodations/modifications/extenuating circumstances
- Emergency preparedness procedures
- *Optional* - social media policy

Questions?