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**SENATE BILL 5346**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Liias, Harris, Shewmake, Dozier, Bateman, Christian, Frame, Hasegawa, King, Krishnadasan, Lovick, Nobles, and Salomon

AN ACT Relating to improving student outcomes by restricting mobile device use by public school students; adding a new section to chapter 28A.600 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that student use of mobile devices in schools has had a multitude of negative effects on student outcomes. Mobile devices can be a constant distraction that disrupts the learning environment for all students. According to a study from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and as replicated by other researchers, the mere presence of a smartphone by a neighboring student lowers a nonphone student's test performance by about six percent.

(2) The legislature further finds that mobile devices can increase harm to students' mental health either by recording students without consent or through increased cyberbullying. Washington students are still recovering from the massive effects of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, including severe learning loss and troubling trends in student mental health.

(3) The legislature intends to combat these effects with safer and more engaging learning environments for students. While the United States and nations around the world consider restricting mobile devices for students, lessons can be learned from states and school districts that have already implemented mobile device restrictions. These lessons can be used to identify the best strategies to implement a phone-free school environment with more focus on academics, development of social skills, and students engaging with each other. Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to restrict student use of mobile devices in public schools during instructional hours using the strategy or strategies recommended by the office of the superintendent of public instruction, beginning in the 2026-27 school year.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.600 RCW to read as follows:

(1)(a) By December 15, 2025, and in accordance with RCW 43.01.036, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature with:

(i) A summary of the policies and procedures that have been adopted by schools in Washington and in other states to limit student mobile device use during instructional hours;

(ii) Recommendations for successful strategies for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours, which may include limiting use: To specified time periods; to designated locations; during particular activities; or by requiring students to leave mobile devices at the front of the classroom or in an administrative office, or to place mobile devices in a secure container; and

(iii) Recommendations for exceptions to the student mobile device restrictions. For example, exceptions could be made for certain emergencies, students with certain disabilities, certain English learner students, students with certain health conditions, or instructional purposes.

(b) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall share draft recommendations with the Washington state school directors' association as soon as practicable so that the association can meet the deadline for developing a model policy and procedures under subsection (2) of this section.

(2)(a) The Washington state school directors' association shall develop a model policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours. The model policy and procedures must be informed by and aligned to the recommendations contained in the report required by subsection (1) of this section.

(b) The model policy and procedures required by this subsection (2) must be posted publicly on the website of the Washington state school directors' association beginning March 15, 2026.

(3)(a) By the beginning of the 2026-27 school year, each school district shall adopt a policy and procedures for restricting student mobile device use during instructional hours. The policy and procedures must be consistent with the model policy and procedures developed under subsection (2) of this section.

(b) The policy and procedures required by this subsection (3) must be shared with students and the parents and guardians of the students at least annually.

(c) This subsection (3) governs school operation and management under RCW 28A.710.040 and 28A.715.020 and applies to charter schools established under chapter 28A.710 RCW and state-tribal education compact schools subject to chapter 28A.715 RCW.

(4) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Instructional hours" has the same meaning as in RCW 28A.150.205.

(b) "Mobile device" means any personal mobile telephone or other portable electronic communication device with which a user engages in a call or writes or sends a message, or any device in which the user plays a game or watches a video, except that such term does not include school-issued devices.

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