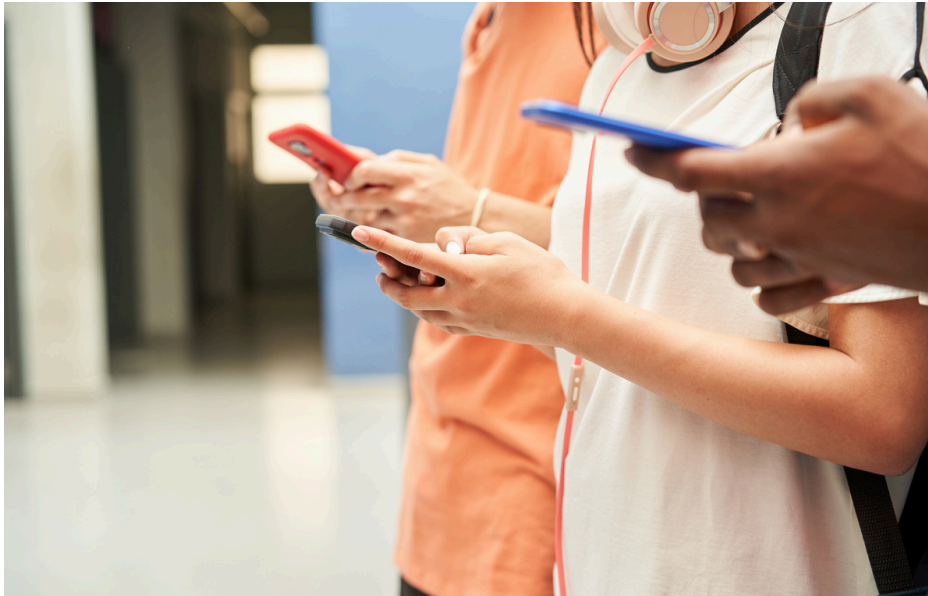

SCHOOL PHONE BANS

What does the research say?



New Wisconsin State Law:

Wisconsin Act 42 requires public schools to have policies that prohibit students from using personal wireless communication devices during instructional time, starting fall 2026.

Smartphones have become a regular part of students' lives. Growing concerns about learning, attendance, connection, social pressure, and youth mental health have led many schools to limit when students can use their phones. Evidence on the effects of school phone bans is emerging, with more research needed to understand effects.

RESEARCH AT A GLANCE

- **Students are using phones in class frequently**
- **Problematic media use is linked to poorer mental health, sleep and academic achievement**
- **There is wide support for phone bans in schools**
- **Phone bans can support focus and learning**
- **Phone bans can reduce behavior issues and conflict**
- **Phone bans have mixed effects on mental health**



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Students are spending significant time on phones, and schools are seeing the impact.

79%

of WI students spend over **3 hours per school day** on **digital devices** for non-school-related activities.

Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health, 2025

1 in 4

adolescents have **problematic social media use patterns**, resembling behavioral addiction.

Ahmer, Arshad, & Shafique, 2026

72%

of high school teachers say **phone distraction** is a **major problem**.

Pew Research Center, 2024

Problematic media use is linked to **depression, anxiety, stress, and poor sleep** in children and young people.

Sohn, Rees, Wildridge, Kalk, & Carter, 2019

Students' problematic smartphone and social media use are associated with lower academic achievement.

Pyhältö et al., 2025

Phone ban policies have major support from families and schools.



The majority (77%) of adults support school phone bans.

Pew Research Center, 2025

Less than half (41%) of students support school phone bans.

Pew Research Center, 2025

90% of teachers support banning phones during instructional time and 75% support bell-to-bell phone bans.

National Education Association, 2024

Evidence is mixed and more research is needed on the effects of phone bans.

Campbell et al., 2024; Children and Screens, 2024

Phone use: Phone bans can greatly reduce student phone use.

Academic Outcomes: Phone bans can improve academic performance, particularly among lower-achieving students.

Attention & Engagement: Phone bans can reduce distractions and support student attention and classroom engagement. Teachers have also reported fewer disruptions and easier classroom management.

Behavior & Bullying: Phone bans can reduce behavioral problems, conflict, and bullying.

Mental Health: Evidence is limited and mixed. Some studies find little to no change in anxiety, depression, or well-being, while others report increased anxiety related to *nomophobia*—the fear of being without a mobile phone.

Research on the effects of phone bans is still in its early stages. While bans do reduce student phone use, it's less clear whether and under what conditions that translates into better grades, engagement, behavior, or mental health.

Do phone bans actually help students?

Sometimes, but it depends.

Research shows phone ban policies are not one-size-fits-all solutions.

Outcomes can depend on the policy, how it's implemented and enforced, and the school setting.



Developed by Roxy Etta, PhD
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Division of Extension

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