



Input on HB 1481

Regarding cell phone policies in public schools

March 18, 2025

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input on **HB 1481**:

We want to acknowledge and thank Rep. Fairly for bringing this legislation forward to attempt to solve a pervasive and growing issue in our public schools. As an organization dedicated to advocating for the needs of educators and students, we believe this legislation represents a critical step toward finding a solution to disruptions in the learning process for both teachers and students. ATPE's 2025 Legislative Priorities include the following statement: "School districts should be positioned [by the Legislature] to establish local policies governing the responsible use of technology such as cell phones, computers, and artificial intelligence."

We appreciate that the bill's intent is to enhance the classroom experience by removing communication devices as a distraction to instructional time. This is something for which many teachers have been asking. Writ large, technology use during the instructional day can cause many disruptions to a student's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to teach without distractions. Educators have attempted to get ahead of the problem by incorporating the use of student technology into lessons; however, in many instances, the distractions caused by devices far outweigh their learning benefits.

We also appreciate that the committee substitute was available and shared before the hearing today. Unfortunately, the substitute language takes the bill further away from, not closer to, where we feel the bill should be. We would call on the author and committee to return to the language as filed but with two amendments. First, we recommend an amendment to Subsection (a) that takes a device that might otherwise be considered a personal wireless communication device, per the bill's definition, out of that definition if the device is being used for sanctioned educational purposes, such as an accommodation for a special education students or student with disabilities. Second, we recommend removing Subsection (c) as overly prescriptive.

Subsection (a) as amended in coordination with Subsection (b) would require every district to create a policy banning the use of cell phones for non-educational purposes during instructional time. This seems to be the goal and is certainly what our members support and are asking for. Again, unfortunately, we are concerned that in moving from simplicity of purpose with flexibility in implementation to complexity and rigidity, the bill will be rife with unintended consequences. For example:

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) is the leading educator association in Texas and has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for the more than 5 million Texas public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school educators.

- The committee substitute's full-day prohibition contains some conflicting language regarding when phones can and cannot be used. We acknowledge that the intent of the bill seems to be giving districts local control regarding use of phones outside of the instructional day; however, the full-day ban would potentially include off-campus activities such as student field trips and athletic events. We believe this will be a bridge too far for parents, who will likely want to communicate with their students for safety reasons while they are attending off-campus events, as well as set up potential confusion for school boards as they adopt local policies. Our preference would be for this ban not to include off-campus activities or activities outside of the normal instructional day.
- While we appreciate that the bill attempts to give flexibility and control to districts regarding storage of student devices, we fear that without funding this will become another unfunded mandate. We understand from our conversations with the bill author that there is a possibility for funding to be attached to this legislation, and we would like to see that happen.
- Device storage also creates a potential issue for teachers with regard to how/where the devices are stored, if they are secure enough to prevent them from being stolen, and potential conflict with parents and students who do not want to give up the devices. If a full-day prohibition is the goal, we would like to see language that requires the phones to be taken up and stored by campus administration rather than teachers. We understand the intent to allow districts to write their own policies; however, our concern is that districts will require educators to enforce this and this will lead to the issues outlined above.

We do very much appreciate the intent and spirit behind this bill, and we intend to continue to work with Rep. Fairly and her staff to ensure this bill gets stronger and potentially becomes something we can support.

For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.