

OFFERED BY COUNCILORS BENJAMIN J. WEBER, ENRIQUE PEPÉN, SHARON DURKAN,
BREADON, COLETTA ZAPATA, FITZGERALD, FLYNN, MEJIA, MURPHY, SANTANA,
WORRELL AND LOUIJEUNE



CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FIVE

ORDER FOR A HEARING TO DISCUSS THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

- WHEREAS,** There is no dispute that, for many teens, cellphone and social media usage are now ubiquitous, including in school; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Studies have shown that social media can pose significant risks to the mental health and brain development of adolescents. According to Mass General Brigham Psychologist J. Stuart Ablon, social media use has been linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and even eating disorders, especially in teens; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Accordingly, there is growing evidence that unrestricted use of smartphones by pupils at elementary and secondary schools during the schoolday interferes with their education, lowers pupil performance, particularly among low-achieving pupils, promotes cyberbullying, and contributes to an increase in teenage anxiety, depression, and even suicide; *and*
- WHEREAS,** According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), more than half of public school leaders (53 percent) feel that their students' academic performance has been negatively impacted by cell phone usage. More than two-thirds feel cell phones have had an adverse impact on their students' mental health (72 percent) and attention span (73 percent); *and*
- WHEREAS,** In an attempt to reduce distractions in the classroom, improve student focus, and potentially address mental health concerns, the NCES estimates that 77 percent of public schools have some form of ban on the use of cell phones in the classroom; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The London School of Economics and Political Science published a May 2015 study that found that test scores improved significantly at schools that banned mobile phone use, and that the most significant gains in pupil performance were made by the most disadvantaged and underachieving pupils. The study concluded that "schools could significantly reduce the education achievement gap by prohibiting mobile phone use in schools"; *and*

WHEREAS, The Los Angeles Unified School District has implemented a cell phone ban, with schools using designated storage containers or requiring students to store their devices themselves; and the State of California's Phone-Free School Act (AB 3216) will mandate that all school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education in California adopt policies limiting or prohibiting smartphone use by July 1, 2026; *and*

WHEREAS, Some schools in Boston, such as English High School, have already begun requiring students to place their phones in secure pouches during the school day with anecdotal results suggesting that it has benefitted students; *and*

WHEREAS, The public policy debate around smartphone bans in schools, however, is complex, with arguments both for and against restricting student cell phone use. Proponents argue that bans improve student focus, reduce distractions, and minimize bullying, while opponents emphasize the importance of digital literacy, the potential for educational uses, and the need for communication in emergencies; *and*

WHEREAS, As evidence of at least one positive impact resulting from social media usage in school, a recent study by Mesfin Awoke Bekalu, Rachel McCloud and Vish Viswanath for the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health showed that social media provided tangible mental health benefits for students who needed the kind of support they did not receive from their in-school peers, which was especially true for marginalized groups such as students of color and LGBTQIA2S+ students; ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss the impacts of social media and technology on adolescents in Boston Public Schools with representatives from Boston Public Schools, the Boston Public Health Commission, medical experts, parents, and students invited to attend.

Filed on: April 16, 2025