

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



## CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FIVE

**RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF  
FOSTERING DISTRACTION-FREE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS  
AND SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH  
IN BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
BY ESTABLISHING A DISTRICT-WIDE “BELL-TO-BELL” POLICY  
TO SUPPORT LIMITED USE OF  
MOBILE PHONES AND PERSONAL DEVICES**

**WHEREAS,** Well-crafted school policies that take a supportive rather than punitive approach to mobile phone and personal device usage during the school day can foster a greater sense of connection and belonging for students, support student mental health and social-emotional growth, and reduce distractions to learning and education; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Students of all ages have growing access to personal electronic devices, mobile phones, and social media; *and*

**WHEREAS,** There is growing evidence that social media and mobile electronic device usage pose risks to healthy adolescent brain development and induce damaging brain changes, leading to decreased attention spans, a loss of critical thinking and creativity, lessened impulse control, and impaired cognitive function; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Increased use of mobile phones and social media impacts adolescent mental health by contributing to social isolation, leading to increases in cyberbullying, and heightening risks of users experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Social media, which is used by 95% of American teenagers ages 13-17 and used “almost constantly” by one-third of those surveyed by Pew Research, poses a “profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents,” per the U.S. Surgeon General’s 2023 Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health, risks which are likely amplified in early adolescence; *and*

**WHEREAS,** New data in a peer-reviewed study from a Boston-based tech startup shows that one in twelve students spend more than two hours on their phones while in school, detracting from limited, critical learning time; *and*

**WHEREAS,** 90% of National Education Association members support school policies creating instructional time free of personal devices, while 83% of members support having entire school days free of personal devices with exceptions for medical and assistive-technology needs and other similar needs; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Educators attest to significant impacts of mobile phones and social media on the school environment, including posing distractions from learning; causing negative peer interactions; and leading to increases in cyberbullying, harassment, and hate incidents; *and*

**WHEREAS,** The impacts of mobile phone usage extend to students themselves, many of whom display shortened attention spans, increased anxiety, and underdeveloped social skills as a result of reduced social interactions amongst students; *and*

**WHEREAS,** The Boston City Council Committee on Education held a public hearing on August 12, 2025, regarding the impacts of social media and mobile phone usage on Boston Public Schools students, during which the Committee heard testimony from panelists regarding the potential benefits of establishing policies regarding the usage of mobile phones and personal devices in schools, as well as the need for additional input from students and community members, which is particularly necessary to ensure community buy-in for any policy implemented, and that students recognize and experience the benefits of these policies, rather than seeing them as punitive; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Over thirty states have already instituted state-wide policies regarding the use of mobile phones in schools, including New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, and schools that have already seen policies instituted have seen improved grades, test scores, mental health, and attendance; *and*

**WHEREAS,** The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that 77 percent of schools have some form of policies limiting the use of mobile phones in the classroom in order to promote a more productive learning environment and potentially address mental health concerns; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Schools with such policies report significant improvements in academic benefits, social-emotional benefits, instructional benefits, mental health benefits, and benefits for educators; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Amongst these reported benefits are increased academic engagement, higher test scores and stronger academic performance, improved student relations, increased socialization, development of stronger communication skills, decreased bullying both in-person and online, fewer discipline-related referrals, decreased stress and anxiety, improved educator morale and job satisfaction, and increased instructional time. **NOW, THEREFORE BE IT**

**RESOLVED:** That the Boston City Council declares its support for the existing bell-to-bell policies currently implemented in a limited number of Boston Public Schools to promote the intentional use of mobile phones, including systems in place to address emergencies; to ensure families and caregivers can readily contact students when needed, including ensuring private space is offered for those conversations; to support students with disabilities, language access needs, other needs for accessing mobile devices for assistive purposes during school hours; to address other extenuating circumstances; and to communicate the purpose and benefits of the policy to all students and families, so they recognize how it will support a healthier and more effective learning environment without punishing students;

***AND BE IT FURTHER***

**RESOLVED:** That the Boston City Council declares its support for the development and adoption of a comprehensive District-wide bell-to-bell policy for non-school issued Internet-enabled devices on school grounds in all K-12 Boston Public Schools that is fair, provides for the respectful treatment of all students, is free from the effects of implicit or explicit bias, promotes restorative and trauma-informed approaches to intervention for non-compliance, and which can be implemented without resorting to involving the legal system in response to student behavior;

***AND BE IT FURTHER***

**RESOLVED:** That the Boston City Council respectfully encourages the Boston School Committee and BPS Leadership to build on existing community engagement to further convene students, families, educators, mental health and education experts, and other community stakeholders to provide ongoing community leadership and feedback on the implementation of such policies;

***AND BE IT FURTHER***

**RESOLVED:** That the City Clerk is hereby requested to provide a copy of this resolution to the Mayor, to the Superintendent of Boston Public Schools, and to each member of the School Committee.

**Filed in Council:** September 10, 2025