



## News Coverage

Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts  
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### [Local school district leaders weigh in on proposed student cellphone ban on Beacon Hill](#)

By Anthony Cammalleri, Staff Writer, The Greenfield Recorder

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As a proposal to ban cellphone use in Massachusetts public schools makes its way through the state Legislature, districts from across the Pioneer Valley that have already enacted bans on student cellphone use during school hours claim they have seen heightened student engagement.

The state Senate approved [S.2561](#), “An Act to Promote Student Learning and Mental Health,” a bill calling for a statewide ban on cellphone use, bell-to-bell, in public schools on July 31. As the bill [now awaits approval](#) from the House of Representatives, it has gained support from various school leaders across the region who have already implemented phone bans in their districts.

In Greenfield, cellphones were originally banned during the school day at both the high school and middle school in 2022. The magnetic pouches where students’ cellphones are kept during the school day came from Yondr, headquartered in San Francisco, and were ordered for an initial start-up cost of \$16,000.

Interim Superintendent Roland Joyal said staff members at both schools have reported seeing increased student focus and engagement since the ban took effect.

“I talked to some of our principals and our teachers because ... the focus on their work has increased. The students’ focus on their work, generally, has gone up because students are paying more attention and they’re not worried about messages that are coming in or social media,” Joyal said. “They’ve also mentioned that their class discussions have benefited because people aren’t trying to sneak a look at their phone or put their head down or look at something in their lap.”

Joyal explained that a common argument against the cellphone use restriction in schools has been that a lack of access might hinder students’ ability to call for help during an emergency. He said he feels this argument is flawed, as schools will always maintain the ability to contact families during an emergency.

“We have people in our offices. If there was ever an emergency, we can always get in touch with the children,” Joyal said. “During an emergency, should there ever be one ... it’s beneficial not to have everybody on a cellphone so emergency personnel can respond and keep those wavelengths open for everybody.”

The Pioneer Valley Regional School District implemented a similar cellphone ban last school year, which was a resounding success, according to Principal Annie Scanlan-Emigh.

Scanlan-Emigh noted that a full blanket ban on phones is much more effective than prohibiting them in individual classrooms, because it spares teachers the task of having to “battle at the doorway in every single classroom” as students try to spend every possible second on their phone.

“When you walk into our cafeteria at lunch, you will see a cafeteria full of kids in conversations with other kids,” she said at a School Committee meeting in February. “It’s beautiful and we take this for granted because we grew up with it, but it is an unusual experience for our kids to be having and it’s really great.”

Pioneer Superintendent Patricia Kinsella, in an interview, noted that she supports the proposed legislation, citing improved student engagement and academic performance since the ban was implemented at Pioneer. She noted that, with the use of personal electronic devices — including smart watches, earbuds or tablets — prohibited in school, instances of cyberbullying have decreased as well.

“Before we implemented this policy, cellphones were visible all the time in classes. All the time. Kids were walking down hallways and I’d say 95% of kids in the cafeteria had cellphones out at lunch,” she said. “This year, it’s been a sea change. ... The Attorney General’s Office heard about what we were doing and reached out to us. They used Pioneer in their toolkit that they published on helping schools figure out how to deal with the scourge of cellphones and social media and their negative impact on adolescents.”

Mohawk Trail Regional School District School Committee Chair Martha Thurber also expressed support for the legislation, explaining that her district implemented a bell-to-bell ban on an experimental basis last school year and, given the program’s success, will continue it during the 2025-2026 school year.

Other local districts, such as the Frontier Regional School District, have decided not to enact a full-day ban on cellphones. Superintendent Darius Modestow said he believes school districts should be responsible for implementing their own phone policies, not the state government.

“When the state gets a hold of something like this, they’re going to tell us how to run a school when they’re not educators,” Modestow said. “At Frontier, we’ve always had the mentality that you can’t ignore the fact that cellphones have been integrated into our society, and so you have to have rules that are reasonable.”

Frontier, Modestow said, has implemented a policy requiring that high school students store their phones in containers or charging racks while they’re in class. He said in the event that a student needs to use his or her cellphone for an appropriate purpose, such as notifying their parents of a change in schedule, Yondr pouches would complicate things.

“The pouches, they look good in theory, but a simple magnet opens them. We can invest \$20,000 in putting in a pouch program and then someone can just use a fish magnet to open all of them. They’re teenagers, so they’re going to find ways around whatever rule you put in the place,” he said. “I’d be curious to see where this [legislation] ends up, and then you just get concerned with feel-good laws that don’t have the teeth. It just becomes more compliance for districts.”

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