



ALBERTA
EDUCATION

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Calgary - Bow*

June 20, 2024

Dear parents:

On June 17, Alberta's government introduced new restrictions on the use of cellphones and access to social media in schools. Beginning this fall, we will no longer permit the use of personal mobile devices in classrooms, or access to social media sites on school networks. In recent months and years, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia have all done the same.

Alberta's new standards were developed following months of consultation with those most impacted, including students, parents, and teachers. The feedback was clear: more than 90 per cent of 68,000 survey respondents said they are concerned about cellphone use in schools.

In addition to our stakeholder engagement, my department reviewed recent research and statistics regarding the impact of mobile devices and social media use in classrooms and found reports of increased distraction, instances of inappropriate usage, negative impacts on learning and mental health, and an increase in cyberbullying.

According to the 2023 UNESCO report on Technology in Education it can take up to 20 minutes for a student to refocus on learning after checking their phone, which in turn impacts recall and comprehension.

A 2023 Statistics Canada report found that one in every four Canadian teens has experienced cyberbullying, ranging from online or text message threats, to hurtful information posted about them online, to being excluded from virtual communities. Another Statistics Canada study reported mental wellness rates dropped from 77.9 per cent in 2015 to 62.3 per cent in 2021 in young Canadians between 12 and 17.

The new restrictions announced June 17 will answer the call for a standard approach to how schools navigate these policies in Alberta, while still affording those authorities the autonomy and flexibility needed to implement policies that best meet the needs of their students and communities.

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While schools *must* make exceptions for health or medical reasons, or learning needs, these restrictions are decisive and clear. This fall, students will return to class, but their devices will not. By doing this, we're prioritizing learning and protecting student mental health.

Your school authority will communicate the specific details of their personal mobile device and social media policy in the coming months. This will include information on whether access to personal mobile devices is being limited during class or whether the school will be going further and not allowing them to be used during the school day. School authority policies will also outline where and how mobile devices will be stored during class time, how to apply for an exemption if your child has health or medical needs that require the use of a mobile device during class time, and the consequences for violations of the policy.

If you have specific questions regarding your school's specific policy, please contact your school authority, as they will be best positioned to speak to how these restrictions will be implemented at the local level.

As a parent, I am happy to know that when kids head back to the classroom this fall, their devices won't be with them. Students should be fully focused on learning and developing healthy social skills away from screens.

I'm proud of the world-class education system we've built in Alberta. I trust these changes will only make that system stronger by minimizing distractions and protecting our children's mental health and well-being.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Demetrios Nicolaides". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Demetrios Nicolaides ECA PhD
Minister of Education