



Jared B. Vance, M.Ed. - Principal

Evelyn Folcarelli, M.Ed. - Assistant Principal
Michael P. Monahan, M.Ed. - Assistant Principal

Date: April 23, 2025

To: The House Committee on Education

Re: House Bill 5598 - Restricting Personal Electronic Devices in Schools (In support of)

Chairperson, Members of the Committee, and Honorable Representatives,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding **House Bill 5598**, which would require all public school districts in Rhode Island to develop and implement policies restricting the use of personal electronic devices, such as cell phones, during the school day.

As **Principal of Rogers High School** in the **Newport Public Schools**, I stand in strong support of this bill. It represents a **thoughtful and necessary first step** by the General Assembly to acknowledge and address the growing impact of personal devices on student learning, behavior, and mental health.

For years, educators have struggled to balance the benefits of technology with the increasing toll of constant connectivity. In our classrooms, we see daily how **cell phone use—particularly for social media—undermines student attention, reduces academic performance, and contributes to social and emotional challenges.**

Research continues to affirm what we see on the ground:

- A 2023 study published in *Educational Psychology Review* found that students who used phones in class experienced significantly **lower retention and academic performance**, even when usage was brief or seemingly unrelated to instruction.
- The *American Psychological Association* reported in 2022 that **adolescents who spend more time on social media** during the school day report **higher rates of anxiety, depression, and disrupted sleep cycles**—factors that impact not just their personal health, but also their readiness to learn.

At Rogers High School, and throughout the Newport district, we are working actively to create policies and procedures that promote **engaged, focused learning environments**. However, the absence of statewide standards or expectations places a significant burden on local districts, often leading to **inconsistent enforcement**, pushback from families, and a lack of clarity for students and staff alike.

By passing House Bill 5598, you are offering more than just a mandate — you are providing **support and credibility** to the work we are doing on the ground. Your leadership helps reinforce the message that a **distraction-free school environment is not only beneficial but essential** in preparing students for success beyond the classroom.

Moreover, this legislation centers the **well-being of students**—acknowledging the pressures they face in today’s digital culture and helping to establish healthy boundaries. It also recognizes that **cell phone addiction is not just a buzzword**, but a documented concern with real cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences for adolescents.

Still, we believe that this bill can be the **foundation for even broader support**. We encourage the state to follow this initial step with **further guidance, resources, and best-practice models** that districts can adopt. A unified, statewide approach would offer relief to schools that are struggling with the fallout of phone overuse, while also ensuring **equity in enforcement and access to solutions**.

In closing, House Bill 5598 reflects a clear understanding of what educators have known for some time: that learning thrives when students are fully present, free from unnecessary digital distractions, and supported by policies that prioritize their development and health. We thank you for your leadership, and we urge you to move this bill forward as a critical step in supporting Rhode Island’s students, families, and school communities.

Respectfully,

Jared B. Vance M.Ed.

Principal - Rogers High School