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Briefing Doc: Phone and Social Media Free Schools Model Legislation

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The Problems:

1) **A Youth Mental Health Crisis** - The causes of the current youth mental health crisis are multifaceted, **but the weight of the evidence clearly shows a significant relationship with exposure to social media and other digital and online products.** US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy has said that children need device-free spaces – including schools – and has called on Congress to require warning labels on social media. Dr. Murthy says that, "the risk of not acting could be someone's life." https://edhub.ama-assn.org/jn-learning/video-player/18901909

2) **Disruption to Academic and Social Skills -** All children deserve a safe school environment to learn, and experience social growth – free from cyberbullying and other harm. Unfortunately, the introduction of personal devices in school environments has had the opposite effect.

3) **Teachers see the impact on student focus and learning.** A National Education Association poll showed that 83% of teachers support an all-day phone ban. https://www.nea.org/resource-library/impact-social-media-and-personal-devices-mental-health

The Solution:

Phone-free schools for improved academic focus, mental health, and social cohesion. A state statute mandating all personal electronic devices be turned off, securely locked away, and inaccessible from first bell to last bell is needed. This would ensure our investment in our children's future and their well-being is not squandered. Such a law will lead to a safer school environment - a break from cyberbullying and other online harm - will improve children's mental health and social development, and will allow school leaders/administrators/staff more time to focus on more important work.

What the Legislation Says:

1) All K-12 Schools (public & independent) must implement a policy where all personal electronic devices are turned off, securely locked away, and inaccessible from first bell to last bell. Exceptions for medical and special education needs.

2) Schools and school districts are prohibited from using social media to communicate directly with students (e.g. academic classes, school clubs, sports teams).

MYTHS:

1) **This is going to be an expensive, unfunded mandate.** There are low cost options (pencil pouches, manilla envelopes, phone lockers) for storing student devices.

2) **This will increase work for administrators and cause bottlenecks, causing kids to be late for class and miss buses home.** Schools with over 2,000 students have successfully gone device-free. At these schools teachers and administrators spend less time on dysregulated students, school fights and cyberbullying incidents.

3) **Gun violence in school.** School safety experts recommend that students not have phones during a school shooting or similar emergency. Their attention should be squarely on the adult in charge and what is occurring in real-time.

4) **We need to teach kids to use these phones responsibly and prepare them for the real world.** We need to prepare children with communication and media literacy skills, as well as the ability to focus and think critically. We can educate without giving students access to devices. Do we ask kids to take drugs so they can learn how to manage drug addiction?

5) **Phones and social media are a lifeline for marginalized groups who need to access their support systems during the school day.** The data show that marginalized children are harmed more often by social media than other groups.
https://fairplayforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/unfairimpacts.pdf
It is imperative that schools do more to create safe environments for marginalized groups, but introducing devices that also cause significant harm to students is not the answer.

6) **Parents should be able to reach their children at all times.** Developmental psychiatrists say there should be no better place to allow children to explore their independence than in the safety of the school community. Additionally, student anxiety decreases when phones are removed for the day.

7) **Constituents should be part of the decision making.** While it's essential to include the voices of parents and community members, they may not have access to independent research on the negative impacts of phones on child development. Parent's concerns are valid, but they should not be confused with the goals of phone-free school policies, which are designed to create a safer and more focused learning environment. Studies show that removing phones during the school day can reduce student anxiety and support a healthier educational atmosphere.