



Heads Up Advocacy Brief

Reflecting a growing international movement toward phone-free schools, all ten Canadian provinces now have policies in place restricting the use of cell phones and other personal digital devices in primary and secondary schools. However, these policies vary significantly across jurisdictions, resulting in a patchwork of rules—many of which require strengthening. Sustained success relies on active buy-in from governments, school boards, principals, teachers, parents, and students.

This advocacy brief equips advocates with the evidence needed to engage provincial governments and school boards in advancing durable policies, consistently applied.

The Case For Phone-Free Schools

The digital landscape for Canadian youth has shifted drastically, creating an environment that undermines learning and safety.

We Need To Act Now.

- **Widespread phone access:** 93% of young Canadians¹(aged 14–17) have their own smartphone; 85% received their first device before the age of 14.
- **The screen time surge:** As of 2022, Canadian adolescents' **average daily screen time**² surged to nearly eight hours—four times the **national recommendations**³.
- **The safety risk:** Youth exposure to online harms and personal harassment is **30–50% higher**⁴ than in the rest of the population.
- **Worse learning outcomes:** Excessive screen time has been linked to increased student distraction, more cyberbullying, and **lower test scores**⁵.
- **Public support:** More than four in five Canadians (81%) **support**⁶ school phone restrictions, with more support for stronger approaches like bell-to-bell bans.

References available at:
dais.ca/headsup/references

Calls To Action

To support provincial and district-level policy development, the following actions align with emerging best practices for phone-free schools

- **Articulate a clear rationale**, grounded in public support and evidence regarding student distraction, learning, and well-being.
- **Implement Bell-to-Bell Standards:** Strengthen guidance to ensure policies cover the entire school day, including breaks and lunch, ensuring expectations are clearly communicated and consistently enforced.
- **Adopt “Off and Away” Storage:** Develop policies where phones are stored in lockers, pouches, or secure boxes rather than pockets or bags, as physical separation performs significantly better than “no show” rules.
- **Proactively Engage Key Groups:** Involve students, teachers, and parents early and consistently to build the consensus necessary for effective implementation.
- **Track Implementation and Impacts:** Commit to ongoing evaluation to identify implementation challenges and assess long-term academic and social impacts.

Detailed frameworks for drafting these policies and managing school-level transitions are available in our [Policymaker Playbook](#) and [School Implementation Guide](#) available at the QR code below.

Impact at a Glance

Evidence from around the globe shows that when schools move to full day phone restrictions, benefits to learning, school climate and student mental health follow.



Academic Benefits

In [Spain](#)⁷, PISA scores rose by the equivalent of 0.6 - 1.0 years of learning in math and science following a ban. In [Florida](#)⁸, test scores rose by approx. 1.1 percentiles in the second year of implementation



School Climate

In [South Australia](#)⁹, bell-to-bell policies led to a 57% decrease in social media issues and a 38% decrease in device-related behavioral incidents



Educator Satisfaction

A survey of 20,000+ [U.S.](#)¹⁰ educators linked strict, school-wide policies to higher teacher satisfaction



Mental health and Well-being

In [Norway](#)¹¹, phone bans reduced bullying for all students and led to fewer mental health-related healthcare visits among girls.

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