New Jersey Enacts "Bell-to-Bell" Cellphone Ban: What School Districts Need to Know

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In one of his final acts in office, on January 8, Governor Murphy signed into law legislation requiring school districts to adopt policies barring students from using cellphones in classrooms. Known as a “bell-to-bell ban,” New Jersey joins a growing list of states enacting similar measures to prevent students from losing focus during instructional time by texting or using social media, as student mental health concerns have increased in recent years. These efforts have generated bipartisan support and the endorsement of teachers, administrators, and parents across the state.

The legislation directs the New Jersey Commissioner of Education to issue guidelines restricting student use of cell phones and other internet-enabled devices during school hours, on school buses, and at school-sanctioned events. Once these guidelines are released, Boards of Education must adopt corresponding policies to take effect in the 2026-2027 school year.

Last Fall, Governor Murphy's Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents (the Commission) recommended delaying social media access until age 16. The Commission also recommended banning cell phones in schools. These measures aim to reduce cyberbullying, sleep loss, and declines in mental health in school-age children.

Last month, the New Jersey Department of Education awarded 86 grants to school districts through the “Phone-Free Schools” Grant Program to support implementation of the bell-to-bell ban for students in grades 6-12.

With the 2026-2027 school year approaching, school districts should work with their counsel to review existing cellphone policies and include a bell-to-bell ban.

Boards should engage a variety of stakeholders in drafting these policies. Doing so ensures the new cell phone policy can be seamlessly implemented in practice from the perspectives of school administrators, teachers, and advisors. It is also advisable for boards to conduct focus groups or listening sessions with parents, older students, and community members. These steps will promote widespread understanding and acceptance of the new procedures and protocols, which should flow from allowing stakeholders the opportunity to collaborate and contribute to the final policy outcome.

Porzio's team of education attorneys is available to assist employers with compliance with the new law and advise on future guidelines from the Department of Education regarding the legislation's parameters.