



SYNOPSIS:

Under existing law, a local board of education may permit a pupil to carry or use a pocket pager, cellular telephone, or other electronic communication device while on school property.

This bill would establish the Freeing our Classrooms of Unnecessary Screens for Safety (FOCUS) Act to prohibit a student from using, operating, or possessing a wireless communications device on public elementary or secondary school grounds during the instructional day, subject to certain exceptions and subject to written policies adopted by a local board of education.

This bill would require each local board of education to adopt an Internet safety policy that addresses student access to the Internet on district-owned devices.

This bill would also require students to receive instruction on the risks and benefits of social media and how to use social media safely before admission to the eighth grade.



A BILL
TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

Relating to public K-12 education; to establish the Freeing our Classrooms of Unnecessary Screens for Safety (FOCUS) Act; to prohibit the use, operation, and possession of wireless communication devices on certain public school properties; to require local boards of education to adopt an Internet safety policy; to add Section 16-40-13 to the Code of Alabama 1975, to require students to complete a social media safety course prior to entering the eighth grade; and to repeal Section 16-1-27, Code of Alabama 1975, providing for the use of electronic communication devices on school property.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

Section 1. The Legislature finds and declares the following:

(1) Each student in an Alabama public K-12 school should be college-ready or career-ready upon high school graduation.

(2) Many high school teachers believe that cell phones and other electronic communication devices are distracting students in the classroom.

(3) Studies have shown that cell phones and other electronic communication devices are negatively impacting learning outcomes.



(4) Studies have shown that increased social media usage may negatively affect the mental health of school-aged children.

Section 2. For the purposes of this act, the following terms have the following meanings:

(1) INSTRUCTIONAL DAY. The period of time during which a public elementary or secondary school is open and in session for purpose of meeting the minimum number of instructional days or hours pursuant to Section 16-13-231, Code of Alabama 1975. The term also includes class transitions, lunch, non-instructional times, and any other time specified in a wireless communication device policy.

(2) WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICE. A cellular telephone, tablet computer, laptop computer, pager, gaming device, or any other portable electronic device identified in a wireless communication device policy that has the capability of exchanging voice, messaging, or other data communication with another electronic device.

(3) WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICY. A written policy adopted by a local board of education to implement this act.

Section 3. (a) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, no student shall use or operate any wireless communication device in any public elementary or secondary school building or on the grounds thereof during the instructional day.

(b) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, no student may possess a wireless communication device in any public elementary or secondary school building or on the grounds



thereof during the instructional day unless the wireless communication device is turned off and stored off their person in a locker, car, or similar storage location.

(c) Notwithstanding subsections (a) and (b), a student may use, operate, or possess a wireless communication device in a public elementary or secondary school building or on the grounds thereof during the instructional day in any of the following circumstances:

(1) The use, operation, or possession is pursuant to the student's Individualized Education Program, Individualized Accommodation Plan, Section 504 plan, or Individualized Health Plan.

(2) The use, operation, or possession is for educational or learning purposes under the supervision of local board of education personnel.

(3) The use, operation, or possession occurs during an emergency threatening the life or safety of the student or another person.

(d) No later than July 1, 2025, each local board of education shall adopt a wireless communication device policy. The wireless communication device policy shall include consequences for violations. The local board of education shall reasonably distribute the wireless communication device policy to students, parents, faculty, staff, and the State Board of Education.

Section 4. (a) No later than July 1, 2025, each local board of education shall adopt an Internet safety policy that



addresses student access to the Internet on devices owned by the local board of education.

(b) The policy shall do all of the following:

(1) Limit Internet access by students to only age-appropriate subject matters and materials deemed age-appropriate pursuant to the policy.

(2) Protect the safety and security of students when using email, chat rooms, and other forms of direct electronic communication.

(3) Prohibit access by students to unlawfully obtained data or information, including hacking, and other unlawful online activity by students.

(4) Prohibit access to websites, web applications, or software that exposes students to the disclosure, use, or dissemination of their personal information.

(5) Prohibit students from accessing social media platforms, except when expressly directed by a teacher solely for educational purposes.

(c) The principal shall be responsible for ensuring consistent compliance with the policy by school personnel.

Section 5. (a) Each certificated staff member employed by the local board education shall complete an annual written anonymous survey regarding the implementation of the wireless communication device policy and to measure uniform compliance within the school.

(b) On or before October 1, 2025, the State Department of Education shall develop a survey to assess the levels of participation and compliance with the wireless communication



device policy. On or before June 1, each subsequent year, the annual survey results shall be submitted by the principal to the local superintendent of education, local board of education, and the State Board of Education for publication on the website of the State Department of Education.

(c) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, failure of a school to meet the minimum standards of uniform compliance with the wireless communication device policy or this act shall result in a deduction of 30 percent of the common purchase allocation for the school.

Section 6. Section 16-40-13 is added to the Code of Alabama to read as follows:

§16-40-13

(a) No later than July 1, 2025, the State Department of Education shall develop and approve an asynchronous, digitally delivered course that addresses the risks of using social media and how to use social media safely.

(b) At a minimum, the course shall include the following topics:

(1) The benefits of safely using age-appropriate social media platforms, including career and resume building for future academic or employment opportunities; sharing information with family and friends; and safely connecting with other users with similar interests.

(2) The risks of social media use including its negative effects on mental health, including addiction; the distribution of misinformation on social media; how social



media manipulates behavior; and the permanency of sharing materials online.

(3) Safe practices for using social media including how to report suspicious behavior; how to identify cyberbullying, phishing and scam communications, predatory behavior, and human trafficking; and maintaining personal security and preventing oversharing of personal information.

(c) The State Department of Education shall make the course available online and each local board of education shall reasonably notify parents of its availability. Each local board of education shall deliver the course to all students prior to entering the eighth grade and shall make the course available to students in grades eight through 12 who transfer to the school district or who otherwise have not completed the course.

(d) The State Board of Education may adopt rules to implement this section.

Section 7. Section 16-1-27, Code of Alabama 1975, providing for the use of electronic communications devices on school property, is repealed.

Section 8. This act shall become effective immediately.