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Across the United States, there has been a growing trend of school districts and state governments implementing policies to regulate cell phone use in schools to minimize distractions and support the well-being of students. These policies vary by state, some requiring specific actions, others offering incentives, and a few providing guidelines or recommendations for districts to follow.

States, like California and Florida, have adopted mandatory laws requiring districts to develop cellphone policies, while others, like Alaska and Connecticut, have issued recommendations for local districts to consider. Several states, such as Arkansas and Delaware, incentivize districts with funding to implement cellphone restrictions, typically for purchasing storage solutions such as pouches or lockable bags.

However, it is important to note that many of the laws that have been enacted by states provide exceptions to cellphone restrictions for students with health-related needs or those with IEP/504 plans. This ensures that policies are flexible and accommodate individual student requirements.

Some states, including Florida and Pennsylvania, emphasize the importance of educating students and parents on responsible cell phone use, particularly regarding social media and its impact on mental health. Other states have launched pilot programs to test the effectiveness of cellphone policies and gather data for future decision-making.

This diverse approach shows there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The trend is toward providing local control over the regulation and thoughtful consideration of how cell phones impact the learning environment and student well-being.

We would be supportive of the requirement for school districts to develop and implement a district wide cell phone policy that is comprehensive and developmentally appropriate. Cell phone policies developed by local school districts must prioritize the mental health, safety, and educational success of all students. As mobile technology continues to play an increasingly significant role in our lives, it is crucial that schools take a thoughtful, balanced approach to cell phone use that aligns with the needs of students at different developmental stages.

A well-designed cell phone policy should:

- **Differentiate by Grade and Educational Level:** Recognizing that students at different ages and stages of development have varying needs and capabilities in terms of managing technology, policies should be tailored to reflect these differences. For younger students, policies may focus on limiting phone use to prevent distractions, while older students may need guidelines that strike a balance between allowing appropriate use and maintaining academic focus. This approach ensures that students receive the appropriate support and boundaries for their developmental stage.

- **Reflect Input from Students, Teachers, and Parents:** Engaging key stakeholders - students, teachers, and parents - in the policy-making process is essential to creating a fair and effective cell phone policy. Their insights provide valuable perspectives on the challenges and benefits of cell phone use in schools. Parents and teachers are uniquely positioned to identify what works for students both in and outside of the classroom, while students themselves can offer important feedback on how technology impacts their learning experience and mental health. Local law enforcement and district security personnel can provide input into the safety aspects of proposed cell phone policies.
- **Preserve Local Autonomy for Effective Existing Policies:** While a statewide policy can set guidelines, districts with proven policies should be allowed flexibility to continue their approach. Tailoring policies to local needs, with the involvement of students, parents, and educators, increases community buy-in and enhances the likelihood of successful implementation.
- **Promote Responsible Digital Citizenship Through Comprehensive Education for Students and Parents:** Schools are well positioned to educate students and parents on the responsible use of technology and social media. Instead of banning digital devices outright, schools should integrate lessons into the curriculum to foster lifelong digital literacy, balance, and informed decision-making. This education should include topics such as device etiquette, privacy, time management, and the potential risks of digital technology, including cyberbullying, digital addiction, and mental health impacts. Additionally, educational initiatives for both students and parents can provide tools for healthy social media use, screen time management, and support strategies, empowering families to navigate the complexities of the digital age together.
- **Consider Public Safety Concerns:** The availability of phones during emergencies, such as lockdowns or lockouts, presents a significant safety argument. Policies should allow students to have access to phones in life-threatening situations, striking a balance between safety and minimizing classroom distractions.
- **Exempt Approved Uses Under IEP/504 Plans:** Recognizing that some students may require accommodation due to specific learning needs, it is important that cell phone policies be flexible enough to account for exceptions under Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 plans. For students who rely on mobile technology for communication, learning tools, or support with disabilities, the policy should ensure that cell phone use is not only allowed but encouraged as part of their educational experience.
- **Recognize Implementation and Enforcement Challenges:** To ensure effectiveness, any policy must address practical enforcement issues. Providing schools with clear guidelines, resources for staff training, and a focus on consistency will mitigate enforcement challenges and prevent undue burden on educators. School districts should be encouraged to include cell phone enforcement provisions in their district Code of Conduct.

By empowering school districts to implement individualized cell phone policies that are thoughtful, flexible, and inclusive of all students' needs, we can foster an environment where technology supports rather than detracts from students' educational experiences. A well-crafted policy will contribute to better focus, healthier relationships with technology, and an overall improvement in student mental health and success. Cell phones and cell phone use is ubiquitous and attempts to ban or limit access runs counter to everyday life experience. Schools are supposed to educate kids and that includes the education of how to use tools like cell phones effectively. Banning them is akin to ignoring the problem.

We believe that through careful policy development and collaboration, we can create school environments where students thrive both academically and personally in the digital age without sacrificing local control.