

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 962 (Hoover) – As Introduced February 20, 2025

SUBJECT: Pupil safety: comprehensive school safety plans: use of smartphones

SUMMARY: Requires that if a comprehensive school safety plan addresses the use of smartphones by students, the provisions not conflict with the requirement that local educational agencies (LEAs) adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use of smartphones while students are at a schoolsite or under the supervision of an employee of the LEA. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires that if a comprehensive school safety plan addresses the use of smartphones by students, the provisions not conflict with the requirement that LEAs adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use of smartphones while students are at a schoolsite or under the supervision of an employee of the LEA and the accompanying exceptions.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the governing body of a school district, county office of education (COE), or charter school to develop and adopt a policy by July 1, 2026, to limit or prohibit the use of smartphones by students while they are at school or under the supervision of a school employee, and to update the policy every five years. (Education Code (EC) 48901.7)
- 2) Prohibits the policy in (1) from restricting a student’s use of a smartphone under any of the following circumstances:
 - a) In the case of an emergency, or in response to a perceived threat of danger;
 - b) When a teacher or administrator grants permission to a student to possess or use a smartphone, subject to any reasonable limitation imposed by that teacher or administrator;
 - c) When a licensed physician and surgeon determines that the possession or use of a smartphone is necessary for the health or well-being of the student; or
 - d) When the possession or use of a smartphone is required in a student’s individualized education program (IEP). (EC 48901.7)
- 3) Requires each school district or county office of education (COE) to be responsible for the overall development of all comprehensive school safety plans for its schools operating kindergarten or any of grades 1 through 12. (EC 32281)
- 4) Specifies that the comprehensive school safety plan must include an assessment of the current status of school crime committed on school campuses and at school-related functions and identification of appropriate strategies and programs to provide or maintain a high level of school safety, and address the school’s procedures for complying with existing laws related to school safety, including child abuse reporting procedures; disaster procedures; an earthquake emergency procedure system; policies regarding pupils who commit specified

acts that would lead to suspension or expulsion; procedures to notify teachers of dangerous pupils; a discrimination and harassment policy; the provisions of any schoolwide dress code; procedures for safe ingress and egress of pupils, parents, and school employees to and from school; a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning; rules and procedures on school discipline; procedures for conducting tactical responses to criminal incidents, including procedures related to individuals with guns on school campuses and at school-related functions; accommodations for students with special needs in case of emergency; procedures related to severe fires, including a communication, refuge, and evacuation plan; procedures to respond to incidents involving an individual experiencing a sudden cardiac arrest or a similar life-threatening medical emergency while on school grounds; and a protocol for responding to a student suffering from an opioid overdose. (EC 32282)

- 5) Requires the petition to establish a charter school to include the development of a school safety plan with specified safety topics aligned with the requirements for a school district's comprehensive school safety plan. (EC 47605 and 47605.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: The Office of Legislative Counsel has keyed this bill as non-fiscal.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “AB 3216 was signed into law in 2024 requiring all schools to adopt a student smartphone policy limiting their use during the school day by July 2026. With this forthcoming requirement, there is anticipated confusion in regards to any potential conflicts between student smartphone policies and school safety plans when responding to an emergency. AB 962 would provide that unless a school’s comprehensive safety plan includes language that addresses student smartphone use during a school emergency, the student smartphone access requirements set by law in 2024 must apply. Eliminating this confusion will ensure smooth coordination amongst emergency responders (police, fire, EMTs) and school officials, and further protect the collective safety of students, teachers, and administrators.”

This bill would prohibit school safety plan provisions regarding the use of smartphones by students from conflicting with current law, which states that students should not be prohibited from possessing or using a smartphone in the case of an emergency or in response to a perceived threat of danger.

Smartphones and emergencies. School safety experts suggest that students use of cell phones can impact school safety in a number of ways. Potential positive impacts may include the following:

- During a crisis, cell phones allow students to notify their parents that they’re safe and keep family members updated on the situation;
- Allows students to clarify to their parents any rumors that may be circulating on social media;
- Allows emergency responders to send directions to the students; and
- Students can stay updated on the situation through news outlets, as they may otherwise not have access to such information.

There are also potential negative consequences of students having access to smartphones during an emergency, including:

- Student use of cell phones during an unfolding emergency can distract their attention from safety and emergency response directions being given by school staff;
- Cell phone use by students can hamper rumor control and, in doing so, disrupt and delay effective public safety personnel response;
- A ringing or vibrating cell phone can reveal to a shooter where hiding places are; and
- Cell phone use by students can impede public safety response by accelerating parental and community arrival at the scene of an emergency during times when officials may be attempting to evacuate students to another site.

In addition, it is possible that hundreds or thousands of students and others rushing to use their cell phones in a crisis could potentially overload cell phone systems in some areas and thus hamper first responders' lines of communication. Therefore the use of cell phones by students and others in the immediate school community could potentially decrease, not increase, school safety during a crisis.

School safety plans. Existing law requires each school to develop a school safety plan that includes procedures and policies to ensure student and staff safety at a school site. The components of the plan range from procedures for safe ingress and egress of pupils, parents, and school employees; to disaster and emergency procedures, such as those during and after earthquakes; to behavioral policies, such as discrimination and harassment policies.

The school safety plan is developed by a school site council or a school safety planning committee. Current law requires a school to submit the school safety plan to the school district or COE for approval and requires the school district or COE to annually notify the CDE of any schools that have not complied with the requirement to develop a school safety plan.

Arguments in support. The Association of California School Administrators writes, "Under current law, all schools serving K-12 students are required annually to adopt a Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) to address campus risks, such as natural and man-made disasters, to prepare for emergencies, and to create a safe, secure learning environment for students and school personnel. The CSSP, developed in collaboration with school communities and emergency responders, often includes policy limiting student smartphone use during emergencies unless at the direction of school personnel. This is for several reasons including mitigating the spread of misinformation as well as protecting against location sharing that could inadvertently increase the risk for a student and those around them.

AB 962 is proactively helping LEAs avoid confusion that may arise with the annual CSSP adoption process and July 1, 2026, deadline to enact a student smartphone limitation policy (pursuant to Education Code Section 48901.7). This is because current law related to student smartphone use policies provides some exceptions to restricting smartphone use, including in the case of an emergency, or in response to a threat of danger. Our members have expressed concerns about potential inconsistencies with their CSSP and we believe addressing the issue now will help ensure a more seamless policy adoption and revision process.

To be clear, AB 962 does not seek to create additional content for the CSSP, nor mandate smartphone restrictions in emergencies. Rather, the measure seeks to limit confusion by stating that a CSSP may address smartphone use in an emergency as a permitted exception to mandatory access requirements.”

Related legislation. AB 453 (Muratsuchi) of the 2025-26 Session would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), in consultation with the State Board of Education (SBE), to convene a stakeholder workgroup on school safety by July 1, 2026, and for the workgroup to make recommendations on the development and approval process as well as the required elements of a comprehensive school safety plan.

AB 3216 (Hoover and Muratsuchi) Chapter 500, Statutes of 2024, requires, rather than allows, a governing board of an LEA, COE, or a charter school no later than July 1, 2026, to develop, adopt, and update every five years a policy, to limit or prohibit the use by its pupils of smartphones while the pupils are at a schoolsite or while the pupils are under the supervision and control of an employee of that LEA, COE, and charter school.

SB 1283 (Stern) Chapter 891, Statutes of 2024, authorizes a school district, a COE, or a charter school to adopt a policy to limit or prohibit students from using social media while at a schoolsite or under the supervision and control of an employee of the school district, COE, or charter school.

AB 272 (Muratsuchi) Chapter 42, Statutes of 2019, provides that a student shall not be prohibited from possessing or using a smartphone under specified circumstances, and authorizes governing bodies to adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the use of smartphones by students while at school.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Association of California School Administrators (Sponsor)
California Association of School Business Officials
Small School Districts Association

Opposition

None on file

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