



A Bi-Partisan Bill for Back to School

The end of August is upon us. I hope everyone enjoyed their local fairs, barbecues, and family gatherings. With summer ending, a majority of our state's children will be returning to the classroom in less than two weeks. This new school year will be an exciting time for new beginnings.

Underpinning the excitement are some lingering negative effects I want to address. Since the COVID pandemic, I have read several articles, including a series titled, "Kids in Crisis" in our local newspapers. This series addressed the mental health pressures facing our youth.

These issues are discussed at our family gatherings and even our legislative committees have incorporated these pressing matters into their work (i.e. Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families; and the Assembly Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Prevention.)

One of the many triggers to social anxiety and negative mental health outcomes is the prevalence of smartphones. This is well documented in the 2020 documentary, *The Social Dilemma*. This film analyzes the negative social effects of social media and how the companies that operate the various media platforms attempt to grasp as much of your attention as possible.

With all of that said, there is a push in several states to push cellphone restrictions in the classroom. From red to blue states, legislatures across the country are coalescing around the idea that too much screen time is a negative mental health outcome. More succinctly, they are a significant distraction in the classroom and lead to a loss in learning.

Last year, Florida passed the first state law to limit cellphone use. Their law bans cellphone use during instructional time and the school's Wi-Fi prohibits access to social media sites. Indiana, Ohio, and Virginia have followed suit. California's governor, Gavin Newsom, signaled he would sign a bill going through their legislature. In addition, the largest school district in the nation, New York City, will follow through with these restrictions this upcoming school year.

Teachers are constantly battling with students over cellphone use and enforcement and punishment policies vary wildly leading to confusion from school to school and district to district. I plan to propose a new state law to alleviate this burden on our teachers and to take away this distraction from our students. I believe this will be a positive policy reform in our schools.