

A bipartisan bill introduced in Kansas to prohibit students across the state from using cell phones during school hours has support from more than two-thirds of the Kansas Senate, including leaders from both parties. HUGO PHAN/KMUW/KANSAS NEWS SERVICE

Kansas eyes school cell ban

By DANIEL CAUDILL
Kansas News Service

A bipartisan bill introduced in Kansas would prohibit students across the state from using cell phones during school hours.

The bill would ban phones during "instructional time," which would be from the start of the school day until dismissal at the end of the day.

During that time, students would have to turn off their phones and store them in a secure, inaccessible location.

If it becomes law, school districts would have to comply by Sept. 1. Districts would have to set their own policies on enforcing the ban and disciplining students who violate it.

SENATE LEADERS from both the Republican and Democratic parties are supporting the bill. It has 28 co-sponsors in the Senate, which is 70% of the Senate's members.

Those who support the ban say it would improve the quality of learning time and help students form more meaningful relationships with their teachers and peers.

"Phone-free schools give students space to think, build authentic human relationships, and protect student mental health from constant digital pressure," said Senate Majority Leader Chase Blasi, a Republican from Andale, in a release.

"The longer phones stay in classrooms, the harder it becomes to undo the damage."

Some administrators have concerns about potential liability if a student's phone is stolen or damaged while in the school's possession. And some parents say they want to be able to quickly reach their children in case of an emergency.

IN OCTOBER 2024, a 36-member task force on screen time recommended to the Kansas Board of Education that school districts ban cell phones. At the time, some task force members expressed concerns

about a total ban.

"I need to be able to text my parents ... or my boss. If a practice is canceled really last minute, I need to be able to communicate that," said Ananya Argawal, a student in the Blue Valley district near Kansas City.

The state BOE ultimately opted not to pass any statewide restrictions.

The bill would make an exception for students who need to use a cell phone or similar device as part of their individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan.

It also says licensed physicians can approve a student using a cell phone if it is a "medical

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— Chase Blasi,
Senate Majority Leader

necessity to support the health or well-being of the student." A student with Diabetes may need to use a phone or other device to monitor their blood sugar, for example.

THE BILL outlines an exception for travel time to and from learning experiences not on school premises. It's not clear how the bill would apply to open lunch, which lets upperclassmen in some districts, including Wichita, leave the school campus during lunch.

Several current and incoming Wichita school board members have expressed an interest in a potential cell phone ban. Current district policy lets high school students use their phones during passing periods and lunch, with a phone ban from bell to bell in elementary and middle schools.

Amy Warren is an incoming Wichita school board member who has children in the district. She's advocated

for years for changes to policies around screen time in schools.

Warren said when students don't have cell phones during breaks like lunch or passing periods, it improves their ability to retain and process new information they've learned that day in the classroom.

"When we let them get on their phones in between class (periods), we're just kind of wiping that experience and that processing off the board," she said.

Warren said the change could also reduce student fears about their peers taking their photo or recording them.

"Thinking back about what it would have been like for me, I would have felt very nervous to learn in a class where if I said the wrong thing, it was being recorded," she said.

"It's not that every single class, every kid has their phone out. But it does create that pressure in those down moments."

A SEPARATE section of the bill would prohibit school employees from contacting students on social media platforms for official school purposes. It would allow school boards to approve certain exceptions for using social media for official purposes.

Kansas lawmakers return to Topeka on Monday for their annual legislative session. In an emailed statement to KMUW, Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly called the new proposal a "commonsense bill."

"As leaders, we have a responsibility to ensure that our children can learn in a distraction-free environment," Kelly said. "This bipartisan, commonsense bill is a reasonable step to ensure that Kansas students can focus and thrive in the classroom."

Public notice

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REQUEST FOR SEALED BIDS

Marmaton Valley USD 256 is requesting sealed proposals for re-roofing a section of Marmaton Valley High School. Pre-bid meeting: January 13, 2026 at 1:00 PM. Proposal deadline: January 30, 2026, at 10:00 AM. Full RFP available from Superintendent Kim Ensminger at ensminger@usd256.net or at the District Office, 128 W. Oak St., Moran, KS.

K-State settles DEI complaint

By ANNA KAMINSKI
Kansas Reflector

TOPEKA — Kansas State University has resolved a student complaint about the presence of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts within its student government following pressure from legislative leadership to investigate.

The Legislature passed a provision in 2025 requiring state agencies, including state universities, to eliminate DEI-related positions, mandates, programs, activities, training requirements, grants and contracts by Aug. 1.

Universities and agencies scrubbed their websites of DEI terminology, re-signed or eliminated staff positions, refocused clubs and departments, examined contracts and removed pronouns from email signatures.

But a student was not satisfied with K-State's efforts and sent an anonymous report to legislative leadership in July outlining complaints. The Kansas Board of Regents, which oversees the state's higher education institutions, informed K-State of potential issues within the university's student government.

AMONG THE issues was language within the university's Student Governing Association's constitution that required planning diversity training for student government members. The association also has power to allocate funds to clubs that could involve DEI-related topics. The student senate repealed the training requirement at its Sept. 4 meeting.

Marshall Stewart, chief of staff for K-State's president, told the State Finance Council on Tuesday that K-State did not realize it was out of compliance at the time of the complaint and worked hard to course correct. The State Finance Council is made up of Gov. Laura Kelly and legislative leadership.

Stewart said students took the matter seriously and



Senate President Ty Masterson is one member of the State Finance Council, and in his role there, he has encouraged investigating Kansas State University for its compliance with the state's anti-DEI law. GRACE HILLS/KANSAS REFLECTOR

resolved to no longer disperse money or make appointments that could be in conflict with the state's anti-DEI law.

"Universities are big, complex organizations, and I'm not going to say if you go deep enough and look hard enough you're not going to find some things," Stewart said. "But if you do find them, we ask that people share those with us."

YOUNG AMERICA'S Foundation, a conservative youth organization, complained to the U.S. Department of Education's civil rights office in March that K-State's wasn't complying with federal anti-DEI efforts. The organization's letter mentioned the Student Governing Association and other K-State departments by name. However, it did not produce a formal investigation, according to U.S. Department of Education records.

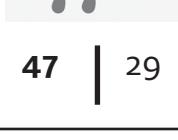
Tuesday's issue is a carryover from that March complaint and the State Finance

Council's July meeting. Senate President Ty Masterson, an Andover Republican and candidate for governor, had charged state officials with investigating the anonymous report, which was sent to his office.

Adam Proffitt, the secretary of administration, who must certify all agencies and universities are in compliance with the state's anti-DEI law, presented his findings Tuesday to the council.

He said his legal team worked with K-State, and he was satisfied with the university's updated report. Masterson commended the university's effort but expressed interest in crafting additional anti-DEI provisions in the upcoming legislative session.

University leaders recently appeared before the House Committee on Government Efficiency to detail efforts to extricate DEI from college campuses. Legislators on the committee expressed interest in censoring related college curricula.

Today	Friday	Saturday
 64 39	 47 29	 44 22

Temperature	Precipitation
High Tuesday	24 hrs as of 8 a.m. Tuesday
Low Tuesday night	0
High a year ago	This month to date
Low a year ago	Total year to date
	Excess since Jan. 1

Sunrise 7:38 a.m.

Sunset 5:19 p.m.



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