
CELLPHONE
FREE SCHOOLS
The Principals View: Why we must act now

WHO IS RYAN HAUGE?

Teacher
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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

The Anxious Generation

How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

A *WALL STREET JOURNAL* TOP 10 BOOK of 2024

Jonathan Haidt

Coauthor of *The Coddling of the American Mind*

WHAT CELL PHONES DID TO KIDS

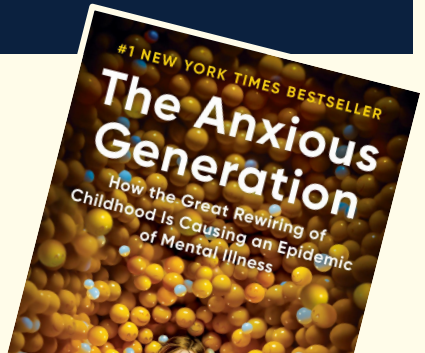
According to Jonathan Haidt

Shift from play-based childhood: Phones pulled kids indoors, reducing free play, face-to-face interaction, and independence.

Mental health impact: Heavy phone use, especially social media, is strongly linked to rising rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness in teens.

Sleep disruption: Late-night phone use cuts into sleep, which magnifies emotional and academic struggles.

Attention and learning: Phones fragment attention, making it harder for students to concentrate, retain information, and engage deeply in learning.



WHAT CELL PHONES DID TO KIDS

According to Jonathan Haidt

Social development: Constant digital connection often replaces real-world friendships, leaving relationships more shallow.

Comparison and pressure: Social media on phones amplifies peer comparison, body image issues, and fear of missing out.

Safety trade-off: Phones give parents a sense of safety, but ironically increase kids' vulnerability to online risks like bullying and exploitation.

Generational experiment: Smartphones were introduced to adolescents without understanding the long-term developmental costs—Haidt calls this a massive social experiment.

FOUR CORE NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Resulting from phone-centered youth culture

SOCIAL DEPRIVATION

Less face-to-face interaction

ATTENTION FRAGMENTATION

Constant distractions

SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Late-night phone use

ADDICTION

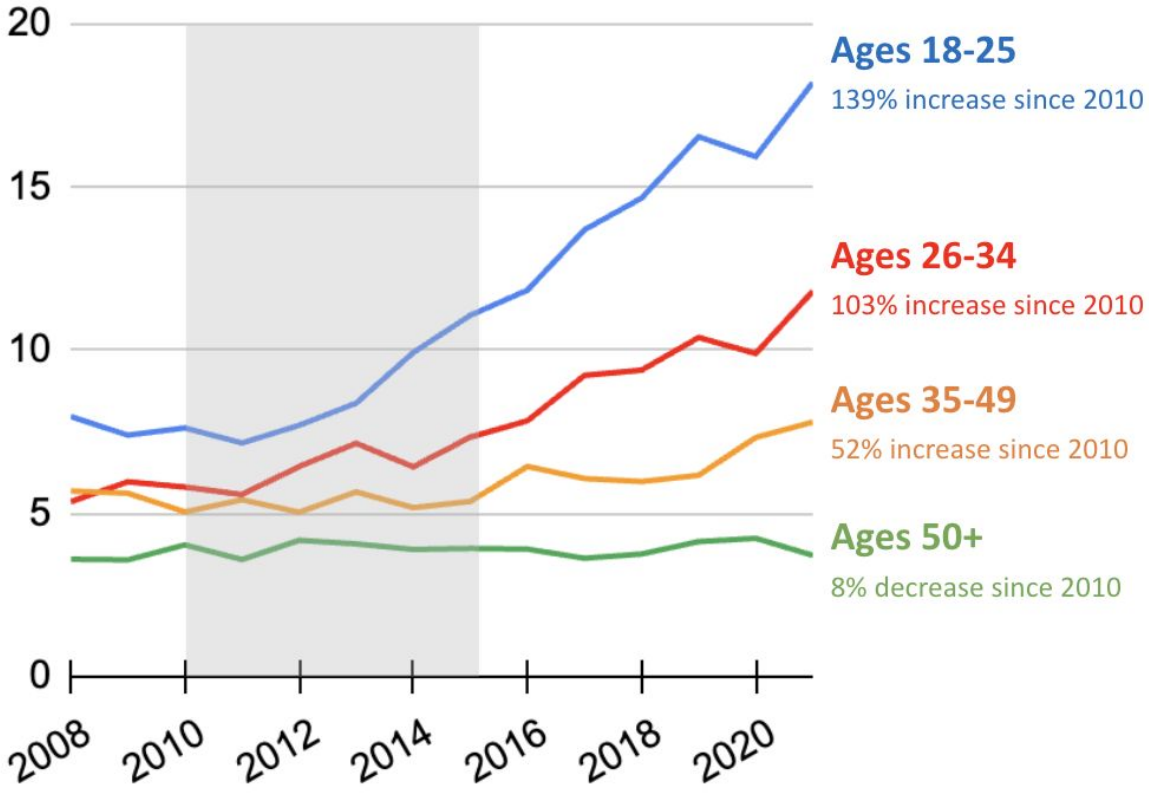
Engineered habit forming design

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Youth mental health collapsed in the early 2010's. Depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide surged.
- This isn't isolated to the USA, it's international.
- Between 2010-2012 SmartPhone use became widespread, and most students had one.

This coincides with significant mental health decline.

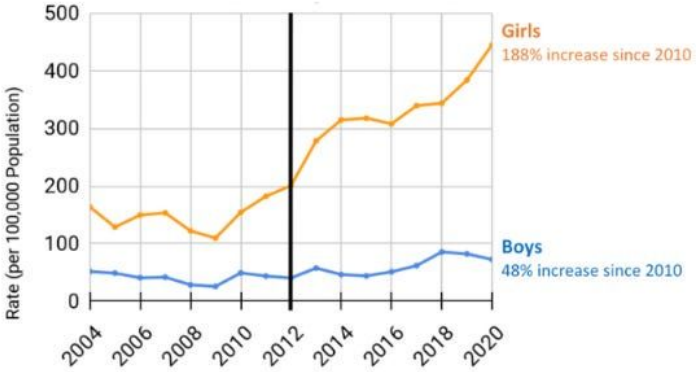
Percent U.S. Anxiety Prevalence



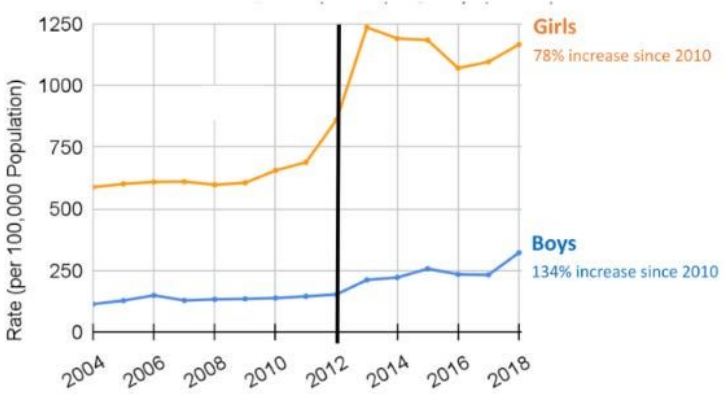
SOURCE: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health

Teenage Self-harm Episodes in Four Anglo Nations

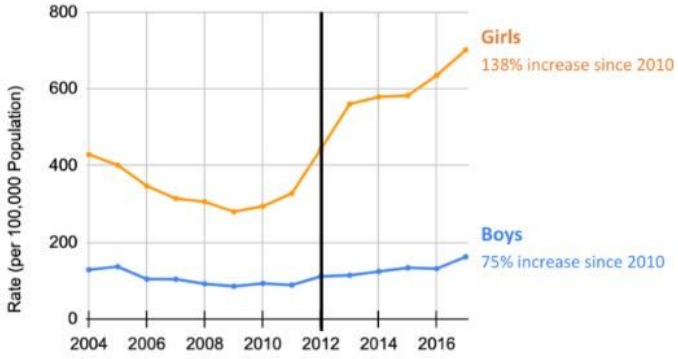
US Teens Emergency Dept Visits for Nonfatal Self-harm (Ages 10-14)



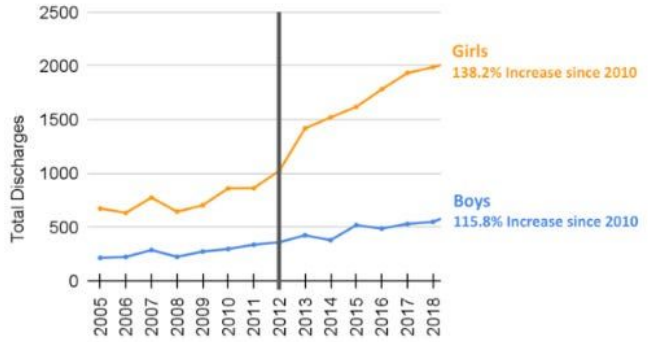
UK Teens, Self-harm Episodes (Ages 13 – 16)



Psychiatric Emergency Dept Visits, Ontarian Teens (13-17)



Public Hospital Discharges for Intentional Self-Harm New Zealand (Ages 15-19)



CHANGES IN PARENTING HAS PLAYED A ROLE

Freedom vs. Protection

Past generations of kids had more independence, unstructured play, and freedom to roam.

Today’s kids are far more supervised and scheduled.

Risk Avoidance

Parents increasingly try to shield children from every possible risk, which ironically can hinder resilience and independence.

SHIFT TO “Safetyism”

The cultural mindset has changed—protecting kids from physical danger is now paired with protecting them from emotional discomfort.

Screen replacement

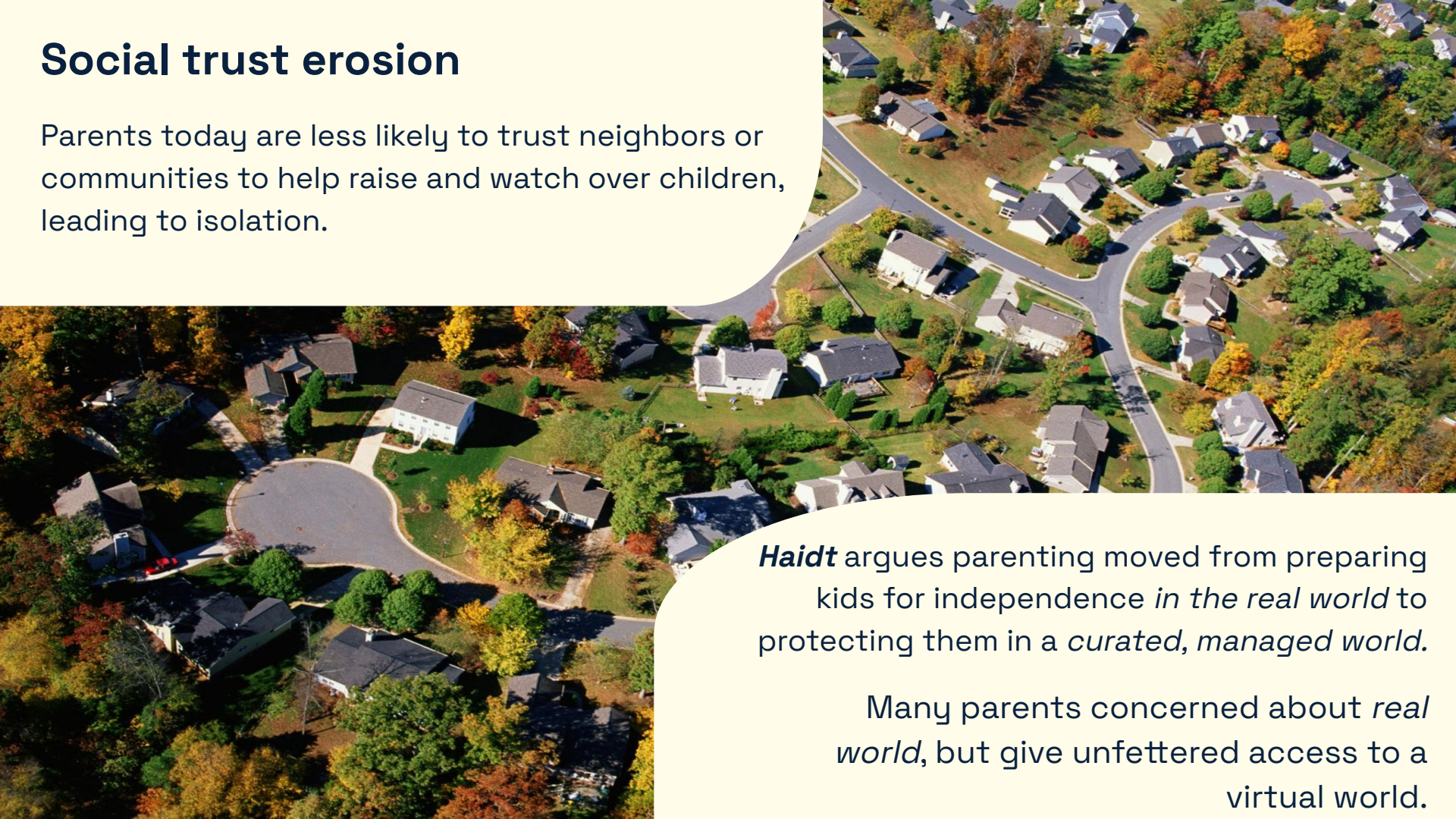
Free play and face-to-face interaction have been replaced with screen-based entertainment, often encouraged by parents as the “safe” option.

Later independence

Milestones like walking to school alone, biking across town, or getting a first job happen later (or not at all) compared to past generations.

Social trust erosion

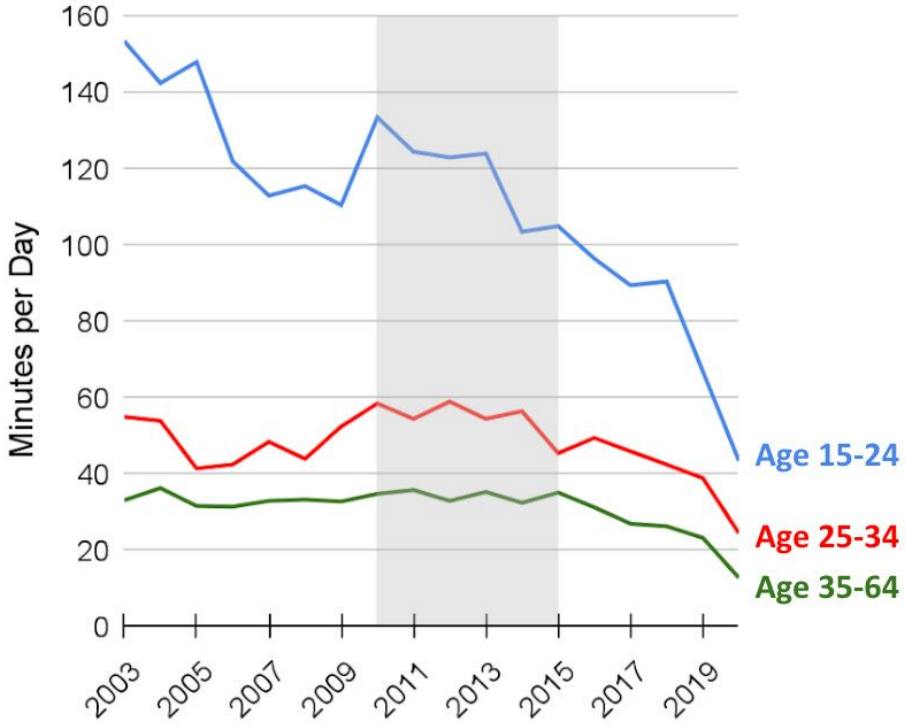
Parents today are less likely to trust neighbors or communities to help raise and watch over children, leading to isolation.



Haidt argues parenting moved from preparing kids for independence *in the real world* to protecting them in a *curated, managed world.*

Many parents concerned about *real world*, but give unfettered access to a virtual world.

Daily Avg Time with Friends (minutes)



SOURCE: Kannan & Veazie (2023) analyzing the American Time Use Study.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Comparison and Performance

Social media encourages constant comparison, performance, and “curation of self,” which undermines self-esteem.

Developmental Mismatch

Adolescents are especially vulnerable because their brains are wired for social belonging but not yet equipped for self-regulation.

Gender Differences

Girls suffer more from image-based platforms (Instagram, TikTok), while boys are more drawn into gaming and YouTube, though both face risks.

Policy Recommendation

Haidt argues for delaying social media until at least age 16.

THE BIGGEST ISSUE

WHY ARE SCHOOLS INVOLVED

Schools are cultural leaders. If educators take the lead, they can model healthier habits for families and communities.

Mental health is at stake. The rise in anxiety, depression, and loneliness among adolescents tracks closely with the spread of smartphones and social media. Schools are one of the few institutions with the authority to create healthier boundaries.

Collective action is necessary. If one parent takes away a phone, their child risks social exclusion. Schools can level the playing field by setting shared norms.

They damage social development. School used to be a place for face-to-face interaction, play, and relationship-building. Phones hijack that time with digital chatter and social media drama.

Phones undermine learning. Even when not in use, their mere presence distracts students and reduces attention, memory, and problem-solving.

ARGUMENTS FOR SCHOOLS TO MIND THEIR OWN BUSINESS

If schools don't step in, no one else has enough leverage to counteract the tech industry's grip on kids' attention.

What if there is a Safety issue? How do I get a hold of my student?

Phones reduce safety, not increase it. Contrary to popular belief, constant phone access often heightens fear and conflict. Students are safer and calmer in environments where phones aren't dominating attention.

This is a parents right, not the schools

We limit lots of things, and we have the right to do so. This is done in the best interest of students and learning.

Phones are a normal part of life and this feels like overreaching

Because we've always done it like this, is the worst argument to not change. Knowing we are negatively impacting mental health and continuing ought not to be normal.


WHAT ARE WE DOING AT ROCORI?
WELCOME TO:
ROCORI SCHOOLS
AUDITORIUM
GYM
COMMONS
11
WE ARE A CELL PHONE FREE SCHOOL!

New Cell Phone Policy

- Establishes **greater consequences** for infractions
- Designed to be **reasonable and fair** in enforcement
- Has already shown a **significant positive impact on learning**

Area for improvement: Current version does not yet ensure students receive a **6-hour social media break**

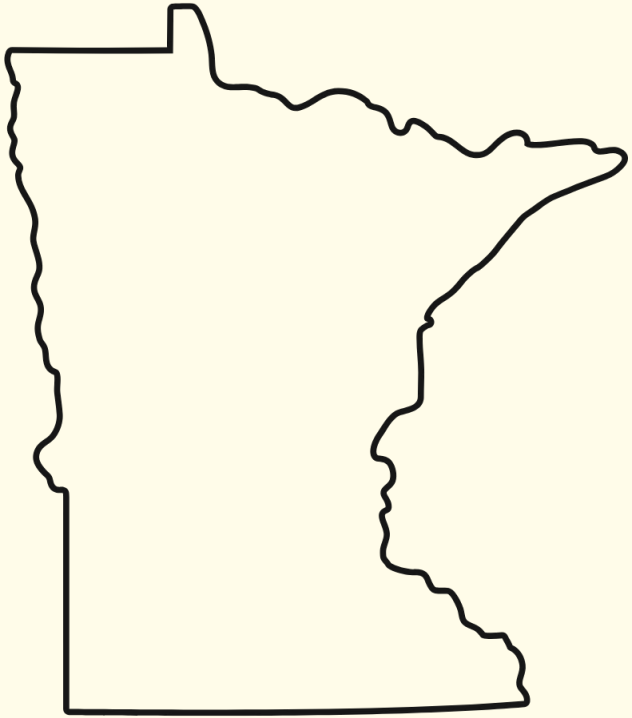
LEGISLATION

Minnesota law requires all schools to have a cell phone policy though it does **not specify exact restrictions**

20 U.S. states currently enforce “**bell-to-bell**” bans during the school day

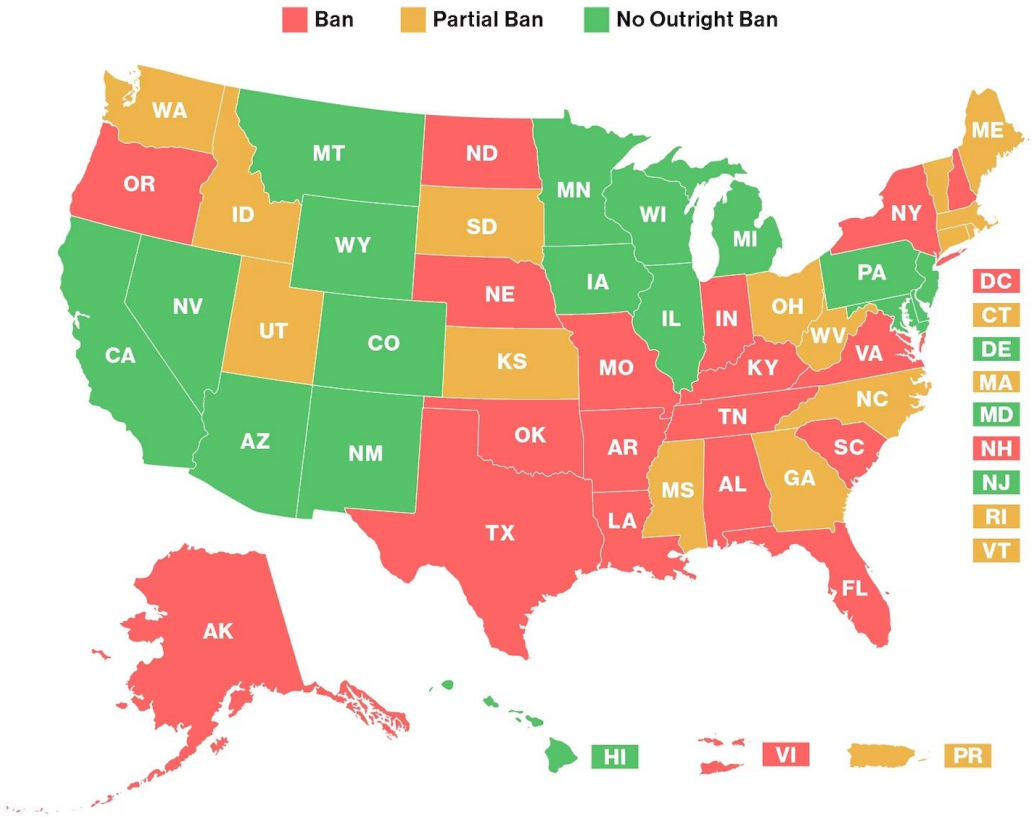
International momentum: Countries like **Sweden** and **France** have enacted nationwide school cell phone bans

Recognized as “**The Last True Bipartisan Issue Left**” (Politico, Sept. 2, 2025), highlighting broad agreement across political lines



School Cellphone Bans 2025-2026

Most states support phone bans; some leave decisions to local districts



SOURCE: STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

abc NEWS

Yondr Pouch

Cell Phone Classroom Storage

Thank You

Questions?

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