

House Bill 340 (COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE)

By: Representatives Hilton of the 48th, Jones of the 47th, Gaines of the 120th, Rice of the 139th, Barrett of the 24th, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
2 elementary and secondary education, so as to enact the "Distraction-Free Education Act"; to
3 require local school systems and public schools to enact policies and procedures for use of
4 personal electronic devices at school and school sponsored events by students in kindergarten
5 through eighth grade; to provide for permissible student use of personal electronic devices;
6 to authorize the Department of Education to provide guidance and technical assistance; to
7 prohibit certain waivers; to provide for definitions; to provide for related matters; to repeal
8 conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

10 **SECTION 1.**

11 This Act shall be known and may be cited as the "Distraction-Free Education Act."

12 **SECTION 2.**

13 Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to elementary and
14 secondary education, is amended in Part 15 of Article 6, relating to miscellaneous provisions
15 under the "Quality Basic Education Act," by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

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16 "20-2-324.8.

17 (a) As used in this Code section, the term:

18 (1) 'Access' means viewing, holding, wearing, or otherwise using a device for the
19 purpose of communication, internet access, gaming, recording, listening to music, or any
20 other function commonly associated with personal electronic devices.

21 (2) 'Bell-to-bell' means the period beginning with the first bell signaling the start of
22 instructional time and ending with the final bell signaling the conclusion of the school
23 day and shall include all scheduled instructional time, breaks, transitions, assemblies, and
24 other school related activities occurring between the start and end of the school day.

25 (3) 'Distraction-free education' means a learning environment where access to personal
26 electronic devices is restricted to minimize distractions, improve academic outcomes, and
27 increase meaningful interactions and focused learning experiences.

28 (4) 'Personal electronic device' means any portable electronic device capable of
29 transmitting, receiving, or accessing communications, data, or media. Such term
30 includes, but is not limited to, smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, e-readers, headphones,
31 and other devices with functionalities such as wireless communication, internet access,
32 messaging, video recording, gaming, social media access, or data transmission.

33 (5) 'School day' means the bell-to-bell period for students receiving instruction on a
34 school campus. Such term shall not apply to students receiving virtual or remote
35 instruction away from a school campus.

36 (6) 'School equipment' means any computer or computer networking equipment,
37 technology or technology related device or service, or communication system or service
38 that is operated, owned, leased, and made available to students by a local board of
39 education, local school system, or public school and that is used for transmitting,
40 receiving, or accessing communications, data, or media.

41 (b) Beginning no later than July 1, 2026, no public school student in kindergarten through
42 grade eight shall be permitted to access personal electronic devices during the school day,
43 except as otherwise provided in this Code section or required by law.

44 (c) By January 1, 2026, each local school system and public school shall adopt policies
45 and procedures that, at a minimum:

46 (1) Prohibit bell-to-bell access to personal electronic devices by students in kindergarten
47 through grade eight, subject to exceptions provided for by law;

48 (2) Establish appropriate methods for storing students' personal electronic devices,
49 including, but not limited to, a student's locker, a locked pouch, or a designated place in
50 the classroom;

51 (3) Establish clear procedures for off-site events or activities, including all school
52 sponsored events and field trips, daily transportation, athletic and extracurricular events,
53 and other instructional opportunities that do not occur on school grounds;

54 (4) Establish clear communication protocols that:

55 (A) Facilitate all emergency communication through school emergency communication
56 management systems and coordinated by school personnel;

57 (B) Require parents or guardians who need to communicate with their student during
58 the school day to contact the school directly; and

59 (C) Communicate rules for school personnel and sponsors of all school sponsored
60 events and field trips, daily transportation, athletic and extracurricular events, and other
61 instructional opportunities that do not occur on school grounds; and

62 (5) Provide that any student found in violation of such policies and procedures during
63 the school day shall be subject to progressive consequences in accordance with the local
64 school system's or public school's student code of conduct, including, but not limited to,
65 verbal warnings, confiscation of personal electronic devices, parental notification, and
66 other actions as deemed appropriate.

67 (d) A student whose Individualized Education Program (IEP), Section 504 Plan, or
68 medical plan explicitly mandates the use of a personal electronic device for medical or
69 educational purposes shall be permitted to access the device as necessary to fulfill the
70 requirements of the respective program or plan.

71 (e)(1) Each local school system and public school shall:

72 (A) Implement appropriate monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure
73 compliance with policies and procedures established pursuant to this Code section,
74 which may include, but need not be limited to, assigning designated school personnel
75 to oversee implementation and adherence to such policies and procedures, conducting
76 periodic audits of personal electronic device storage, and regularly reviewing
77 enforcement practices;

78 (B) Ensure that parents, guardians, and students are informed of such policies and
79 procedures through student and family handbooks, student codes of conduct, school
80 public websites, and other common communication channels; and

81 (C) Regularly review the effectiveness of such policies and procedures and adjust as
82 necessary to ensure its continued alignment with educational goals and student
83 well-being.

84 (2) Each local school system and public school is encouraged to host student and parent
85 engagement activities designed to promote distraction-free education through personal
86 electronic device-free, independent play and learning, including, but not limited to,
87 family workshops, question and answer sessions, town halls, mindfulness or enrichment
88 sessions, screen-free challenges, and participation in initiatives that encourage students
89 to engage in meaningful, personal electronic device-free play and activities.

90 (f) The Department of Education shall provide local school systems and public schools
91 with guidance and technical support for the effective implementation and enforcement of
92 the provisions of this Code section.

93 (g) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed or applied to prohibit or limit a local
94 school system or public school from providing school equipment, including, but not limited
95 to, laptops and tablets, for student use for educational purposes.

96 (h) This Code section shall not be subject to waiver pursuant to Code Section 20-2-82 for
97 a strategic waivers school system, Code Section 20-2-2063.2 or 20-2-2065 for a charter
98 system, Code Section 20-2-2065 for a charter school, Code Section 20-2-2096.3 for a
99 completion special school, or Code Section 20-2-244."

100

SECTION 3.

101 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.