



To: The Education Trust - Massachusetts

November 14, 2025

From: The MassINC Polling Group

Re: Summary of findings from focus group on proposed cell phone ban

On September 23, 2025, The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) conducted a focus group with parents and guardians of Massachusetts students in grades 6-12. Among the topics discussed was the proposed “bell-to-bell” ban on cell phones in public schools. This was followed by a poll of 1351 K-12 parents, including 890 parents with a child in grades 6-12. These 6-12 parents were asked about the proposed cell phone ban. The entire project was sponsored by The Education Trust in Massachusetts (Ed Trust).

Poll Findings

Two-thirds of parents support the proposed “bell-to-bell” cell phone ban, although nearly as many want ways of contacting their kids if a ban goes into effect.

Two-thirds (66%) of 6-12 grade parents support the proposed bell-to-bell cell phone ban now being considering by the State Legislature, including 40% who “strongly support” the measure. Support is consistent across racial subgroups in the survey, with strong support highest among white (41%) and AAPI (48%) parents. There are also differences in strong support by gender, age, and socioeconomic status. Fathers (46%), parents over age 45 (47%), parents with a college degree or higher education (46%), and parents making over \$75,000 (45%) are all more likely to strongly support the ban. (See chart on page 2.)

Given that 88% of parents report their 6-12th graders has a cell phone or smartwatch, this is a highly salient issue that will impact nearly all families with middle and high school aged kids. It makes sense, then, that parents want to have clarity about the new policy, even as they express support for it.

If a ban were to be adopted, 63% of parents would want to know how they can contact their child during the school day, and 49% would want a detailed explanation of the policy and any exceptions. These two findings are very consistent with the findings of the focus groups, detailed below.

Focus Group Findings

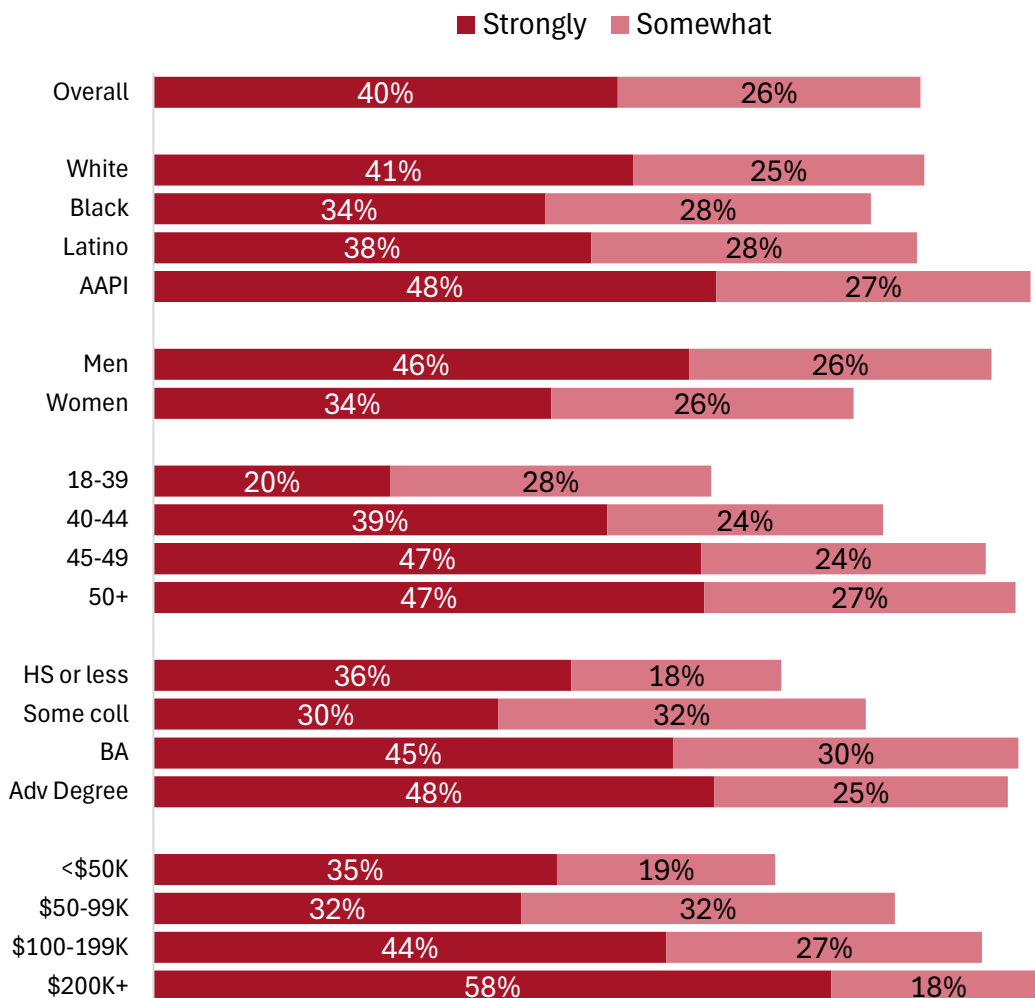
Parents generally support banning cell phones in school but have concerns about safety and contacting their kids, especially in emergency situations.

Nearly all the parents of middle and high school students reported that their students had cell phones. Parents of younger kids gave their kids access to iPads or other devices. Several parents said that cell phone access was important because their kids took public transportation to and from school and needed to be in touch. A couple mentioned they picked up their kids from school and

liked being able to text them if plans changed. One mentioned she got her child a phone because they were being bullied on the school bus, and also because the child has medical issues. At the same time, parents did not like the amount of time their kids spent on their devices, and they were worried about social media on phones.

Two-thirds of 6-12 grade parents support a "bell-to-bell" cell phone ban

% of parents who _____ support a ban, overall and by demographic



Seven parents were supportive of the “bell to bell” cell phone ban passed by the State Senate, as described in the group. Three were opposed. Parents who supported the ban thought it would limit distractions from cell phones and possibly force children to socialize instead of being on their phones constantly. A few mentioned it would cut down on the phenomenon of students filming fights between kids and posting them to social media.

The few parents who were opposed were concerned about getting in touch with their students in the event of an emergency, or even if pick-up plans changed after school. One parent of two high

schoolers mentioned that both her girls had been in lockdown situations in school with their phones, and being able to communicate in that situation was a relief.

One parent in the group was also a teacher, and she explained that she and other teachers in her school were already taking phones from students at the start of class time, storing them in a bin or individual cubbies.

Despite these concerns, parents were not supportive of giving students their phones back for lunch or recess. Doing so would reintroduce the downsides (distractions, social media) without addressing the primary concern of being able to reach students in the event of an emergency.

If the cell phone ban becomes law, parents are looking for guidance from their kids' schools about details and implementation. Clarity about emergency communications is a key factor, as is being on the same page so that parents know exactly what the restrictions are when they send their kids to school.

- “What I don't like is it feels constant, they always want to check their phones and be on their phones, and if they have 30 seconds of free time, the first thing they're doing is pulling their phone out to look at something on YouTube or text a friend.”
- “My daughter knows that she needs to shut it off when she gets to school. Since I can track her, I know when's the last time that her phone was on...But I would love for anybody to invent some type of app that you can shut the phone with a passcode or anything like that for parents here at home. Because, to be honest, what's going on in school nowadays is very scary as well, with after-school fighting as well, kids being videotaped, put on social media. That's the story of my life with my middle-schooler, a lot of fights and stuff like that happen after school, and everybody with their phones recording and stuff.”
- “I do know of some places that keep their phones in some kind of bin that's completely locked up until 2 o'clock, or whenever the school day ends...It's great, but at the same time, what happens if they really did need it? So I just go back and forth.”
- “My 16 year-old will text me, can you pick me up at this time? I'm staying after for this, can you pick me up for this? And it's not the same every day, and if she didn't have her phone in the middle of the day, she wouldn't be able to tell me that. But the younger ones, it's just take the bus and come home. You don't need the phone to text me that...You don't need your phone in middle school or elementary school, especially. But high school, I see a reason for having it.”
- “I [want] guidance on exactly what a lot of folks have talked about: How can a student still bring their phone for the things that they need, like getting to and from school, contacting their parents after school, while also adhering to the rules, right?...For my kids, at least, being able to set those expectations with them before they leave the house, in a way that matches what the school is going to expect of them when they get there is really, really helpful, so that I'm not, intentionally or unintentionally, going afoul of what the school is intending, or what the laws or the rules say about what phones are, but that they can still have it for the things they need that might involve a part of their day on the way to or after school.”

Focus group: 9/23/2025 – 5:30-7pm
Hand Raising Question Tables

Question 1 – Devices

Question	Response options	Count
How many of your kids have a cell phone, a smartwatch, or another similar device? And who doesn't? (Note: includes iPads.)	Yes	10
	No	0
	Total	10

Question 2 – Cell Phone Ban

Question	Response options	Count
How many of you would support a “bell-to-bell” ban on cell phones in schools? And how many opposed? Any unsure?	Support	7
	Oppose	3
	Unsure	0
	Total	10