

Statewide phone ban takes effect

How Nebraska's latest phone policy is working to "unplug" all public schools



By
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As students return to class to kick off the 2025-26 school year, they will notice something missing from each of their classrooms, their cellphones. On May 14, 2025, the Nebraska Legislature passed, and only six days later, Governor Jim Pillen signed L.B. 140, a bill requiring all public schools to adopt policies regulating student use of personal electronic devices, (such as cell phones and tablets) on school property. There are a few special exceptions for the use of these devices on school grounds, such as if they are necessary for a student's medical condition. However, for nearly all students, public schools have put into place a "bell to bell" device ban, with one of these being McCool Junction.

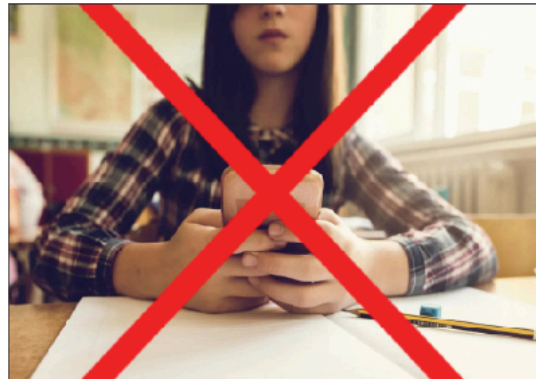
As to why this ban came about in the first place, on the state level, Pillen's main goals are to crack down on a growing lack of engagement in the classroom, improve students' mental health, (since studies have linked social media to increased anxiety), and ultimately, improve students' academic performances by providing them a distraction-free learning experience. Locally, at McCool Junction, Superintendent Dade McDonald shares these same goals, stating that, "while a change as big as this is challenging, a break from the stress of constant notifications is a positive change for our students." Along with this, McDonald emphasized that while he is well aware that phones

are our way of staying connected to the world, he hopes students can see the value in being present with the people around them too.

"Our students are doing a great job adapting to this policy, and overall, I think it is a beneficial change for our students and staff," said McDonald.

McDonald isn't the only member of the Mustang family with an opinion on the new phone ban, with its impact bringing a new normal to teachers and students inside the classroom on a daily basis. Although ninth grade geography teacher Jabe Wurtz has never allowed phones in his classroom, he's taking a more neutral side to this policy, saying that, in the past, he's known great teachers to allow

time", said Reinsch. All in all, while everyone has their own opinion on a phone free school experience, teachers and students alike can agree on one thing: this policy is here to stay, so we should all make the most of it.



Students are not allowed to use personal devices during class, in the hallways, or during lunch at McCool Junction.

phones, and bad teachers to prohibit them, so ultimately, this policy "is what you make of it." However, Wurtz is grateful to our school board for letting teachers decide how to handle potential "phone peeks", since he feels it gives them peace of mind that they are in control of their classrooms. On the student side of things, senior Grace Reinsch misses the easy access a phone gave her to text her family during the day, but agreed that she has gotten "more work done with way less distractions", by keeping it out of sight. "Now I read and finish class work instead of scrolling on my phone during free

MJPS STUDENT MEDIA MUSTANG MEMORIES Mustang Roundup 2025



Freshmen Klaire Rasmussen and Kayliana Kitto posing for a quick picture before marching in the Mustang Roundup parade.



Community Members Vaeniece Davis and Mark Ellis announced each parade entry to the crowd as they passed by.



McCool Jct. eighth graders riding in their decked out "Diamonds and Demin" themed float, with that being the theme for Mustang Roundup this year.

Goodbye Kerry's, hello Stables

After over two decades of service, a McCool Junction staple is handing over the reins



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Kerry's Restaurant and Catering has not only been a convenient place to dine, but a cherished household name in McCool Junction since 2002. With their famous onion rings and friendly staff drawing in diners from all across the state, owners Kerry and Lisa Johnson have taken pride in creating a "feels like home" atmosphere for each one of their customers. However, on Nov. 12, this deep-rooted legacy was passed down to the next generation, new owners Wendy and Bradley Martin out of York, as Kerry's publicly announced that they would be reopening the restaurant as The Stables Bar and Grill. Moving forward, Wendy and Bradley Martin are planning to serve many fan favorites from the original Kerry's menu, along with keeping Kerry's tradition of Sunday brunch, while also adding a handful of signature dishes of their own. Along with new menu items, The Stables will feature updated decor, additional beverage options, various televised sporting events for

customers' viewing pleasure, longer hours of operation, and more open days as well. As of now, these hours will be Tues-Sun, 11 a.m to 1 a.m. Being in the restaurant and bar industry since she was 15, Wendy Martin is excited to share her experience with McCool Junction, and finally work at a restaurant that she and her husband can call their own.

"We are excited to get to know everyone in the community, and to continue serving Kerry's customers the quality of food they know and love!" Wendy and Bradley Martin commented.

Although Kerry's will still offer all of its previous catering services, and is currently working to expand its catering reach as well, Lisa Johnson mentioned that the decision to pass on the restaurant has been in the making for years.

"I would like my husband to be able to

retire someday with his mind and body intact, so we've been praying for the right people to take over our restaurant responsibilities," stated Lisa Johnson.

Kerry and Lisa Johnson's prayers were finally answered when they were approached by Wendy and Bradley Martin a couple of months prior, and were instantly sold by their young enthusiasm and determination. But,

even though Kerry and Lisa Johnson are looking forward to enjoying their "grandma and grandpa" stage and more time with each other, they admitted that they will greatly miss the day-to-day community interactions that running Kerry's provided.

"Over the past 22 years, our staff and customers have become part of our family; we are grateful for their belief in us from the beginning, and into our next chapter," Lisa Johnson stated.



Above: Kerry and Lisa Johnson, owners of Kerry's Catering. Below: Wendy and Bradley Martin, owners of The Stables.

The road to redemption

McCool football tackles second round of eight-man playoffs for first time in decades

**By
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the first time since 1989 that they have made it to the second round of eight-man playoffs. Unfortunately, it came to an end by losing to Dundy County-Straton. "Every game is a

The Mustangs battled through a competitive season, overcoming injuries and close games to earn their spot in the playoffs. This has been

battle, and knowing that you have to win the majority of your games to qualify for the playoffs, there is always that nervous energy that you have each and every game," said Head Football Coach Jarrod Weiss. Unfortunately for the team, they are losing eight key seniors and have only seven returners. The team relied on leadership from the upperclassmen and had younger players step into important roles throughout the season.



Head Coach Jarrod Weiss giving Senior Ja Soukup a celebratory hug after taking down Arcadia Loup City. This victory earned the Mustangs a spot in the second-round playoff game.

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Mustang activities for the win

McCool Jct. sweeps the competition
in annual NSAA cup



By
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Sept. 5, was an historic night for the McCool Junction student body as it received

the Buckle Up Phone Down Cup award from the Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA) for the first time ever. The Buckle Up Phone Down Cup is an NSAA and Nebraska Department of Transportation annual award that recognizes outstanding achievements in high school. The winners of this award are determined by a point system based on performance in the State Championship events within each division and class. Schools that finish in the top eight positions in State Championship events receive points. The point breakdown used by the NSAA was:

1st Place- 50 Points, 2nd Place- 45 Points,
3rd Place- 40 Points, 4th Place- 35 Points,
5th Place- 30 points, 6th Place- 25 Points,
7th Place- 20 Points, 8th Place- 15 Points

This summer, McCool Junction found out they won in the girl's, boy's, and all-school division in Class D. The school scored 50 points in girl's Cross Country, 45 in Play Production, 20 in Speech, 40 in Dual Wrestling, 40 in boys Basketball, and seven and a half in girl's Track. Overall, the girls scored 122.5 points, tying with Howells-Dodge and Falls City Scared Heart. While the boys scored 145 points, tying with Howells-Dodge and St. Mary's. As a whole school they scored 202.5 points. The award was presented by NSAA officials at halftime of McCool's home football game



McCool Jct. high schoolers flooded the field to receive NSAA Cup during halftime of home football game.

against Twin River.

McCool Junction's Athletic Director Guy Stark said, this was something the whole school and community could be excited about. Stark said many students were involved in multiple activities and sports. "(It's) something to take a lot of pride in," Stark said. "(There have been) great participation numbers."

Stark said this had been an annual award given by the NSAA since 2007. In the 2024-2025 competition there were over 130 schools in Class D, according to the NSAA's website.



Buckle Up Phone Down Cup