

Newspaper News Writing - Sydney Huber

Headline: *Statewide phone ban takes effect*

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

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 LB 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 while school is in session, 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, and connecting 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 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 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.