

Governor Kim Reynolds signs bill restricting cellphones in classrooms

Robin Opsahl | Iowa Capital Dispatch
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Starting in the 2025-2026 school year, public Iowa K-12 school districts will be required to set policies that, at minimum, ban the use of cellphones during class time under a law signed by Gov. Kim Reynolds Wednesday.

The ban on cellphones during instructional periods was one of the governor’s top priorities heading into the 2025 legislative session. At a ceremony signing the measure into law, Reynolds said House File 782 will help improve Iowa students’ learning and mental health.

“Smartphones and other digital devices have made information, media and entertainment immediately available at any time, any place, and this level of connectivity has changed the way we live, learn and communicate,” Reynolds said. “And while the positive impacts are undeniable, we can’t ignore that our phones can also be a source of constant distraction in our daily lives, whether at home or at work or, especially for our kids, at school.”

Reynolds cited a Pew Research Center survey that found 72 percent of high school teachers say students being distracted by cellphones is a major problem in their classroom. Data also shows policies limiting cellphones and other personal electronic devices have a positive impact on student outcomes, Reynolds said, pointing to statistics on higher grades and lower disciplinary rates at Iowa schools that have already put cellphone policies in place.

The Ottumwa Community School District, which implemented a cellphone ban for the entire school day starting in the current school year, saw a 12 percent increase in A and B grades and a 60 percent decrease in failing grades for 8-12 students compared to the first semester of the previous year. Additionally, the district saw a 20 percent decrease in referrals for behavior issues.

Mike McGrory, superintendent of the Ottumwa Community School District, said “Ottumwa schools this year experienced firsthand how powerful a bell-to-bell cellphone policy can be,” and said the new law will help other schools across the district see improved learning and engagement with students.

“The results, as the governor was alluding to, far exceeded our expectations,” McGrory said. “They were truly profound ... by eliminating those learning distractions for our students, it allowed the following three things: (for) our students to refocus on their learning, focus on their mental health, and also — this is so important — with building meaningful face-to-face relationships with each other.”

The Ottumwa school district’s policy of no cellphone use for the entire school day is a higher standard than



what would be required under the new law. School boards are required to set a ban on cellphone use during class times by July 1, but have discretion on whether to restrict devices during other periods of the school day. The Iowa Department of Education is required to develop and distribute a model policy for use as boards develop their own policies. The law requires that cellphone bans include exceptions, such as for students who are English Second Language (ESL) learners or who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan that involves accommodations using a cellphone or other personal electronic device. Parents will also be allowed to petition a school district for their child to retain access of their cellphone during class periods if they establish a “legitimate” reason related to a student’s mental or physical health that requires the device to be readily available.

Gabe Polich, a senior at Des Moines Hoover High School, also spoke on the measure, saying he has seen improved grades as a result of not using his cellphone in class. Hoover High School implemented a ban on cellphones during class at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, which Reynolds said resulted in a 14 percent increase in A and B grades, a 12 percent decrease in students’ failure rate and decrease of out-of-school suspensions by 60 percent.

Polich said he is less distracted in class and students are happier in school because of the ban.

“I wasn’t happy they were taking away our cellphones,” Polich said. “But now I can see it’s really improved our school.”

Reynolds joked “my grandchildren weren’t very happy with me either” when she brought up the school cellphone ban, but the measure will help other students like Polich learn and be more engaged in schools with the policy in place.

The governor said she believes the policy will help Iowa schools and students while including important provisions addressing concerns about students’ lack of access to phones. This includes the provisions allowing exceptions, as well as requiring schools update their safety and emergency plans, with guidance from the state departments of education and public safety, to account for communications needs during these situations.

Reynolds also thanked lawmakers for their efforts getting the bill to her desk, saying she was happy to see it pass through the legislature with bipartisan support.

“I think it’s a great example of how we can come together to support simple, common-sense solutions that can make an overwhelmingly positive difference,” Reynolds said.

LESTER NEWS



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A meeting of the Lester Friendly 4-Hers was held April 12. The meeting was called to order by the president, Angie Knapp. Roll call was called and 33 members were present. This meeting was the annual make-it-take-it night where members got the opportunity to learn and make something new. There were five different options including painting, cupcake decorating, making a charcuterie board, making plant stakes, or crocheting a dishcloth. It was a fun experience for all who attended. Special thanks to the volunteer helpers and the make-it-take-it committee for organizing a fun night. — Kayla Knoblock, reporter

Children will be going door-to-door in Lester Thursday, May 22, beginning at 6 p.m. distributing poppies for the upcoming Memorial Day holiday. Remember veterans with your donation.

The Lester Memorial Day service will be begin at 10 a.m. Monday, May 26, beginning at 10 a.m. at Hillside Cemetery. Children, 4 years and older, are needed to help decorate crosses during the ceremony. Have your children at the cemetery by 9:40. In case of inclement weather, the ceremony will be in the Lester Community Center. Bring your own lawn chairs to the cemetery service.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Inwood Residents,

I want to take a moment to update you on the progress surrounding the insurance claim for our community center. After a long and thorough process, I’m pleased to share that the claim is nearly finalized. The building has officially been declared a total loss.

As many of you know, there was a significant delay in moving this process forward due to a lack of communication and responsiveness from our insurance pool, ICAP, following the building’s collapse. In response to this, the City Council made the decision to hire a public adjuster to advocate on behalf of the city and ensure our claim was handled fairly and thoroughly. This step proved critical.

Initially, ICAP proposed a settlement of \$1.2 million. Thanks to the efforts of the public adjuster and our team, that figure has been increased to approximately \$3.7 million. After deducting the adjuster’s fee and our insurance deductible, we anticipate receiving roughly \$3.3 million from insurance.

In addition to these funds, the generosity of our residents, local organizations

and outside grantors has added nearly \$1 million in donations and pledges. This brings our total available funding for the project to approximately \$4.3 million.

We are currently working with a structural engineer and an insurance provider to determine whether it is feasible and cost-effective to reinforce and salvage the remaining structure, or if a full demolition and rebuild is the better option. That assessment is expected to be completed by the end of next week, and the Inwood City Council will make a final decision by the end of May.

This is a major step forward, and we are deeply grateful for the support and patience of our community. With these resources, we are in a strong position to rebuild a new community center that meets the needs of Inwood today and into the future.

As always, we will keep you updated and involved in the planning process. Your input is vital as we take the next steps in creating a space that reflects the heart and spirit of our town.

*With gratitude,
Becca Bixler
Mayor of Inwood*

COURTHOUSE NEWS

SCHEDULED FINES

Aiddy Kott Phomvisay, Estherville, trespass-first offense.
Eve Ann Wichner, Harrisburg, South Dakota, speeding.
Preston Mitchell Moss, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, speeding.
Jackson Alexander Ganun, Hills, Minnesota, defective or unauthorized muffler system.
Christopher James Gordon, Bismark, North Dakota, trespass-first offense.
Gamaliel Figueroa Ramirez, Temple, Texas, speeding.
Laura Rose Clark, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, insufficient number of headlights.
Brady James Scott Waldstein, Cedar Falls, speeding.
Stephanie Nason, Rock Rapids, failure to use child restraint device.
Ryan Jay Thomas, Merville, failure to display registration plate.
Linda Allace Kruger, speeding.
Leah Elizabeth Van Ravenswaay, Rock Valley, speeding.
Jonathan Lee VanGinkel, Inwood, speeding.
Logan Jon Smidt, Harrisburg, South Dakota, speeding.
Luke Allen VanBaren, Beecher, Illinois, speeding.
Gary W. Koedam, Doon, seat belt violation.
Amber Ann Vanessen, Inwood, seat belt violation.
Seth James Henriksen, Rock Rapids, seat belt violation.
Carlos Daniel Garcia Cardona, Hospers, open container.
Juan Antonio Garcia Cardona, Hospers, open container.
Cody Tanner Schmith, Sheldon, speeding.
Bernard Blaise Krempges, Pipestone, Minnesota, improper use of handicapped parking

space.

Tanges Eldon Kruse, Rushmore, Minnesota, speeding.
Joseph D. Vierra, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, speeding.
Emily Grace Baatz, Lester, operation without registration card or plate.
Scott Allan DeJong, George, seat belt violation.
Dawson James Snyders, Inwood, no valid driver’s license.
Thomas Andrew Fluit, Doon, dark window or windshield.
Jared Carl Kopplow, Adrian, Minnesota, operation without registration card or plate.
Brooke Kristine Lais, Fulda, Minnesota, speeding.
Mallory Post, George, possession/purchase of alcohol by person under 21-first offense.
Stephanie Rose Miller, Cando, North Dakota, operation without registration card or plate.
Chad Jay Knoblock, Alvord, speeding.
Abigail Raquel Hartog, Ashton, speeding.
Alexander Jason Espenson, Windom, Minnesota, speeding.
Alana Marie Fergen, Menno, South Dakota, passing too near bridge, intersection or railroad.
Kaeden Stanley Jacobson, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, operation without registration; seat belt violation.

DISTRICT AND MAGISTRATE COURT

On April 28, Dustin Leroy Hansen of Marcus was sentenced for violation of probation on previous charges of operating while under the influence-second offense, an aggravated misdemeanor, and possession of a controlled substance-metham-

phetamine-first offense, a serious misdemeanor. The probation previously imposed was revoked, and the original sentence of 60 days in the Lyon County Jail with credit for time served was imposed.

Dana Darrell Jensen of Hudson, South Dakota, was sentenced for operating while under the influence-second offense, an aggravated misdemeanor. Jensen was sentenced to serve 90 days in the Lyon County Jail with all but seven days suspended. Jensen was ordered to pay a \$1,875 fine, court costs and surcharge. Jensen was ordered to serve two years on probation, submit to a substance abuse evaluation and follow any and all recommendations of said evaluation and complete an unimpaired driver course and provide proof of completion to the probation officer. Jensen’s driver’s license was revoked.

On April 29, Kaylee Dandurand of Larchwood was sentenced for violation of probation on a previous charge of child endangerment, an aggravated misdemeanor. Her probation was terminated unsuccessfully. Dandurand was sentenced to serve 30 days in the Lyon County Jail to run concurrently with the sentence in another case. She was ordered to pay court-appointed attorney’s fees.

Dandurand was also sentenced for violation of probation on a previous charge of assault causing bodily injury or mental illness, a serious misdemeanor. Her probation was terminated. Dandurand was sentenced to serve 30 days in the Lyon County Jail to run concurrently with the sentence in another case.

On April 29, Ndayishmiye Protais of Canton, South Dakota,

was sentenced for operating while under the influence-first offense, a serious misdemeanor. Protais was sentenced to serve 48 hours in the Lyon County Jail with credit for time served. Protais was ordered to pay a \$1,250 fine, court costs, surcharge and other costs. Protais was also ordered to submit to a substance abuse evaluation and follow any and all recommendations of said evaluation and complete an unimpaired driver course and provide proof of completion. Protais’s driver’s license was revoked.

Tristan William Fraser of Orange City was sentenced April 29 for defraud drug/alcohol test-synthetic urine/urine additives, first offense, a simple misdemeanor. He was ordered to pay a \$150 fine, court costs, surcharge and other charge.

On May 5, Tammy Joann Harskamp of Inwood was sentenced for violation of probation on a previous charge of possession of a controlled substance-methamphetamine-first offense, a serious misdemeanor. The probation previously imposed was revoked, and the original sentence of 20 days in the Lyon County Jail was imposed to run concurrently with the sentence in another case. Harskamp was ordered to pay court-appointed attorney’s fees.

Harskamp was also sentenced May 4 for violation of probation on a previous charge of operating while under the influence-first offense, a serious misdemeanor. The probation previously imposed was revoked, and the original sentence of 30 days in the Lyon County Jail to run concurrently with the sentence in

another case was imposed.

REAL ESTATE DEEDS

Kevin J. and Tina Fluit to Fluit Acres LLC, warranty deed to the SW1/4 of 17-99N-44W except Parcel D and except Parcel E.
Framed In LLC to Joel D. and Angel M. Spiehls, warranty deed to Lot 3 in Block 1 of Hawkins Third Addition, City of Rock Rapids.
Jared and Alexis Van Middendorp to Jacob Rozeboom, warranty deed to Parcel B in the SE1/4 of 34-99N-47W.
Byron and Beverly J. Vande Weerd to Jason Dibbern, warranty deed to Lot 3 and the north 60 feet of Lot 4 and the east 44 feet of the south 39 feet of Lot 4 in Block 6 of East Rock Rapids.
Brent and Brenda Vande Weerd to Jason Dibbern, warranty deed to Lots 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 and the east 27 feet of Lots 4 and 7 in Block 3 of East Rock Rapids.
Todd Vande Souwe, trustee of the Todd Vande Stouwe Revocable Trust, and Kelley Vande Stouwe, trustee of the Kelley Vande Stouwe Revocable Trust, to B&G Acres, trustee warranty deed to the SE1/4 of 11-98N-48W except a tract described as the south 342 feet of the east 465 feet thereof.
Estate of Marvella M. Schaa to Darwin Lee and Brenda Jo Gerken, court officer deed to the S1/2 of the NW1/4 of 24-99N-43W, except Parcels B, C and E, and Parcel F.
Clint E. Metzger, successor trustee of the James E. Metzger and Lois C. Metzger Joint Revocable Trust, to Aaron J. Metzger, trustee warranty deed to Parcel F in of the fractional 11-100N-47W.