

# New state law banning cell phones improves learning

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A recent state law that banned cell phones in the classroom and some at New America School-Las Cruces say they are already seeing positive results.

The law, the Anti-Distraction Policy in the Schools, sponsored by state Sen. Crystal Brantley, R-Elephant Butte, was a bipartisan bill aimed to enable school districts and teachers to have more control over banning cell phones in the schools. The law passed in the 2025 legislature and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed it last spring.

One teacher, Nathan Paz, who teaches English Language Arts at New America School-Las Cruces, said he's noticed a difference.

"Students are more attentive. Which is good. Some students are very fidgety. They need to occupy their hands. Some have separation anxiety from their phones. It's hard for them to sit still," Paz said.

Roberta Stathis, who is on the governing council of the

school and has taught there, said that, in her experience, one of the most difficult things about teaching was the presence of electronic media in the classroom.

“They were just tethered. It’s a constant distraction,” Stathis told the Bulletin.

Stathis said the new rules require that students place their cell phones in a mini-locker at the beginning of the day. Paz said students are allowed to retrieve their phones during their lunch breaks, but once lunch is over, the cell phone goes back into the mini-locker.

Brantley said the bill received broad support from school districts and teachers and the only push back was from some concerned parents worried about being able to reach their kids during the school day.

Brantley said this has been alleviated by the fact that parents can still contact their children through the school office. Also, Brantley emphasized that the new law creates flexibility so that an individual teacher who wants to use devices as part of a lesson can still do so.

Paz said one reason why the cellphone has become a problem is because of artificial intelligence. He said students can use AI to write papers and do math problems. He said there are even AI programs available that show how to solve

a math problem, enabling students to rely on AI to pretend they did the work.

Paz said without the law, it was almost impossible to keep students from using their phones in the classroom.

“What people don’t realize, it’s not necessarily a defiant behavior, it’s an addictive behavior. You have to understand it from that point of view. They always have this need to check something. They’re so locked into their cell phones and they get that dopamine hit. There’s so much content out there. They’re tied into that and it’s hard to disconnect,” Paz said.

He said trying to address constant cell phone disruption in the classroom in itself became disruptive and that fighting it was “a losing battle” before the law passed earlier this year.

Paz said there are some students who are grateful.

“They feel like they’re more in tune with school and actual lessons. Now we have students who say they are more engaged,” Paz said.

Brantley told the Bulletin that she has teenage daughters of her own and became concerned because recent studies show that teens, on average, spend five hours a day on social media. Brantley said this leads to issues such as online bullying and depression among young people.

"I wanted to put the focus back on the classroom. Our education system here in New Mexico could use all the help it can get. Teachers are competing against cell phones in the classroom. We needed a uniform policy on how to address it," Brantley said.

Stathis said that many of the students who attend New America School are in credit recovery mode. They come from the other area high schools and need more individualized attention.

She said that with the new law, New America School students are "really starting to flourish.

"This law has been such a boon for us for learning," she said.