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SYNOPSIS:

Under existing law, a local board of education may permit a pupil to carry or use a pocket pager, cellular telephone, or other electronic communication device while on school property.

This bill would establish the Freeing our Classrooms of Unnecessary Screens for Safety (FOCUS) Act to prohibit a student from using, operating, or possessing a wireless communications device on public elementary or secondary school grounds during the instructional day, subject to certain exceptions and subject to written policies adopted by a local board of education.

This bill would require each local board of education to adopt an Internet safety policy that addresses student access to the Internet on district-owned devices.

This bill would also require students to receive instruction on the risks and benefits of social media and how to use social media safely before admission to the eighth grade.



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A BILL
TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

Relating to public K-12 education; to establish the Freeing our Classrooms of Unnecessary Screens for Safety (FOCUS) Act; to prohibit the use, operation, and possession of wireless communication devices on certain public school properties; to require local boards of education to adopt an Internet safety policy; to add Section 16-40-13 to the Code of Alabama 1975, to require students to complete a social media safety course prior to entering the eighth grade; and to repeal Section 16-1-27, Code of Alabama 1975, providing for the use of electronic communication devices on school property.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

Section 1. The Legislature finds and declares the following:

- (1) Each student in an Alabama public K-12 school should be college-ready or career-ready upon high school graduation.
- (2) Many high school teachers believe that cell phones and other electronic communication devices are distracting students in the classroom.
- (3) Studies have shown that cell phones and other electronic communication devices are negatively impacting learning outcomes.



55 (4) Studies have shown that increased social media usage
56 may negatively affect the mental health of school-aged
57 children.

58 Section 2. For the purposes of this act, the following
59 terms have the following meanings:

60 (1) INSTRUCTIONAL DAY. The period of time during which a
61 public elementary or secondary school is open and in session
62 for purpose of meeting the minimum number of instructional
63 days or hours pursuant to Section 16-13-231, Code of Alabama
64 1975. The term also includes class transitions, lunch,
65 non-instructional times, and any other time specified in a
66 wireless communication device policy.

67 (2) WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICE. A cellular telephone,
68 tablet computer, laptop computer, pager, gaming device, or any
69 other portable electronic device identified in a wireless
70 communication device policy that has the capability of
71 exchanging voice, messaging, or other data communication with
72 another electronic device.

73 (3) WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICY. A written
74 policy adopted by a local board of education to implement this
75 act.

76 Section 3. (a) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year,
77 no student shall use or operate any wireless communication
78 device in any public elementary or secondary school building
79 or on the grounds thereof during the instructional day.

80 (b) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, no student
81 may possess a wireless communication device in any public
82 elementary or secondary school building or on the grounds



83 thereof during the instructional day unless the wireless
84 communication device is turned off and stored off their person
85 in a locker, car, or similar storage location.

86 (c) Notwithstanding subsections (a) and (b), a student
87 may use, operate, or possess a wireless communication device
88 in a public elementary or secondary school building or on the
89 grounds thereof during the instructional day in any of the
90 following circumstances:

91 (1) The use, operation, or possession is pursuant to the
92 student's Individualized Education Program, Individualized
93 Accommodation Plan, Section 504 plan, or Individualized Health
94 Plan.

95 (2) The use, operation, or possession is for educational
96 or learning purposes under the supervision of local board of
97 education personnel.

98 (3) The use, operation, or possession occurs during an
99 emergency threatening the life or safety of the student or
100 another person.

101 (d) No later than July 1, 2025, each local board of
102 education shall adopt a wireless communication device policy.
103 The wireless communication device policy shall include
104 consequences for violations. The local board of education
105 shall reasonably distribute the wireless communication device
106 policy to students, parents, faculty, staff, and the State
107 Board of Education.

108 Section 4. (a) No later than July 1, 2025, each local
109 board of education shall adopt an Internet safety policy that



110 addresses student access to the Internet on devices owned by
111 the local board of education.

112 (b) The policy shall do all of the following:

113 (1) Limit Internet access by students to only
114 age-appropriate subject matters and materials deemed
115 age-appropriate pursuant to the policy.

116 (2) Protect the safety and security of students when
117 using email, chat rooms, and other forms of direct electronic
118 communication.

119 (3) Prohibit access by students to unlawfully obtained
120 data or information, including hacking, and other unlawful
121 online activity by students.

122 (4) Prohibit access to websites, web applications, or
123 software that exposes students to the disclosure, use, or
124 dissemination of their personal information.

125 (5) Prohibit students from accessing social media
126 platforms, except when expressly directed by a teacher solely
127 for educational purposes.

128 (c) The principal shall be responsible for ensuring
129 consistent compliance with the policy by school personnel.

130 Section 5. (a) Each certificated staff member employed by
131 the local board education shall complete an annual written
132 anonymous survey regarding the implementation of the wireless
133 communication device policy and to measure uniform compliance
134 within the school.

135 (b) On or before October 1, 2025, the State Department of
136 Education shall develop a survey to assess the levels of
137 participation and compliance with the wireless communication



138 device policy. On or before June 1, each subsequent year, the
139 annual survey results shall be submitted by the principal to
140 the local superintendent of education, local board of
141 education, and the State Board of Education for publication on
142 the website of the State Department of Education.

143 (c) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, failure of
144 a school to meet the minimum standards of uniform compliance
145 with the wireless communication device policy or this act
146 shall result in a deduction of 30 percent of the common
147 purchase allocation for the school.

148 Section 6. Section 16-40-13 is added to the Code of
149 Alabama to read as follows:

150 §16-40-13

151 (a) No later than July 1, 2025, the State Department of
152 Education shall develop and approve an asynchronous, digitally
153 delivered course that addresses the risks of using social
154 media and how to use social media safely.

155 (b) At a minimum, the course shall include the following
156 topics:

157 (1) The benefits of safely using age-appropriate social
158 media platforms, including career and resume building for
159 future academic or employment opportunities; sharing
160 information with family and friends; and safely connecting
161 with other users with similar interests.

162 (2) The risks of social media use including its negative
163 effects on mental health, including addiction; the
164 distribution of misinformation on social media; how social



165 media manipulates behavior; and the permanency of sharing
166 materials online.

167 (3) Safe practices for using social media including how
168 to report suspicious behavior; how to identify cyberbullying,
169 phishing and scam communications, predatory behavior, and
170 human trafficking; and maintaining personal security and
171 preventing oversharing of personal information.

172 (c) The State Department of Education shall make the
173 course available online and each local board of education
174 shall reasonably notify parents of its availability. Each
175 local board of education shall deliver the course to all
176 students prior to entering the eighth grade and shall make the
177 course available to students in grades eight through 12 who
178 transfer to the school district or who otherwise have not
179 completed the course.

180 (d) The State Board of Education may adopt rules to
181 implement this section.

182 Section 7. Section 16-1-27, Code of Alabama 1975,
183 providing for the use of electronic communications devices on
184 school property, is repealed.

185 Section 8. This act shall become effective immediately.