

# 1 Policy Analysis: Cell Phone Restrictions in Ontario Schools

## 1.1 Relevant Documents

- **Bill 101:** *Putting Student Achievement First Act* (2026)
- **PPM 128:** *The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct* (Updated 2024)
- **Growing Success:** *Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (2010)
- **OHRC Policy:** *Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities* (2018)
- **Ontario Human Rights Code** (R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19)
- **Ontario Accountable AI Framework** (2025)
- **[Expert Analysis] A mobile phone ban in schools will stigmatise students with disability: experts** (2019)

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This document analyzes the potential impacts, concerns, and policy contradictions related to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s anticipated stricter cell phone ban (as discussed in the 2026 context of Bill 101 [1] and PPM 128 [2]).

## 1.2 1. Policy Intersections and Contradictions

### 1.2.1 PPM 128 vs. Bill 101

- **Current State (PPM 128):** Bans phones during “instructional time” [2] unless directed by an educator.
- **Proposed State (Bill 101 Era):** Moving toward a near-total ban on school property (including hallways and breaks) [1].
- **Conflict:** This shifts cell phones from a “managed classroom tool” to a “prohibited item,” removing educator discretion.

### 1.2.2 Growing Success (Assessment & Evaluation)

- **Professional Judgment:** *Growing Success* [3] relies on the professional judgment of educators to assess student achievement.
- **Impact:** If a teacher has designed a “bring your own device” (BYOD) activity or an AI-assisted research project (as encouraged by newer frameworks), a total ban removes the primary tool many students use for these assessments.
- **Equity:** *Growing Success* [3] emphasizes fair and equitable assessment. Removing phones without replacing them with 1-to-1 board-issued devices creates a gap between students who can afford laptops and those who relied on their phones for digital access.

### 1.2.3 Digital Literacy and AI Guidelines

- **Encouragement of AI:** Recent Ministry messaging encourages the use of digital and AI resources to “modernize” education [6].
- **Contradiction:** Banning the most common hardware (phones) while failing to fund analogue resources (textbooks) or 1-to-1 hardware programs creates a “resource vacuum.”

## 1.3 2. Concerns for Educators and Associations

### 1.3.1 The “Resource Vacuum”

- **Lack of Analogue Funding:** There has been no significant funding to return to a fully analogue classroom (e.g., new textbooks).
- **Hardware Deficit:** School boards are struggling to maintain 1-to-1 device programs. Banning phones essentially “unplugs” the classroom for many students.

### 1.3.2 Enforcement Burden

- **Teacher as Policier:** Stricter bans shift the teacher’s role from instruction to constant surveillance and confiscation, which can damage student-teacher relationships and classroom climate.
- **Social and Systemic Issues:** Stricter enforcement often disproportionately affects marginalized students, potentially leading to increased disciplinary actions and further disengagement.

### 1.3.3 Safety and Communication

- **Parental Anxiety:** Many parents want students to have phones for safety reasons (walking home, after-school coordination). A total ban on school property may face significant parental pushback.

## 1.4 3. Government Rationale (The Case for the Policy)

The Ministry of Education has positioned stricter cell phone restrictions as a critical intervention to “protect instructional time” and “remove digital distractions” from the learning environment. The government’s rationale is built on three key arguments:

### 1.4.1 Eliminating Digital Distractions

- **Focus on Fundamentals:** The Ministry argues that personal mobile devices, particularly social media and gaming apps, are the primary sources of distraction in modern classrooms. Removing these devices is framed as essential for returning to “the basics” of literacy and numeracy.
- **Academic Performance:** Government officials cite international research (including PISA findings) suggesting a correlation between high classroom smartphone use and declining academic performance.

### 1.4.2 Improving Mental Health and Reducing Bullying

- **A “Digital Detox”:** By prohibiting phones on school property, the Ministry aims to create a “safe haven” from the pressures of social media, “FOMO” (fear of missing out), and the addictive nature of digital algorithms.
- **Combatting Cyberbullying:** The ban is seen as a direct tool to reduce instances of cyberbullying, unauthorized recording of students/staff, and other digital misconduct that often occurs during school hours.

### 1.4.3 Encouraging In-Person Socialization

- **Face-to-Face Interaction:** The government emphasizes that school should be a place for social development. Banning phones during breaks and lunch is intended to force students to engage in face-to-face conversation and physical activity.
- **Equity of Experience:** A total ban removes the “digital divide” on display in the classroom, where students with the latest high-end devices can inadvertently create a status-based hierarchy.

## 1.5 4. Human Rights and Accessibility Considerations

### 1.5.1 The “Invisible Inclusion” Challenge

- **Government Exemption Policy:** Under PPM 128, exceptions to the cell phone ban are made for students with health and medical needs, and to support special education needs as documented in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) [2, 4].
- **Expert Concern:** Academic research suggests that while exemptions exist, they can lead to the **stigmatization** of students with disabilities [10]. When a blanket ban is in effect, students who are permitted to use devices (as assistive technology) are “singled out,” which can highlight their disability and create social friction.

- **Concept of Invisible Inclusion:** Experts advocate for “invisible inclusion,” where assistive tools (including mobile phones for text-to-speech, scheduling, or sensory regulation) are integrated into the classroom environment without drawing negative attention to the user [10]. A total ban on school property (including hallways) may further exacerbate this stigmatization during non-instructional time.

## 1.6 5. Stakeholder Perspectives (Teacher Unions)

Teacher unions (ETFO [7], OSSTF [8], OECTA [9], AEFO) have provided the following feedback on the cell phone restrictions: ### “Band-Aid” / “Smoke and Mirrors” Unions have characterized the ban as a “distraction” or “smoke and mirrors” designed to deflect from larger issues like school violence, underfunding, and the lack of mental health resources.

### 1.6.1 Enforcement Burden

There is significant concern that the Ministry has placed the entire burden of enforcement on classroom teachers without providing additional administrative support or clear protocols for conflict resolution.

### 1.6.2 Inconsistency

Unions argue that without provincial standardization of hardware (1-to-1 devices), the ban is applied inconsistently and unfairly impacts students who rely on personal devices for learning.

## 1.7 6. Summary Table

Issue Area	Policy Contradiction	Concern	Potential Benefit
<b>Assessment</b>	<i>Growing Success</i> [3]	Assessment tools are removed.	Standardized testing environment.
<b>Resources</b>	AI Guidelines [6]	Digital access gap (BYOD vs. 1-to-1).	Encourages “non-tech” alternatives.
<b>Accessibility</b>	PPM 128 [2]	Stigmatization of students with IEPs [10].	Explicit exemptions for needs.
<b>Climate</b>	PPM 128 [2]	High enforcement burden for staff.	Reduced cyberbullying during school.

Issue Area	Policy Contradiction	Concern	Potential Benefit
<b>Learning</b>	Modernization	No funding for textbooks/hardware.	Increased focus on core instruction.

## 1.8 7. Sources and Citations

1. **Bill 101: [Legislative Assembly of Ontario](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
2. **PPM 128 (Code of Conduct): [Ontario.ca](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
3. **Growing Success: [Ontario Ministry of Education](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
4. **OHRC Policy on Accessible Education: [Official Policy](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
5. **Ontario Human Rights Code: [Official Text](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
6. **Ontario’s Trustworthy AI Framework: [Official Page](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
7. **ETFO Statement: [Unfair Labour Practice Application](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
8. **OSSTF Statement: [Media Releases](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
9. **OECTA Statement: [Ineffective Cellphone Policy](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
10. **Roy & Buchanan (2019): [A mobile phone ban in schools will stigmatise students with disability: experts](#)** (Date Added: 2026-05-11)

## 1.9 8. Provide Feedback

Your insights are valuable. This analysis is an ongoing effort to document and understand Ontario’s changing education landscape. If you have feedback, documents to share, or suggest a new policy area—including additional resource materials to contribute or specific citations to be included in our research—please use our [Feedback Form](#).

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