

FINALLY ONTARIO CRACKING DOWN ON CELLPHONE USE AND BANNING VAPING IN SCHOOLS

NORTH YORK — Ontario is introducing the most comprehensive plan in Canada to reduce distractions in classrooms and improve the health of children by standardizing and strengthening provincewide measures and mandatory learning to directly counter the alarming rise of vaping and cellphone distractions within classrooms.

As students benefit from three more years of uninterrupted learning as a result of the government's historic signing of deals with all teachers' unions, the government is taking further action to go back-to-basics by combating the negative impact mobile devices, social media and vaping are having on in-class learning.

"We have heard loud and clear from parents and teachers alike that cellphones in classrooms are distracting kids from learning," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. "Our government is introducing the toughest policy in Canada to tackle this issue by cracking down on cellphone usage during class time, as well as banning vaping in all schools. When it comes to cellphones, our policy is 'out of sight and out of mind,' as we get students back to the basics by restoring focus, safety and common sense back in Ontario schools."

Students in kindergarten to Grade 6 will be required to keep phones on silent and out of sight for the entire school day, unless explicitly permitted by an educator. For students in Grades 7 to 12, cellphones will not be permitted during class time unless explicitly directed by the educator. Moreover, social media websites will be removed from all school networks and devices, and report cards will include comment on students' distraction levels in class. The government will provide mandatory training for teachers and new supports for students and parents.

The government is also strengthening the rules around students caught using or carrying vapes or cigarettes. Students will be

required to surrender these products, along with parents being notified immediately of the situation. The government also officially announced \$30 million in the 2024 Budget to install vape detectors and other security upgrades in schools.

To support these initiatives, the government is investing \$17.5 million in new wrap-around supports for student mental health and parent engagement. This will include: \$15 million to provide supports for students at risk of addictive behaviours \$1 million to partner with School Mental Health Ontario to develop webinars and resources targeted to parents and students across the province to learn how to talk about the adverse effects of vaping and excessive cellphone usage

\$1.5 million to Parent Involvement Committees and students to run local prevention campaigns to help deter vaping and cellphone distractions These changes and investments are part of the government's plan to get students back to basics. By removing distractions in the classroom, students can focus on learning the skills they need to succeed after graduation.

DID YOU KNOW?
A 2023 UNESCO report found a negative link between excessive cellphone use and student academic performance and that students can take up to 20 minutes to refocus on what they were learning after focusing on a distraction.

A CAMH study on youth, smartphones and social media use showed that over a third (35%) of Ontario's secondary school students spend five hours or more daily on electronic devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops, computers, gaming consoles) in their free time.

A 2022 Statistics Canada report found that vaping is more prevalent among younger rather than older Canadians, with more than one-fifth of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years reporting vaping in the previous 30 days.

Ontario is the first province in Canada to have a provincewide social media ban on school networks and devices, and the new cellphone restrictions go further than any other jurisdiction in Canada.

As part of an ongoing commitment to student mental health and well-being, for 2024-25, funding to support student mental health, including initiatives focused on student safety and physical activity, has reached \$135.15 million, an increase of \$117.76 million since 2017-18.

In addition to explicitly banning e-cigarettes in schools and school-related settings, Ontario is responding to the popularity of vaping among students by:

Investing \$30 million over three years (2024-25 to 2026-27) to help equip schools with security cameras, lighting and other security upgrades, including vape detectors

Strengthening existing mandatory learning on cannabis and vaping and digital citizenship, with emphasis on the elementary curriculum

Providing \$500,000 (2023-24) to the following community partners: Ontario Native Education Counselling Association for culturally relevant cannabis and vaping awareness and prevention initiatives for youth

Canadian Lung Association for the "Lungs are for Life" program to raise awareness about tobacco, vaping and nicotine addiction

Springboard for its "Weed Out the Risk" program to raise awareness among youth and young adults about the risks of driving or being in a vehicle with a driver who is under the influence of cannabis

Lung Health Foundation to deliver the "Quash" program, which includes digital resources and a mobile app for students who are smoking and/or vaping "Our government is taking action to protect children and youth from the harmful risks of vaping and build healthier communities across the province. We are building on the changes we have already made to restrict the sale of

flavoured vapour products by taking this next step to make students surrender vape, tobacco and nicotine products in student possession to ensure our children receive their education in a safe and healthy learning environment."

- Sylvia Jones
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health

"Ontario is seeing a growing number of youth in Grades 7 through 12 report using vaping products that contain and emit many toxic substances. These products can affect the respiratory, immune and cardiovascular systems, and nicotine in these products is particularly harmful to youth brain development. Removing vaping products from Ontario schools will help protect our students from these preventable threats."

- Dr. Kieran Moore
Chief Medical Officer of Health

"We have seen an increasing number of adolescents and teens who are using vaping devices, which can lead to both short-term and long-term health problems. Nicotine can also quickly become a long-term addiction, especially while students' brains are still developing. We are pleased to see the Ministry of Education acknowledging the increasing use of vaping devices among Ontario's students."

- Ronald Cohn
President & CEO, SickKids

"At CHEO, we increasingly

see the mental health impacts of excessive exposure to social media among children and youth. We also know that clever marketing has made e-cigarettes seem fun and harmless – even though they're not and even though they often lead youth to tobacco smoking. It is important to educate kids and families about these risks and to make sure schools are places that protect and promote students' health."

- Alex Munter
President and CEO, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)

"At a time when young people are facing so many distractions, mental health pressures and even potential dangers, such as addictions, cyberbullying and online predators, we are taking measures to protect students by cracking down on vaping and other addictive substances, removing social media from school networks and devices, and increasing student mental health supports. Students deserve positive and distraction-free schools that promote positive mental health and allow for uninterrupted learning."

- Natalie Pierre
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education and MPP for Burlington

"Schools need to eliminate classroom distractions and focus on academic achievement by prioritizing STEM learning and real-life skills, such as financial literacy, and ensuring young people are

proficient in reading, writing and math. Our government is listening to the concerns of parents, and we're taking action by making it clear that vaping has no place in our schools, mobile devices need to be put away, and swearing at teachers is unacceptable behaviour."

- Billy Pang
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education and MPP for Markham—Unionville

"Having recently championed a successful private motion to address the rising concerns of distractions in our schools, particularly stemming from cellphones and the growing prevalence of vaping among youth, I am pleased to see this swift and decisive action taken by the government. This announcement underscores our commitment to creating safe and focused learning environments for Ontario students. By enhancing policies to counter the negative impacts of excessive screen time and substance use, we are not only addressing the concerns of parents and educators, but also prioritizing the well-being and academic success of our youth. These revisions to the Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct demonstrate our dedication to meeting the evolving needs of our education system and ensuring that our school environments remain conducive to learning and growth."

- Jess Dixon
MPP for Kitchener South—Hespeler

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