



# HOUSE BILL 959: Protecting Students in a Digital Age.

2025-2026 General Assembly

<b>Committee:</b>	Senate Rules and Operations of the Senate	<b>Date:</b>	May 22, 2025
<b>Introduced by:</b>	Reps. Blackwell, K. Hall, Biggs	<b>Prepared by:</b>	Brian Gwyn*
<b>Analysis of:</b>	Third Edition		Staff Attorney

**OVERVIEW:** *The 3rd edition of House Bill 959 would do all of the following:*

- *Require local boards of education to adopt an internet safety policy.*
- *Require the standard course of study to include instruction regarding social media and its effects on health.*
- *Require public school units to adopt wireless community policies that prohibit students from using, displaying, or having a wireless communication device turned on during instructional time except in certain situations.*

**CURRENT LAW:** G.S. 115C-5 defines public school units to include local school administrative units, charter schools, laboratory schools, regional schools, and the schools for the deaf and blind.

G.S. 115C-47 outlines the general powers and duties for local boards of education.

G.S. 115C-81.5 requires the State Board of Education to adopt a plan of education and a standard course of study which must include instruction in the areas of arts, communication skills, physical education and personal health and safety, mathematics, media and computer skills, science, second languages, social studies, and career and technical education. G.S. 115C-81.45(b) requires local boards of education to ensure that the standard course of study is taught in schools.

**BILL ANALYSIS: Section 1** would require local boards of education to adopt policies on student access to the internet on devices or internet services provided by local school administrative units. The policies would be required to do all of the following:

- Limit access by students to only age-appropriate subject matter and materials.
- Protect the safety and security of students when accessing email, chat rooms, and other forms of electronic communication.
- Prohibit unauthorized access by students to data or information maintained by the local school administrative unit, including by "hacking" and other unlawful online activities.
- Prevent access to websites, web applications, or software that do not protect against the disclosure, use, or dissemination of a student's personal information.
- Prohibit and prevent students from accessing social media platforms, except when expressly directed by a teacher solely for educational purposes.
- Prohibit the use of the TikTok application.

Additionally, employees of local boards of education would be prohibited from using TikTok for any job-related duties, including classroom instruction or to communicate or promote any unit- or school-sponsored club, extracurricular organization, or athletic team.

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**Section 2** would require the standard course of study to include instruction on social media and its effects on health. Instruction would be required to be provided once during elementary school, once during middle school, and twice during high school. This instruction would be required to include information on at least the following:

- Negative effects of social media on mental health, including addiction.
- Distribution of misinformation on social media.
- Methods of manipulating behavior using social media.
- The permanency of information shared online.
- How to maintain personal security.
- How to identify cyberbullying, predatory behavior, and human trafficking on the internet.
- How to report suspicious behavior encountered on the internet.
- Personal and interpersonal skills or character education that enhances individual level protective factors and mitigates or reduces risk-taking or harmful behavior.

This section would be effective when it becomes law and would apply beginning with the 2026-2027 school year.

**Section 3** would require each governing body of a public school unit to establish a wireless communication policy that prohibits students from using, displaying, or having a wireless communication device turned on during instructional time, except in certain circumstances, including the following:

- If authorized by a teacher for educational purposes or for use in the event of an emergency.
- As required by the student's individualized education program (IEP) or section 504 plan.
- As required to manage a student's health care, in accordance with a documented medical condition.

The governing body of the public school unit would be required to establish the consequences for violations of the wireless communication policy. These consequences may include confiscation of the wireless communication device and disciplinary measures under the public school unit's Code of Student Conduct.

By September 1 of the year in which this law becomes effective, every public school unit would be required to send to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) a copy of the public school unit's wireless communication policy. The public school unit would be required to provide DPI with a copy of the wireless communication policy anytime it is changed. By October 1 of each year, DPI would be required to report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee the number of public school units that are in compliance with this statute and the names of any public school unit which is not in compliance.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** Except as otherwise provided, the bill would be effective when it becomes law and would apply beginning with the 2025-2026 school year.

*\*Hillary Woodard and Drupti Chauhan, Staff Attorneys with the Legislative Analysis Division, substantially contributed to this summary.*