

May 7, 2026

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Chair, Kansas State Board of Education
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Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dr. Randy Watson
Commissioner, Kansas State Department of Education
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Chair Hopkins and Commissioner Watson:

I am writing to share information on the intent and interpretation of certain provisions included in House Bill 2299. First, on behalf of Governor Kelly, I want to thank you for your leadership and support for students across our state. The work of the State Board of Education and the Kansas State Department of Education is vital to the continued success of our students.

As the Legislature crafted this bill, provisions relating to the accreditation of public and private schools were elevated as an issue. Specifically, in section 7 of the bill, it states that:

(5) Any nonpublic school operating in Kansas may voluntarily seek accreditation by the state board of education. Any nonpublic school accredited by the state board of education may also be accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency. Each nonpublic school accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency recognized by the state board of education shall be entitled to the same rights as nonpublic schools accredited by the state board of education. Accrediting agencies recognized by the state board of education on or before March 1, 2026, shall not lose such recognition unless approved by the legislature.

As discussed during legislative deliberations on this bill, this provision's intent is to ensure that accredited private schools may cease accreditation from the State Board of Education due to a desire to not comply with the provisions of HB 2299. This provision was not intended to confer any additional rights to nonpublic schools that they do not already have, regardless of their accreditation status.

During the Senate committee discussion on this provision, Chairwoman Renee Erickson stated that this language was “just defining accreditation for the purpose of who is subject to cell phone ban” and “reaffirming the accreditation process.” During the Senate floor debate, this intent was reaffirmed by comments from multiple members of the body. Additionally, a successful amendment from Senator Bill Clifford further clarified this by explicitly stating that third-party accrediting agencies must be recognized by the State Board.

In addition to the provisions previously mentioned, concerns have been raised on elements of this bill relating to the storage of personal electronic devices during the school day and how those devices can be used in accordance with a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) or for the student’s physical or mental wellbeing.

On challenges relating to storage of these devices, Governor Kelly believes that schools should develop methods that best suit their student populations and can do so while complying with provisions of this bill. The bill requires devices to be powered off and securely stored away and off a student’s person during the school day. Here are examples of how we believe this can be achieved through school district policies:

- Storing a student’s phone in pencil bags, or other containers, and left in that student’s primary classroom, home room, first classroom of the day;
- Storage in a student’s vehicle or being left at home;
- Storage in a student’s locker;
- Storage in a cubby, cabinet, or designated phone area in a classroom or secure area within the school building.

This is not an exhaustive list but hopefully outlines the types of concepts that can achieve implementation with minimal costs. Storage in backpacks that are not left in a student’s locker, first classroom, primary classroom or homeroom is not acceptable and does not meet the language of the bill.

Concerning students’ use of personal devices in accordance with their Individualized Education Program or for medical accommodations, this bill does not substantively change the status quo. Students who use their personal devices for these purposes will still be allowed to do so given subsection (a)(5)(A) clearly states that districts must adopt a policy that allows these students to use their devices during the school day.

The additional provision urging the consideration of other forms of intervention for these students simply ensures that districts are fully considering the best tools to support these students in their educational needs. This does not create additional burdens or prevent students with medical needs or IEPs from accessing necessary devices.

While we understand complying with this legislation will be a significant endeavor and require some level of trial and error, the benefits this bill will have for our students and their academic achievement is worth the hard work of implementation. We must do all we can to protect our students and ensure their school days are defined by collaborative learning, not distracting screentime.

As with any law, these provisions are not set in stone—but always open for further refinement. I urge parents, schools, and policymakers to continue collaborating in future years to finetune this law so that the policy has the intended impact while remaining workable for our school districts. Governor Kelly stands ready to assist and support our schools as they take these important steps to protect our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Will Lawrence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Will Lawrence
Chief of Staff, Governor Laura Kelly