From "Rob Price <rob.price@bvsd.org>" <rob.price@bvsd.org>
Subject **February 13, 2026 News Clips**
To Susan Cousins <susan.cousins@bvsd.org>
Date February 13, 2026 8:24:34 AM MST

Susan,

Do you know where the more than 5000 students is coming from? In this mornings news clips: "The district reported a decline of more than 5,000 students since 2017 and projected further decreases in the coming years.

From 2017 to 2025, we declined by 3,675 students. This is not a number that I've communicated. Thanks,

Rob Price
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From: **Critical Mention** <do-not-reply@criticalmention.com>
Date: Fri, Feb 13, 2026 at 5:37 AM
Subject: February 13, 2026 News Clips
To: <rob.price@bvsd.org>

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February 13, 2026 News Clips

From Randy Barber (randy.barber@bvsd.org)

BOULDER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

View Full Report

February 13, 2026 News Clips

News Clips is delivered to the Boulder Valley School District's leadership with important news and media mentions. The purpose is a survey of media coverage, not an endorsement or promotion of the ideas contained within. Please consult with related BVSD departments or leadership before making changes to school/district

practice.

Total Number of Clips 19

Sections:

- BVSD News (1)
- Education News (18)

BVSD News

1 **District 21 Senate Vote Set for Feb. 26; Student activists urge gun law reform; Boulder Valley School District addresses enrollment decline**

Online News

Date Collected Feb 13, 2026 5:35 AM
Category Online News
Source KGNU

Following the resignation of Colorado Senator Dafna Michelson-Jenet, announced Monday, the Senate District 21 Vacancy Committee, in accordance with revised statutes and Colorado Democratic Party Rules, will meet virtually to elect a new Senator to represent Senate District 21 on February 26 at 6 p.m. If the election is contested, the committee will hold a candidate forum before conducting the election. The meeting will be streamed live on YouTube. More information about the vacancy process, including a list of announced candidates, can be found at coloradodems.org.

Colorado Democratic Party Chair Shad Murib said in a statement, “Sen. Michaelson Jenet has been an extraordinary leader for Colorado, championing mental health, reproductive freedom, strong public schools and standing up to antisemitism. I’m grateful for her service and excited to see the impact she’ll make in her next chapter.”

Student activists urge gun law reform
More than a hundred high school students held a rally at the State Capitol yesterday, calling for tighter gun laws. The event was part of an annual statehouse advocacy day for Colorado members of Students Demand Action. This year, students urged

day for Colorado members of Students Demand Action. This year, students urged lawmakers to pass a bill that would expand Colorado's existing ban on 3-D printed ghost guns and their parts. They were joined at the rally by two of the bill's Democratic sponsors. KGNU's Don Davis was there, so tune into the Morning Magazine early next week to hear his reporting on that.

This story was reported by the Colorado Capitol News Alliance.

Boulder Valley School District addresses enrollment decline
Tuesday afternoon, the Boulder Valley School District sent a statement to parents, staff, and community members to address declining enrollment and plans.

The district reported a decline of more than 5,000 students since 2017 and projected further decreases in the coming years. The enrollment decline directly affects the district's funding and budget, making it more difficult to manage facilities and deliver the education BVSD promises students.

The impacts are especially significant at the elementary level, where the district said potential options could include "consolidation, closure, or programmatic changes." No decisions have been made.

The district said it will maintain transparency and communication throughout the process. Additional information is expected after BVSD's spring break.

ChatGPT blocked on BVSD networks
Boulder Valley School District is planning to block generative AI application ChatGPT on its network devices, effective Monday, Feb. 16. This decision stems from a recent software update that allows the creation of group chats and customization of AI chatbots. BVSD Information Technology sent a statement to parents, staff and community members yesterday evening detailing this decision.

The statement reads, "The safety of our students, both physical and digital, is a priority. The BVSD Board of Education has this issue scheduled for discussion in March."

Until then, BVSD recommends students and staff to use the application 'MagiSchool', a district-approved AI enterprise software that BVSD has purchased, and says it better meets both their educational and safety standards.

Winter bike to work day tomorrow
Tomorrow, Friday, February 13, is Winter Bike to Work Day, a worldwide celebration of winter bike commuting. In Boulder the event is co-sponsored by the City of Boulder, Community Cycles, and others. From 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., there will be over 40 stations around Boulder offering free breakfast. Sue Prant, Executive Director of Community Cycles, says the event celebrates people walking and biking to work.

"We're rewarding people for keeping it up all winter, keeping those good habits up all winter. And also to encourage new people to get out. To walk and bike in the winter by doing it as part of a group, which sometimes makes it a lot easier, and getting a reward for doing it, which is the free breakfast."

You can go to communitycycles.org to take the pledge to ride, and see a map of those breakfast stations, which includes KGNU. You'll also find more information about Community Cycles' upcoming events, which include free classes and an urban hike this Saturday. That's communitycycles.org.

You can hear daily headlines on the Morning Magazine, KGNU's weekday morning show, with coverage of local and regional public affairs and news with headlines and commentary. Click here to listen to full episodes of the Morning Magazine.

Education News

2 **Bill would change how older misdemeanor convictions affect Colorado teacher licensure**



Date Collected Feb 12, 2026 5:49 PM MST
Category Digital News
Source Chalkbeat Colorado
Author Jason Gonzales
Market United States

Language English

People applying for a teaching license in Colorado wouldn't have to report a misdemeanor conviction that's seven years or older unless it involves a young person or at-risk adult under a bipartisan bill that unanimously passed the House **Education** Committee on Thursday.

The current law says that teacher licensure applicants must disclose most misdemeanor convictions regardless of the date of the conviction. The law exempts misdemeanor traffic offenses or traffic infractions.

Sponsors said House Bill 1090 aims to knock down barriers for prospective teachers who have made past mistakes. The bill could also help address a statewide teacher shortage. Colorado had about 2,800 vacancies to start the 2024-25 school year and about 600 positions were never filled, according to Colorado Department of **Education** data.

Many people feel embarrassed about previous legal issues, and that can stop them from getting a teaching license, said Rep. Matthew Martinez, a Monte Vista Democrat and bill sponsor. Before he became a lawmaker, he worked with incarcerated **students** at Adams State University.

We're on a need-to-know basis.
Every weekday morning, Chalkbeat Colorado is bringing thousands of subscribers the news on public schools and **education** policy that they need to start their day. Sign up for our free newsletter to join them.

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He said many people who have committed crimes want to change their life.

"And sometimes they are the best teachers and the best mentors," Martinez said.

Other bill sponsors include state Rep. Stephanie Luck, a Penrose Republican, and Sen. Julie Gonzales, a Denver Democrat.

Martinez and Luck said they chose the seven-year timeframe because it's closer to what most private businesses use.

The bill uses the state's definition of an at-risk adult, which is a person with a developmental or physical disability or a senior.

Become a Chalkbeat sponsor

During Thursday's meeting, Colorado Association of School Executives lobbyist Elisabeth Rosen said the bill makes sense, and there wasn't any testimony against it. A legislative analysis says the bill wouldn't require additional costs to the state.

"We all from the school district and teacher perspective hope to move this forward," Rosen said.

Luck said qualified teaching candidates shouldn't be prevented from becoming teachers for a misdemeanor such as joyriding or shoplifting. Most of the people that she's heard from were young when they committed an offense, she said.

"Some of us have had bad days that have resulted in criminal behavior. Some folks have been caught; other folks have not been caught," Luck said. "I don't think that after seven years, if it is a certain type of crime, we should continue to remind them of that bad day."

Luck and Martinez amended the bill before its passage to remove a section that would have exempted private school educators who worked with a Colorado school for more than two years from having to apply for a professional license. Martinez said the amendment narrowed the focus of the bill, and the sponsors would try to take up the issue at another time.

Jason Gonzales is a reporter covering higher **education** and the Colorado legislature. Chalkbeat Colorado partners with Open Campus on higher **education** coverage. Contact Jason at jgonzales@chalkbeat.org.

3 Can AI Help Students Navigate the Career Chaos It's Creating?



Date Collected Feb 12. 2026 12:08 PM MST

Category Digital News
Source EdSurge
Author Daniel Mollenkamp
Market United States
Language English

After a career counselor visited one of her classes earlier this year, Lily Hatch found herself asking a chatbot for guidance about college.

A junior at Wake Forest High School in North Carolina, Hatch had taken an in-class career quiz that recommended she pursue dermatology. She had finished quickly and so approached the counselor to find out how to explore that profession further. The counselor gave a couple of suggestions, before adding that Hatch could also play with a chatbot to explore her college options.

So, that's what Hatch did.

But instead of returning information on which schools rank highly for dermatology, the chatbot — a general-purpose consumer product, rather than an edtech tool — veered off into offering information about climate, telling Hatch to consider the University of North Carolina in Wilmington because it's near a beach.

It felt a little like a runaway train, with the bot dragging her down a pre-laid track. "I was looking for advice on what colleges would be ideal for me. And it switches into going more into what things in my life I would be looking for in the future, which was not what I was looking for," Hatch says.

Today's high school students — who spent years of their academic careers surfing disruptions and the challenges of returning to the classroom after the pandemic school closures — are preparing to enter a labor force and broader economic system that can seem confusing and unstable, as technologies like artificial intelligence are reshaping the career ladders that their parents climbed. Some national surveys show that Gen Z students feel more prepared for their futures now than they did in past years, but for those about to graduate, that's not always the case. Many students describe a general pessimism about the future.

"There's a lot of fear there," says Matthew Tyson, CEO of Tapestry Public Charter School in DeKalb County, Georgia. Tyson notes that many of his students aren't planning for college, or feel discouraged by the fast-changing nature of life around them.

Navigating these major shifts about starting a career requires both educators and young people to think flexibly, according to experts. Students need honest guidance, Tyson says, adding that adults should be transparent about the reality that they don't have all the answers.

But new AI tools don't have all the answers either, not even those purpose-built to offer career guidance. At least, some human counselors don't think so.

"The AI stuff is kind of crazy to think about," says Ian Trombulak, a school counselor in Vermont. "That's not going to help us reverse the trend here of career readiness scores being low."

Still, some say they are open to the possibility that offloading aspects of their work to AI may, ironically, free them up to offer better support to students contending with the disruptions AI is creating in the labor market.

A Tough Job
Career counseling is a demanding gig these days.

Youth unemployment rates are increasing, and recent assessments reveal dips in college readiness. And two-thirds of parents desire an increase in job skills and workforce training opportunities in high school, according to a figure from the Hunt Institute.

Yet counselors often have to make tough choices between giving academic and career advice or addressing students' emotional crises, and many students seem to lack support systems, says Tyson, from the Georgia public charter school. Student traumas can spout up to the adults meant to give those students advice.

Matthew Tyson, CEO of Tapestry Public Charter School in DeKalb County, Georgia. Photo courtesy of Tyson.
"A lot of times, there's only so much water that can be taken out of a glass before the glass is empty," Tyson says of counselors' emotional states. Eager to assist students, counselors can burn out.

They also have to deal with staff shortages. Tapestry, Tyson's public charter, doesn't suffer from a shortage of counseling educators like some nearby schools. It has three counselors for 300 students, according to Tyson.

But across Georgia, there are 378 students for every school counselor, according to the latest data from the American School Counselor Association, which recommends one counselor for every 250 students. And that's hardly the worst in the nation, with the ratios sitting at 573 students per counselor in Michigan and 645 per counselor in Arizona.

With human resources strained, schools are now considering how to use AI to create more opportunities to meaningfully advise students on how to approach the future.

Innovative uses of artificial intelligence can amplify the work of human college and career counselors, argues June Han, the CEO of EduPolaris AI, a company which offers Eddie, an AI counseling platform that includes counselor, student and parent portals licensed by schools. The company raised $1 million in early investments, and the company's platform — which relies, at least in part, on third-party large language models — is being piloted in a handful of Title I high schools, the CEO told EdSurge.

School-support organizations, including the Homeschool Association of California, list the tool as a recommended AI resource, as does the White House.

Tapestry is one of the schools piloting Eddie. The platform has helped, according to Tyson, particularly because the dashboard lets Tyson see useful information such as how many students have completed their reference letters for college applications. From the dashboard, he can send a nudge to students, reminding them to finish. That feature cuts down on the number of meetings he has to take. The data collected by the platform also provides clues about what to focus on when he works with students, and where they need the most help, Tyson says.

The Davidson Institute, a nonprofit that provides educational opportunities to "profoundly gifted" students, uses the "Ask Eddie" chatbot function to counsel families in the Young Scholars Program for students ages of 5 through 18. Many of those students are on "nontraditional paths," looking at early college, or coming from accelerated grades or homeschool backgrounds, says Megan Cannella, director of outreach.

More than 200 families in the program have used the tool since February 2025, according to Cannella. She says the big selling point is that it's available 24/7 and in a number of languages. The nonprofit doesn't offer traditional school counseling, so the AI tool boosts the limited support that staff provides. It's proven particularly helpful for families just starting their college journey, and for homeschoolers, she adds.

Meanwhile, what students want from a career is also changing, in a way that makes it difficult for career counselors to keep up.

Shifting Interests
In northwest Missouri, students have become more interested in exploring non-college pathways after graduation, such as military service or vocational training, says Geoff Heckman, a school counselor at Platte County High School.

Apprenticeships, internships and alternative credentials feature more prominently in students' plans these days because these options prepare them to step right into jobs when they leave high school, Heckman says. Indeed, around the country, students are skeptical about college, meaning that high school counselors can't assume that pathway.

Geoff Heckman, a school counselor at Platte County High School. Photo courtesy of Heckman.
The students Heckman counsels at the public school outside of Kansas City are also starting to find postsecondary guidance resources on their own more often, using AI and social media, he adds.

There have been cultural shifts, sometimes away from the kinds of jobs the school's infrastructure is set up to support. Not long ago, the career and technical school next door to Heckman's school had a waiting list for its law enforcement opportunities. Now, there's much less interest, Heckman reports.

Instead, some of the careers students now desire are hard for Heckman to understand. In the years since he's become a counselor, students have found jobs as social media influencers and professional gamers. Indeed, the number of students who say their dream is to be a social media star has swelled.

"I want to support a student no matter how wild their dream may sound to me," Heckman says.

It comes down to helping them construct a plan of attack, teaching them to research the industry of interest, to discern how strong their passion for this dream is and to reach out for mentorship, he adds. For example, last year a student came to Heckman and said she wanted to be a pilot. There was no program for that at the high school. But an effort from the district was able to create a new internship opportunity for the student through the local Air Guard, which has a flight school.

Similar situations occur in schools across the country, and many places are keen to build stronger career pathways.

For instance, Vermont switched over to proficiency-based grading requirements — beginning with the class of 2020 — and it has started to incorporate "self-direction skills" in the assessment of students. It's a signal for schools to focus on skills that will be useful in a future where counselors can't predict precisely what jobs students will be working, according to one school counselor in the state.

A lifelong Vermonter, Ian Trombulak came to career counseling after working in a group home after college. It sparked something, he says. After he left the emotionally tense work of a group home, he found himself pulled into schools where he could be the type of person who had helped him through high school.

Trombulak has worked in public education for nine years, and in that time, he's seen "this continued drumbeat" where public educators are asked to do more with fewer resources, even as core components of education like curriculum have become swept up in political battles. Budgets are too tight to hire enough counselors, and counselors have too many students to feasibly advise, he admits.

"You know, we're not superheroes," he says. "At a certain point, you are constrained by the kind of resources that you have at your disposal, and public education is not working with a whole lot right now. Even in the best of times, it can be a struggle."

Helping students steer through their uncertainty requires a deft approach. At the same time he's helping ninth graders find their footing in the murky transition from middle school to high school, he's also advising students on what could happen after graduation. On average, he meets about five to 10 students per day. Some meetings are pre-planned and some are drop-ins. A lot of his job happens outside of scheduled sessions, he says. While stopping in on a teacher, students will pull him aside to check in. There are about a dozen of those encounters a day.

Schools may be turning to AI out of desperation, Trombulak says. But he doubts it will advise students as well as human counselors.

EduPolaris leaders feel that the safeguards on Eddie, the AI counseling platform, position it to boost the human work of counselors. Han, the company's CEO, argues that Eddie is so human-centric and school-specific that the tool amplifies the human counselor's efforts, allowing for schools to provide personalized guidance even with limited resources.

Han argues that initial skepticism from counselors stems from a lack of AI literacy. Counselors and educators are afraid of losing control, she says.

Yet even if AI proves adept at providing accurate, useful career information and advice, that may miss the subtler value that can emerge when students sit down to chat with a trusted adult. That type of interaction is essential to building the "social capital" and interpersonal networks that actually help young people secure jobs, some researchers argue.

And much of Trombulak's work is relational rather than transactional. Mostly gone are the days of relying on personality tests and career quizzes. Instead, Trombulak says, counselors hold open-ended conversations probing what students feel passionate about. It's more self-exploratory and requires a more human touch. "I'm almost there as a mirror," Trombulak says, or as a backboard to bounce ideas off.

Ultimately, a powerful lesson Trombulak believes he can teach students is how to find answers on their own. As students try on ideas, counselors teach them about what kind of path they would have to take to end up in a job. It means a lot of Googling with students. He goes through the process of how he, as a well-educated adult, would find answers.

Part of that process now is, yes, verifying information gathered from AI.

Unreliable Narrator
For students, what matters most is the quality of the advice they receive, whether it comes from a human or a bot.

After two or three weeks of back and forth with the chatbot, Hatch, the junior from North Carolina, didn't return to the human career counselor.

But that doesn't mean she found the AI useful.

The scraps of information she got could have been easily discovered by a quick Google search, she says. The experience contributed to her overall skepticism of AI, which she acts on as a student leader for her school's chapter of Young People's Alliance, which advocates for stronger AI regulations and more job training opportunities for young adults.

She doesn't know yet where she wants to attend college, or even what she'll study. Right now, instead of dermatology, Hatch is considering education as a career path.

So, what does she think about using AI for career counseling?

She wouldn't recommend it. In fact, she's not so keen on what she sees as an overreliance on technology in general. Students she knows use it to churn out passable school work, and in response, teachers even seem ready to give out good grades for subpar work when they feel it's not AI-generated.

Students should really slow down, and rely on AI less, she says: "I feel like it overall is not as useful as people make it out to be."

4 Fresno Unified elementary students must return laptops as district shifts focus to in-class use





Date Collected Feb 13, 2026 5:22 AM
Category Online News
Source EdSource

Top Takeaways
Students will now only use computers at school instead of taking them home.
The move is expected to save money and increase instructional time.

Teachers and parents have mixed reactions to the new classroom-based setup.
No longer will every student in the Fresno Unified School District have a laptop for use at home.

For almost six years, the school district provided every student with a device, part of a nationwide push to give students equal access to technology during the coronavirus pandemic, which closed schools and initially sent students online for learning.

>From November through June, Fresno Unified's 40,000 elementary students must turn in their laptops. Going forward, they will use them at school.

The reversal is, in part, to reduce spending on fixing or replacing laptops each year. There's also a shift in thinking about the educational value of laptops for students in grades K-6. Keeping devices at school means students can start their work immediately, rather than wasting time in class figuring out whose computer is working, broken, or forgotten, teachers say.

"It's really about supporting students in the classroom," said Tami Lundberg, the district's chief technology officer. "Let's increase the instructional time."

Still, there are concerns that removing laptops from households could limit access to educational resources that engage students and families.

It's unclear whether other large districts in California are scaling back on sending laptops home as Fresno Unified is doing. Some smaller districts appear to be doing the opposite. This month, for example, 30 students in the Madera Unified School District received laptops through donations from United Way Fresno and Madera Counties.

The cost of replacing, repairing devices
Across the country, cost has been a common issue for student devices, according to Adam Phyall, director of professional learning and leadership at All4Ed, a national advocacy organization focused on access to equitable educational opportunities. The more students move a device from home to school, the higher the likelihood of damage occurring, Phyall said.

"With them now going home and in those spaces, schools are having to replace and repair various machines," he said. "School districts (are) making budget decisions and saying, 'Well, maybe if we keep them in our buildings, they can last longer.' "

That's the case in Fresno Unified. Despite providing students and families with guidance to take care of the devices, the district experienced high rates of broken or lost devices over the last five years — up to 30% of devices damaged or lost each school year, costing Fresno Unified about $4 million annually or over $2 million over the technology budget.

Returning to classroom laptops will cost the district $8 million in one-time funds and will nearly eliminate the ongoing costs to replace and repair devices in a couple of years, Lundberg said.

Teachers and parents have mixed responses
Computer keys broke, and screens cracked. Laptops are left at home right before a lesson or a test. Those are some of the reasons Kirk Elementary second grade teacher Ivana Ford-Neal supports keeping computers at school. Her students were expected to complete several lessons and assignments via online learning platforms from home.

"They were not fulfilling that," Ford-Neal said.

Instead, with the laptops back in the classroom, student work previously assigned as homework will be completed there, she said.

But Greenberg Elementary School teacher Jacquilla Burris, who runs one of the school's after-school programs for grades K-4, said she is worried about students who have already returned the laptops, especially those struggling to read. Students read books on their devices until the district began recalling the laptops.

Since returning their laptops, students have been less engaged in the reading program, Burris said. The after-school program doesn't have enough devices for all students.

The after-school program, run through the Office of Advancing Academic Acceleration & Achievement, also offers workshops for parents to help their students

Acceleration & Achievement, also offers workshops for parents to help their students with reading. Burris said that at the beginning of the school year, parents logged in to the sessions with their students' devices. Without the devices, parent engagement has declined because access to technology to help students is gone.

This is one of the risks of returning laptops to schools, said Phyall of All4Ed. When families lack access to online resources, students can fall further behind, he said.

"If we're no longer sending them home, then we run the risk of widening those gaps,'' he said. "It is going to start creating this inequity of the haves and have-nots when devices stop going home with our students."

Though not the intent, some families also used the devices to find ways to improve their lives. A father may use a laptop to fill out job applications, said Burris of Greenberg Elementary, where nearly 96% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged. "It does cause a hardship for families who are already low-income and struggling."

Renewing the purpose of a district-provided device
But leaving devices in the classroom will restore accountability for how students use them, some teachers and parents say.

Because parents had not purchased the devices, there was no ownership or responsibility for the computers, teachers told EdSource. Parents were required to pay $40 for a damaged laptop and $100 for a lost device.

Computer replacement was a free service at technology centers across the district, but many parents wouldn't use it, they said. Some struggled to reinforce what the devices were intended for.

Even though devices at home were meant to help students with their academics, Adriana Ramirez, a mother of two elementary students and one middle schooler, admittedly did not see that happening. When her now middle schooler was in elementary school, he often got in trouble for using his laptop to watch YouTube and chat with other students. In 2024, Fresno Unified disabled the student-to-student chat function.

"Growing up, any technology that we had, we had it at school," Ramirez said, "so I don't see it negatively. When it's at home, they don't use it for school."

Ford-Neal, the Kirk Elementary teacher, said that with the new practice, teachers will reassert the proper use of the devices.

"We can control the narrative — how they're using the computer, if they're getting their work done, what they're doing on the computer, all of that — because we're in a class setting," she said. "When it's at home, we can't control that."

5 California challenges Trump administration's threat to withhold $5 billion over gender identity disclosure



Date Collected Feb 12, 2026 7:30 PM MST
Category Digital News
Source EdSource Today
Author Emma Gallegos
Market Oakland, CA
Language English

Top Takeaways
U.S. Department of **Education** contends that California has violated federal privacy laws by barring school boards from passing laws that require school employees to notify parents if they believe their children are transgender.
California Attorney General Rob Bonta's lawsuit asks for a temporary restraining order against what it calls "an unconstitutional attempt" to impose new conditions on $4.9 billion in federal funding for schools.
The California Department of **Education** released guidance to schools about parental rights to view their children's **education** records.
California filed a lawsuit this week challenging the U.S. Department of **Education**'s threat to withhold funding over the state's policy on gender identity disclosure.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta asked the Northern District of California Court on Wednesday for a temporary restraining order against "an unconstitutional attempt to impose new conditions on $4.9 billion in federal **education** funding," according to a statement from Bonta's office.

"We will not stand by as U.S. ED uses baseless claims to attack crucial **education** funding," Bonta said. "We will continue to fight to protect California's schools and

funding," Bonta said. "We will continue to fight to protect California's schools and students from unfair attacks and work to ensure a discrimination-free educational environment for all students."

At issue is whether school staff should notify parents if they believe their child may be transgender or gender-nonconforming. California and LGBTQ+ advocates contend that policies requiring parental notification may forcibly "out" transgender students to their parents against their will. But the Trump administration and conservatives have portrayed the state's stance as an attack on parents' rights.

Related Reading

Newsom signs bill to end parental notification policies at schools; opponents say fight is not over
July 17, 2024

Legal battle continues over whether parents have right to know student is transgender
December 29, 2025

U.S. high court asked to restore order on student gender identity disclosure
January 9, 2026

"Parents are the most natural protectors of their children. Yet many states and school districts have enacted policies that imply students need protection from their parents," said U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon in a statement on Jan. 28.

Last month, McMahon claimed its investigation found that the California Department of Education "abused its authority by pressuring school officials to withhold information about students' so-called 'gender transitions' from their parents."

Assembly Bill 1955, a 2024 state law, prohibits school boards from passing resolutions that require teachers and school staff to notify parents if they believe a child is transgender or gender-nonconforming. It was passed in the wake of decisions by several school boards to require that parents be notified. In one high-profile incident, State Superintendent Tony Thurmond was ousted from a school board meeting in Chino Valley for speaking against a parental notification policy that the board later passed.

Last March, the U.S. Department of Education's Student Privacy Policy Office opened an investigation into whether the California Department of Education's policies violated federal privacy laws. That includes the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, known as FERPA, which grants parents the right to request and review their children's educational records until they turn 18.

The investigation found that California "put districts in a position of having to choose between complying with FERPA or getting sued by the State." The investigation report noted that CDE "coerces school districts to withhold information about students' gender identity."

Bonta disputes this interpretation of FERPA, stating that the law only requires disclosure of education records, not general information. The lawsuit states that CDE has issued guidance to districts clarifying that parents have the right to request their children's education records under FERPA, even if those records contain information about a student's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

The suit states that the Trump administration has "failed to demonstrate even a single violation of FERPA" and that the focus on the investigation appears to be "motivated by discriminatory animus against transgender people, including transgender students."

"This is a flagrant attempt by the U.S. Department of Education to intimidate the California Department of Education and California's local education agencies under the guise of enforcing FERPA," said Bonta in a statement.

The CDE released guidance regarding FERPA on Wednesday in a letter to public school agencies. It outlines the exceptions to what is included in education records, including personal staff notes, law enforcement records, employee records and records by medical or mental health professionals for students at least 18 years old.

This isn't the only legal battle California is involved in regarding parental notification. Two Escondido Union School District teachers filed a lawsuit in 2023, claiming that state and district policies preventing the "outing" of transgender students violated their constitutional free speech and religious rights. Last month, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit blocked the order from a federal judge who sided with

the teachers. Plaintiffs asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reinstate the federal judge's ruling.

6 **How a District Used Data to Fight Students' Gambling and Vaping**



Date Collected Feb 12, 2026 3:39 PM MST
Category Digital News
Source Education Week
Author Caitlynn Peetz Stephens — February
Market United States
Language English

... to view those student behaviors in the context of elevated levels of depression,

social isolation, and suicidal ideation among young people throughout the country.

"These are not discipline problems—they're coping mechanisms," Vuckovich said during a presentation here at the National Conference on **Education** sponsored by AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

But kids often don't recognize how these coping mechanisms—like a puff of a vape or the thrill of a risky sports bet—might be counterproductive, he added.

Three children in the 1,260-student Windber district have died by suicide this ... suicide in the past year.

"We had to act and build a system that was responsive to that," Vuckovich said.

Additionally, during routine searches of the district's schools, drug detection dogs frequently uncovered vapes, particularly in the middle school, said Korie Duryea, the district's special **education** director.

Vapes are easy to find—there are three shops on a common route through town, Duryea said—and kids use social media apps like Snapchat to coordinate sales and purchases. Vapes are also easy to hide. Kids have been caught hiding them in the strings of their hoodies or in devices that look ... like key fobs for vehicles, she said.

Gambling has similarly become a big problem, added Jessica Shuster, Windber's director of **education**.

Kids use apps in which they deposit real money for rewards in a game. They're also increasingly participating in sports betting or playing casino-style games on their devices, she said.

"They are becoming addicted or conditioned to want that reward," Shuster said.

With knowledge of the problems ... , Windber focused on prevention

Once the district identified **students**' problems with mental health, gambling, and vaping, leaders developed **education** programs to begin teaching kids as early as pre-K about the risks and resources available to them if they need help.

Pre-K **students**, for example, are given a presentation called "why animals don't smoke," and children in 3rd through 5th grades learn about vaping risks and ... , health concerns, resources, and answers to common questions. The district tries to entice families to attend by offering food and Amazon gift cards, which has been somewhat successful, Duryea said.

The district has also begun implementing a new social-emotional-learning curriculum to teach **students** emotional regulation, and now refers **students** who have been caught with vapes to an intervention course sponsored by the American Lung Association.

Along with implementing routine mental health screening for all **students**, a small group of ...

7 On Capitol Hill, Relieved Principals Press for Even More Federal Support



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Source Education Week
Author Olina Banerji — February
Market United States
Language English

More than 200 elementary school principals gathered on Capitol Hill this week to meet with their states' congressional delegations. They had three main asks: increase funding for teacher training and retention, address growing student mental health needs in early grades, and protect public school funding from going to private school choice options.
Still, the school leaders, whose meetings with lawmakers were facilitated by the National Association of Elementary School Principals as part of the group's annual advocacy conference, were palpably relieved as they headed to the Hill. Just a little over a week before their visit, federal lawmakers had approved—and President Donald Trump signed into law—a fiscal 2026 budget that maintained level funding for virtually every K-12 program.

Last year, the principals had made nervous appeals to their representatives to protect the funding that aided their most vulnerable **students** at a time when the Trump administration had started terminating what turned out to be more than $2 billion in federal **education** grants.
The principals last year also met weeks before the president introduced a budget proposal to slash billions of dollars from U.S. Department of **Education** programs—a proposal that Congress ultimately declined to adopt.
David Carpenter, the principal of Jeeter Elementary School in Opelika, Ala., said lawmakers this year have been more open to meeting in person, compared to last year, when the delegation from Alabama mostly met congressional aides.
"There was a lot of turning upside down of ideas and conversation, but I also think that there was a little bit of avoiding talking with us, because there was so much up in the air," he said. "This year, it's been a little easier to set up meetings."
In Carpenter's meeting with lawmakers, he reiterated the importance of steady funding for **students** with disabilities.
"Every year I've been here, we have pressed for more funding for IDEA," he said, referring to the Individuals with Disabilities **Education** Act and the primary federal funding stream that helps public schools provide services for **students** with disabilities.
Carpenter said he has seen a sharp increase in the number of **students** who qualify for special **education** services since the pandemic, and it's been a tall ask to provide the necessary supports because of the costs.
Rachel Edoho-Eket, the principal of Waterloo Elementary School in Howard County, Md., shared Carpenter's concerns about hiring enough mental health counselors and special **education** teachers for a growing population of **students** who need their services.
"Early intervention is great," said Edoho-Eket. "You want **students** to be screened earlier. But our staffing formulas aren't keeping up with the needs."
Principals stressed the importance of Title II, the $2.2 billion program for teacher training. They said they want to use those federal dollars on getting more teachers credentialed in early childhood **education**, special **education**, and other areas where schools struggle to hire teachers.
Principals also pressed their members of Congress to maintain level funding for other federal programs like Title IV-A, which helps schools provide student support and academic enrichment, and Head Start, which offers free early childhood **education** for **students** from low-income families.
The Trump administration had proposed zeroing out dedicated Title II and IV-A dollars, instead moving the programs into a single **education** fund that would have been $4.5 billion less than current allocations for the programs it would have replaced.
While that didn't happen for fiscal year 2026, the relief might be temporary, said John Schilling, the superintendent and principal of Southside Elementary school district in California.
Schilling is apprehensive about unwanted surprises in next year's budget and worried the administration could push for more cuts to public school funding in the future.
"I think we're all scared for the reality that those cuts may actually come to pass," he said.
Federal dollars should strengthen educator pipelines, principals say
With the immediate threat to federal funds now tamped down, principals have trained their eyes on staffing their schools with an adequate number of teachers and support staff.
But with student enrollment falling nationwide, crunching school budgets, principals feel pressured to reallocate money that could have gone toward hiring more specialized teachers or interventionists, said Edoho-Eket, the principal from Maryland.
"There's a lot of burnout happening with our staff, and it's related to funding issues. As more programs are [proposed to be] cut, more things are being pressed upon teachers," she said. "Teachers are now interventionists and counselors. … This is a hard time to recruit people who want to become educators."
See also
Elementary, middle, high school principals from Missouri met senior staffers at R-Rep. Eric Schmitt's office on March 12, 2025.
School & District Management
How Principals Are Shaping **Education** Policy Through Advocacy
Olina Banerji, March 19, 2025
•
6 min read
Also, teachers need continuous training to meet the needs of a changing classroom, said Carpenter, the principal from Alabama.
Both Edoho-Eket and Carpenter have seen their young **students** become increasingly unable to regulate their emotions, and they emphasized the need to train teachers in dealing with these behaviors.
Carpenter said principals need federal dollars to solve these staffing challenges. For example, he has used Title I funding to hire a retired teacher who helps identify **students** with the greatest mental health needs.
The teacher, who works for four hours a day, acts as an informal counselor for the kids and helps teachers manage any disruptive student behavior in their classes.
"Her job is to focus just on the kids with the greatest needs," Carpenter said. "That's what Title money is intended to do from the get-go."
Principals are worried about competing with expanding school choice options
Apart from the big-ticket advocacy items, like maintaining level federal funding, principals also brought a bevy of smaller, but connected, requests to their lawmakers. They requested more funding to hire nurses and to increase reimbursement rates for school lunches by 45 cents per meal and breakfasts by 28 cents.
Annette Sanchez, an elementary principal from Beeville, Texas, leads a school where over 85% of her **students** are economically disadvantaged and rely on free meals at school.
Sanchez spoke to her representatives about pushing forward the Healthy Meals Help

Kids Learn Act, which would increase funding for school meals. The legislation was introduced in the House in October by Rep. James McGovern, D-Mass. There hasn't been any movement on the bill so far.
"We may need that full reimbursement so that our kids are not hungry. If they're hungry, they're not going to learn," said Sanchez.
With her current budget, Sanchez is also worried that her school may not be able to compete with private and home-school options in Texas for which families will be able to receive state support next school year.
Last year, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed into law a billion-dollar private school choice program that provides families up to $10,000 to use toward private schooling options and up to $2,000 for home school. **Students** with disabilities are eligible for up to $30,000.
Some parents celebrated their newfound ability to choose where to send their kids, while public school advocates said the new program would take essential dollars away from public schools. More than 42,000 families applied on the first day after applications for the funding opened on Feb. 4.
See also
20260203 AMX US NEWS COULD TEXAS SCHOOL VOUCHER PROGRAM 1 DA
School Choice & Charters
Where Private School Choice Enrollment—and Spending—Is Surging
Mark Lieberman, February 3, 2026
•
13 min read
While Sanchez supports parents' right to choose the type of **education** that's right for their children, she's worried that private schools may cherry-pick the **students** they choose to enroll—for example, not accepting **students** with disabilities. This might put vulnerable **students** at risk of being left behind in public schools that are now under-resourced because of state money going toward funding private school choice, Sanchez added.
Sanchez spoke to lawmakers about "having accountability" for choice programs.
Carpenter, the principal from Alabama, had similar concerns about tax dollars being diverted to more school choice options, over and above the system already in place in his state.
Carpenter pressed his representatives about the new federal tax-credit scholarship program, which was passed as part of Trump's One Big, Beautiful Bill Act. The program, which takes effect next year in states whose governors opt in, allows individuals to claim federal tax credits of up to $1,700 in exchange for donations to organizations that issue scholarships to cover K-12 school-related expenses. So far, 28 states—including Alabama—plan to opt in.
Carpenter is worried that by opting in, Alabama may send more taxpayer dollars toward private school options.
"This may be a bigger battle next year," he acknowledged, "but I would argue that right now, if some of the rules that govern these scholarship-giving organizations and how they distribute the funds is not talked about sooner than later, … it might end up being a drain on our [public] school funds."

8 Solving Chronic Absenteeism Isn't 'One-Size-Fits-All,' This Leader Says



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Author Jennifer Vilcarino — February
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Language English

School districts are wrestling with how to solve the problem of chronic absenteeism, which remains stubbornly higher than pre-pandemic levels despite declining slightly in recent years.
But there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, and a school's response should be tailored to **students**' specific needs, says Mary Catherine Reljac, the superintendent of the Fox Chapel Area school district in Pittsburgh.
Nationally, about 23% of K-12 **students** were chronically absent in the 2024-25 school year, meaning they missed 10% or more of school days for unexcused or excused reasons, according to a tracker by the American Enterprise Institute.
See Also
Photo of girl walking in school courtyard.
Student Achievement
Absenteeism May Hurt Academics Long Before It Becomes 'Chronic'
Evie Blad, January 21, 2026
•
4 min read
When **students** are chronically absent, they are less likely to do well academically, less likely to feel connected to their peers and school communities, and more likely to

eventually drop out of high school. Research shows that high rates of absences even affect the **students** who do attend class. Many times, teachers need to repeat or review lectures to ensure all **students** can move forward, slowing progress for **students** who attend class regularly.

The top reasons **students** miss class are due to illness (67%), feeling down or experiencing anxiety (10%), oversleeping (9%), and being uninterested in attending (7%), according to a 2025 RAND Corp. survey of 1,300 K-12 **students** aged 12 and up. Recently, increased immigration enforcement activity has contributed to **students** staying home, too.

Reljac was scheduled to share the strategies her district used to tackle chronic absenteeism at the National Conference on **Education**, hosted in Nashville, Tenn., this week by AASA, the School Superintendents Association. In advance of her session, **Education** Week spoke with Relijac about how educators can best support and communicate with **students** and families to get them to come to school. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What is your district's approach to addressing chronic absenteeism?

To be as robust and as comprehensive as possible. We tailor our responses based on the needs of the **students**.

We spotlight the importance of regular school attendance for **students** and for their families, as well as alert our staff to be more mindful of how frequently a student may be absent from school or the reasons that could cause a student to be absent from school.

The first thing that we've done is to make it important for our district. I have embedded with our administrative team multiple checkpoints during the year to review attendance data. We talk about what they're seeing as successful with their **students** and share [those takeaways] collaboratively across the district.

The second thing we did is make contact on a more regular basis with families whose **students** may be struggling with attendance and changed some of our supports that we have to try and get to the root cause of why a child is struggling with attendance.

Are there any examples where educators were able to successfully intervene if a student was chronically absent?

Often, young children miss their school transportation, and there might not be transportation from their family. Some of our educators have worked on helping a student to set alarms or to tell time. We've had educators who have called children in the morning to make sure that they are up on time to get ready and catch the bus. Those small touches not only show that we care but also can make a big difference to support a child and a family as they're trying to come to school.

At the middle and high school level, it is trying to figure out what is the difficult part of getting into school. Is it because they've worked late the night before? We've helped **students** to advocate for a different work schedule or [considered] how we can change their school schedule. Their first period may be something like a study hall, if that is possible, or they have a different start time. We've worked with them to adjust their course schedules to perhaps be online or done in a different format.

See Also
2 **students** stand before a school in the distance.
Student Achievement
Opinion
Progress on Absenteeism Is Stalling. What Can We Do About It?
Nat Malkus, February 2, 2026
•
5 min read

We've sometimes found **students** are having difficulties [with attendance] that aren't related to school, but through the school resource officer developing a positive relationship with them, they've been able to share and then we can help them in whatever way it is available to us.

How can educators best communicate with parents when a child is frequently absent?

Educators have to communicate the importance of being in school and that they are co-collaborators with a family to help get that accomplished. Sometimes when families receive a call from educators, it may be an unsettling situation for them based on their own personal needs or what's going on—so it has to be as nonjudgmental as possible. It has to be from a place of support, student-centered, and as creative as possible.

A good example of that is we redesigned the official attendance letters that go home. Our former letters were filled with a lot of official language and citing statutes or requirements. We felt that that may not be the most effective approach and instead we shifted the letters to be more informative.

We say: "Did you know that your student has been absent for X number of days? The typical student at your child's school has only been absent for this number of days at this point in the year. We know how important it is for them to be there, and we miss them when they're not there. How can we work together?"

In general, what are some common misconceptions about chronic absenteeism?

Some common misconceptions are that it's **students** who are refusing to come to school, or it's an issue that is more prevalent in a socioeconomic category or in an area of the country. I found that to be false.

We've learned that some **students** meet the criteria for chronic absenteeism, and their families may not even realize it. **Students** may miss a day every other week, every Friday, or around holidays. It may be a family that just doesn't realize how quickly those add up, and the cumulative effects year after year.

What are red flags that could lead to chronic absenteeism?

We looked at our attendance data and noticed that **students** who are absent in the first 20 days of school are at a higher risk for becoming chronically absent as the year progresses. That's not for every student. Some **students** just become ill in the first 20 days and need to be home for a day. But knowing that was a pattern that we could see over multiple years, we recognized that it was an opportunity for us to engage earlier in the cycle.

See also

Sharon Bradley, director of student, family and community services for Plano ISD, listens to members of the Character, Attendance, and Restorative **Education** (CARE) team discuss their current projects in Plano, Texas, on Dec. 14, 2023. The CARE department focuses on equipping **students** and adults with the tools, strategies, and resources that support a safe, engaging, and collaborative learning environment through character **education**, attendance recovery, and restorative practices.
Families & the Community
Leader To Learn From
Absenteeism Was a Big Problem in This District. A New Strategy Is Getting Results
Madeline Will, February 5, 2024
•
11 min read
We look at the percentage of school that a child has missed every quarter of the school year, and when that percentage seems to be rather high, we do a deeper dive as a team into that student-specific pattern of attendance.
We also are looking at attendance on Mondays and Fridays, which tend to be days that are more frequently missed in our community. We're also looking at some of the other red flags, like when we aren't getting excuses or written documentation from families. If we're seeing that they are reluctant to engage with us, that's something that we try to build.
What challenges does your district still have with absenteeism?

It's always a challenge with absenteeism to balance the requirements of **students** and families in school. There are things that are very disruptive in a family's life. It's challenging to continue to focus on attendance [when] a bigger thing is getting in the way.
Some **students** who have developed multiple years of chronic absenteeism patterns are very challenging to change. That's why we then celebrate the improvements we can make, as we're trying to take a child who's not attending regularly and help them to attend regularly.
Being able to share information about a child that comes up in one classroom that might affect their attendance pattern but may not be evident in other classrooms—it's a logistical challenge behind the scenes for us. It's one we can overcome with a lot of different strategies, but that continues to be a challenge. Sometimes, someone may know that there's more going on. Can we get that information to the right people who can then try and support it?
We've done some outreach with our educators to explain all of the supports that we have within the district, as well as the community partners that we work with, to give them more awareness so they can articulate when they notice a child that could benefit from some of those resources. They can advocate for them.

9 In These Districts, Students Get an English Credit for On-the-Job Internships



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Author Evie Blad — February
Market United States
Language English

Nashville , Tenn. -
When a group of Wyoming school districts explored why the **students** who could benefit the most from internships weren't doing them, they quickly identified a common barrier—and a creative solution.
Embedding with local employers can help disengaged **students** find a new purpose for learning and identify future jobs in their own communities, the Wyoming leaders said. But struggling **students** too often passed those opportunities up. The reason? They needed the time to take additional English classes to fulfill the state's graduation requirements.
An industrious team of English teachers, community college professors, and district administrators designed a way for **students** participating in a work-based learning experience to earn an English credit concurrently by completing a series of professional writing assignments related to their internships. Even better: **Students** who complete the course also earn an introductory college credit that they can put toward their future degrees.
It's all part of an evolving strategy conceived by four districts clustered in and around Sheridan, Wyo., which have partnered with Sheridan College and local employers to help **students** identify career pathways early and experience them before they graduate. Two superintendents discussed the collaboration, known as the Northern Wyoming Career Pathways Partnership, at the National Conference on **Education**, hosted by AASA, the School Superintendents Association, in Nashville on Thursday.
"There are all kinds of reasons **students** leave our communities after graduation,"

said Chase Christensen, superintendent of the rural Sheridan County District #3.
"The one reason we don't want to see is that they don't see the opportunity to stay."
The districts' work comes as school systems around the country aim to build their relevance for **students** and families by partnering with local employers to design new student learning experiences, a key focus of the AASA conference.
Knocking down barriers to career-based learning
In small towns, that work is particularly relevant, Christensen said. Connecting **students** to local jobs can be a key strategy for economic development, improving graduation rates, and even maintaining school enrollment levels, as more **students** opt to return to their communities and start families after college or career training, he said.
The three districts in Sheridan County and one in neighboring Johnson County use a multi-phase strategy to introduce **students** to possible career fields early, explore whether their aptitude aligns with their interests, and engage in job shadowing and internships to get hands-on experiences.
"We need to ask ourselves, 'Why do our kids keep coming back? And more importantly, why don't they?'" said Scott Stults, superintendent of Sheridan County District #2.
Stults' district eliminated valedictorian and salutatorian titles when educators discovered that many high-achieving **students** bypassed internships they might have otherwise pursued, favoring additional Advanced Placement courses weighted more in calculating GPAs.
For struggling **students**, they offered additional credit-recovery options and eased GPA requirements that were often barriers for interested **students**.
The English/language arts credit helps address the needs of **students** across the academic spectrum by giving them an early start to a college degree. For **students** interested in the trades, it may incentivize them to pursue a more lucrative associate degree, rather than a professional certificate, Christensen said.
Work for the course, overseen by a Sheridan College professor, includes a writing assignment that stretches **students**' problem-solving and relationship skills.
Students must identify an area for improvement in their internship employers' policies or processes and propose a solution in a written essay that they discuss with their supervisor at an exit interview.
Some employers have actually adopted **students**' suggestions, which helped them cut costs and improve products, Stults said. In one case, a local rifle manufacturer changed a metal-finishing process after a student shared a skill he'd developed in shop class. Supervisors later offered to pay for the student to complete gunsmith training so he could return as a full-time employee after graduation.
"We tell employers, 'You're going to have a valuable employee there on day one,'" said Christensen. "'They can think outside the box because they haven't had the lid shut yet.'"
Chase Christensen, superintendent of Sheridan County School District #3, presents a panel at the National Conference of **Education** in Nashville, on Feb. 12, 2026.
Christensen tied his district's goals for work-based programming not just to student success but also the health of the local economy. "If we don't ensure our **students** see a future for themselves in the community where they graduated and grew up, of course they are going to leave," he said.
—Kaylee Domzalski/**Education** Week
A phased approach to career exploration
The ELA credit, and high school internships, build on a phased approach.
All four districts employ career coaches, who work with **students** to identify learning experiences and coordinate with local employers to identify new opportunities.
They also take **students** on field trips and hold career fairs to show the range of jobs at local companies. For example: While Sheridan County doesn't have a big tech employer, a student could become a computer programmer at a nearby hospital.
In 8th or 9th grade, **students** complete ungraded assessments developed by YouScience, an **education** company, that identify overlaps in their career-related interests and aptitudes. Those results can help drive conversations with parents and identify needed coursework, Stults said.
If **students** have a high aptitude in a given career field and no interest, they may benefit from hearing from an adult who does that work. If they have high interest but low aptitude, they may select courses that can help build those necessary skills, leaders said.
Career coaches also share the aggregate results with employers and the local Chamber of Commerce, which may use the data for economic development. If data show that hundreds of high school **students** have both high aptitude and interest in technology jobs, that might become a selling point for a tech company interested in expanding in the area.
Districts also use the results to sort **students** into advisories based on aptitude and interest so they can hold regular conversations with like-minded peers about what's next, leaders said.
The approach has been so successful that leaders are searching for ways to evolve and expand it. One possibility: Identifying additional college credits like math and geometry that overlap with **students**' internships.
"If we don't ensure our **students** see a future for themselves in the community where they graduated and grew up, of course they are going to leave," Christensen said.

10 **Clovis police to charge parents who allegedly aided student ICE protest**



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Market Oakland, CA
Language English

The Clovis Police Department intends to charge parents who allegedly helped organize a student anti-ICE walkout from classes this week with misdemeanor crimes, the Fresno Bee reported.

The likely charge would be contributing to the delinquency of a minor, which can result in a year in jail and a $1,000 fine, a police spokesman told the newspaper.

In an unsigned statement attributed to the Clovis Unified School District and the Clovis police, officials said more than 500 cameras were used to surveil the protest on Tuesday in which **students** walked out of several schools to protest the Trump administration's immigration policies.

"During the course of the protest, multiple adults were observed actively encouraging, organizing and facilitating **students** leaving school without authorization. These actions are unacceptable. Adults who contribute to or promote truancy place minors at risk and interfere with their **education**," according to the statement.

Police also said that several **students** were nearly hit by cars during the march and crossed streets without using crosswalks.

School officials are also working to discipline the student protesters by "identifying **students** who left campus without authorization and taking appropriate action for truancy enforcement."

Two parents, who The Bee did not identify by name, said the **students** organized the walkout themselves.

"To be clear, the children did this all on their own. There was no changing their minds about this," a parent said. "We were showing up for our children and for other children as well. I don't appreciate the implication that some of our parents and other community members who are just showing up for our community were somehow doing something nefarious or wrong."

David Loy, the legal director of the First Amendment Coalition, a free speech and press rights group, said if the parents didn't organize or encourage the walkouts and simply walked with the **students**, they likely didn't break any law.

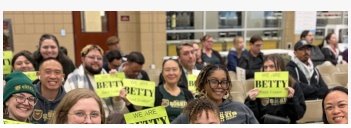
"There's nothing inherently illegal about people exercising their right to protest," he said. "If the **students** themselves organized their own walkout, even if the **students** were violating school rules by walking out of school, the adults are not necessarily contributing to that decision."

Walking with **students**, giving them water and helping them at intersections is "not in any way, shape or form a crime as far as I can tell," Loy said.

He also said he hoped the school district would use restorative justice methods if the **students** are disciplined for truancy. "If they participated in a good-faith protest, then we should have an appropriate consequence. It's not like they skipped school to go joyriding," Loy said.

EdSource investigative reporter Thomas Peele contributed to this report.

11 West Contra Costa school board approves $42 million in cuts to close budget gap





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Top Takeaways
The plan includes 10% reduction in staffing levels by the next fiscal year.
It includes the closure and consolidation of some schools, including the Betty Reid Soskin Middle School.
Five hours of discussion and testimony included more than 100 public comments.
In a contentious meeting, the West Contra Costa Unified School District board unanimously approved on Wednesday a sweeping fiscal solvency plan that will cut $42 million from its approximately $500 million budget for the 2026-27 school year.

The vote comes after the district, which serves 25,000 **students** in the San Francisco Bay Area, held numerous community meetings to discuss the plan, which includes a 10% reduction in staffing levels by the next fiscal year, which starts July 1. The plan also outlines the closure and consolidation of some schools, among other cuts.

At the end of over five hours of discussion and public comment, the board made some small amendments, including allowing elementary schools to retain School Community Outreach Workers known as SCOWS, who work to engage parents in their children's **education**.

As for how it will reduce staffing by 10%, district leaders have said since announcing their solvency plan in January that they hope to do so as much as possible by not filling job openings, as well as through resignations and retirements. By state law, districts must inform staff of possible layoffs or transfers by March 15.

The budget cuts come after the December settlement of the district's first teachers strike in its history. The settlement gave teachers and other employees wage and health benefit increases. But in the weeks since the settlement, the district, board, unions and community have grappled with how the district can remain solvent and avoid state receivership.

"These are incredibly difficult decisions," said Demetrio Gonzalez-Hoy, a board member, a former bilingual teacher in the district and former union president. He voted for the compensation package last month, as well as for the fiscal solvency plan Wednesday night. "If we do not right-size our budget, we risk losing control and decisions could be made for us that would be even more harmful to our schools."

Jamela Smith-Folds, a parent in the district and a former teacher, criticized fellow board members who supported labor settlements with district employees without a clear path to fund them. "When the majority of the board voted 'yes', they knew they were voting yes to mergers, people losing their jobs, middle school shifts and programming losses," she said.

The most vocal display of support came from parents, **students** and staff at the Betty Reid Soskin Middle School, who turned out in force to persuade the board to keep the under-enrolled school open. The solvency plan calls for it to be merged with Pinole Middle School, a mile and a half away.

The school is named after the legendary Betty Reid Soskin, who worked as a ranger at the Rosie the Riveter National Historical Park in Richmond, and at age 100 was the oldest National Park Service ranger in the nation. She died in December at the age of 104.

Board member Gonzalez-Hoy apologized to the school's supporters for having to vote to merge it with Pinole. The board pledged to find other ways to honor Soskin's legacy. "I'm truly sorry that we are in this position, and I'm hoping this choice will actually be good in the long term," he said.

12 How elementary principals can build long-term attendance success

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Author Kara Arundel, Senior Reporter
Market United States
Language English

WASHINGTON — At Love Creek Elementary School in Lewes, Delaware, educators are doing everything they can to encourage student attendance.

There are tiered supports that increase with intensity for those **students** needing individualized interventions and supports. If not having clean clothes is keeping a student from attending, the school provides gently used clothes or offers to wash outfits. And then there's an opportunity to have pancake breakfast with Principal Equetta Jones.

Last year, only 10 **students** out of 715 at Love Creek Elementary were chronically absent, said Jones. And although chronic absenteeism at the school is declining, attendance is always a concern.

"It gets bigger than just kids not coming to school," said Jones, explaining absenteeism affects **students**' academic performance and connections to school.

Elementary school principals are in a unique position to set good attendance habits for young **students** and their families as they enter the K-12 system, said Hedy Chang, CEO, president and founder of the nonprofit Attendance Works.

Chang was speaking to Jones and about 200 other elementary school principals who were in Washington, D.C., this week for the National Association of Elementary School Principals' advocacy conference.

Chronic absence as early as pre-K can negatively impact reading proficiency by 3rd grade, achievement levels in middle school, and suspension and drop out rates in high school, Chang said. There also are impacts on chronically absent **students**' executive functioning skills and social-emotional growth.

"This has to do with the whole child's development," Chang said.

>From 2017 to 2022, the national chronic absenteeism rate nearly doubled, from 13.4% to 28.5%, according to a tracker from the American Enterprise Institute. School closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic are largely to blame for reduced rates of attendance over this time period, and school, district and state leaders have developed interventions and incentives to reduce the rates.

There are signs that those efforts are working. In 2023, the rate fell to 25.4%. And in 2024, it was 23.5%.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of school days — about 18 — for any reason in an academic year.

When examined by grade level, chronic absenteeism had high rates in kindergarten nationwide. The estimated chronic absenteeism rate in kindergarten in 2025 was 24.6%. By late elementary school and middle school, rates fell. But in high school, they rose again. The estimated chronic absenteeism rate in 2025 for 12th graders was 36.3%.

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Elementary schools can face unique challenges when addressing attendance, Chang said. That's because those schools may not have the same infrastructure and staffing as middle and high schools do to address attendance challenges.

"You've got to get real creative on how you work a whole school approach" to chronic absenteeism, Chang told the elementary school principals.

Using empathy to increase attendance
Chang said school leaders should take a more empathetic and supportive approach, rather than one that is punitive or places blame, when aiming to increase attendance. This could mean asking a chronically absent student "How can I help you?" rather than saying "What's wrong with you?"

For elementary schools, where **students** are reliant on adults to get them prepared to start the school day on time, the outreach for whole-school intervention extends to **students**' parents or caregivers. That can include informing parents of the value of consistent attendance, as well as providing a welcoming and caring school environment, Chang said.

Individualized support for families with attendance challenges is also needed, Chang said.

At Kāneʻohe Elementary School in Kāneʻohe, Hawaii, Principal Derek Minakami said there's a lot of **education** on the importance of school attendance with the families of the approximately 510 pre-K-6 **students**. Still, there are challenges such as parents being unsure of when to send their sick child to school, families opting to take vacations on nonholidays, and the fact that the school doesn't have bus routes for most **students**, Minakami said.

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The school analyzes absenteeism data to determine which **students** and families need extra supports. There's also a walking school bus where **students** who live near each other walk to school as a group with an adult.

Jennifer DeRagon, principal of George Hersey Robertson Elementary School in Coventry, Connecticut, highlighted a schoolwide attendance campaign last school

year to educate families about the importance of being at school.

For the most part, the grades 3-5 school's 375 **students** really want to come to class. The challenge is meeting every families' needs when they have barriers to attendance, said DeRagon. One step the school has taken is to have teachers call families whose children were absent for at least two days in September, because that month "sets the precedent for the whole year," she said.

Another approach the school took was to post monthly attendance rates by grade level on a bulletin board near the front entrance. The **students** in the grades with the highest attendance each month got rewards, like an extra 15 minutes of recess time.

"I wanted parents to see that as soon as they walked in. I wanted the kids to notice it," DeRagon said of the attendance posters.

13 Houston ISD unveils plan to shutter 12 schools in 2026-27



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Category Digital News
Source Houston Public Media
Author Bianca Seward
Market Houston, TX
Language English

State-appointed Houston ISD Superintendent Mike Miles recommended the district close 12 schools, operating at 11 total facilities, for the 2026-27 school year.

"We need to take action to sustain not only the gains, but also to put our district in the best position possible going forward," Miles said at a school board meeting Thursday night, referencing HISD's improvements in standardized tests since he was appointed by the Texas Education Agency in 2023.

In his presentation to the board, Miles pointed to aging infrastructure and sharp declines in enrollment for the reasoning behind the planned closures.

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In a video message posted to the district's YouTube page, Miles called the decision difficult. He added "when students are spread across underutilized buildings in need of significant repair, it limits the resources and opportunities we can provide."

HISD's state-appointed board of managers is scheduled to vote on the proposed closures at its next meeting Feb. 26. If approved, the schools will close on June 4, the last day of this year's academic calendar.

Placido Gomez, an elected HISD trustee with no voting power under the ongoing state takeover, expressed frustration over what he said was a lack of community input.

"If HISD needs to consolidate schools, they should make the case to the community and ask for meaningful input before making final decisions," Gomez said. "The appointed board's lack of community engagement is unacceptable."

The 12 schools recommended for closure are:

Alcott Elementary, whose students will transition to Mading Elementary
Briscoe Elementary, whose students will transition to Carrillo Elementary
Burrus Elementary, whose students will transition to Kennedy Elementary
Franklin Elementary, whose students will transition to Gallegos Elementary
Henderson NQ Elementary, whose students will transition to Bruce Elementary
Port Houston Elementary, whose students will transition to Pleasantville Elementary
Ross Elementary, whose students will transition to Roosevelt Elementary or Clemente Martinez Elementary (family's choice)
Cage Elementary, which will be co-located with Lantrip Elementary
Fleming Middle School, which will be co-located with Mickey Leland College Preparatory Academy for Young Men
McReynolds Middle School, which will be co-located with Mickey Leland College Preparatory Academy for Young Men.
Hobby Elementary, which will be co-located with Lawson Middle School
Gulfton Middle College, which will be co-located with Liberty High School
Miles said there would be a way to honor each of the campuses that closes.

For students transitioning to a new school, Miles said their relocation would be "less

than a mile away." HISD's school choice applications are due Feb 27 but will be extended for families affected by the closures.

"What bothers me most now is that our schools that had the highest [facility condition index], the poorest facility, are our underserved populations," Miles said to the board. "That is fact. You're going to see it, and where these schools are located, and that breaks my heart."

A facility condition index, or FCI, measures a building's overall condition and evaluates a school on its HVAC system, plumbing, structural issues and safety features. The district reports 96 HISD campuses have an FCI over 65%, which they say indicates critical issues that would require a replacement to address.

Two schools slated for closure, Clemente Martinez Elementary and Gregg Elementary, will be repurposed to Future 2 pilot schools. Future 2 Schools are kindergarten through eighth-grade programs with a focus on preparing students for a rapidly changing world and the use of artificial intelligence.

The district has suffered from steady enrollment declines over the last several years. A recent report from the University of Houston found those declines have accelerated since the state takeover, which was initiated because one high school received a string of failing academic ratings from the state. In the 2013-2014 school year, HISD had more than 214,000 students. Enrollment this year is approximately 168,000.

RELATED: Houston ISD has seen sharper enrollment decline, workforce shifts under state takeover, UH report shows

Data included in Miles' presentation show 23% of HISD schools are operating below 50% of their capacity. The district also reports the cost of rebuilding a single elementary school is approximately $75 million and renovating an elementary school could cost $40 million.

The closures are part of a district plan called "Accelerate Houston," which the HISD describes as a comprehensive initiative to expand student opportunity while strengthening the district's fiscal sustainability.

The district proposed consolidating 15 schools into a total of seven renovated or rebuilt campuses as part of a $4.4 billion bond proposal in 2024. The measure failed in what could be considered a referendum on Miles and the state intervention.

In August of last year, Miles said he would submit a list of school closure recommendations to the board in December. But when the deadline came the district said it was pausing its move to close campuses though closures were still under consideration.

Miles, who leads the largest district in Texas, pointed to several smaller school districts in the state that have closed campuses in recent years. Among them are Austin ISD and San Antonio ISD. He also mentioned neighboring districts Aldine ISD, Fort Bend ISD and Spring ISD. He added that other urban districts across the U.S., such as those in Atlanta, Boston and Cleveland, also have closed schools in the last two years.

Miles said teachers who work at the affected schools, and are in good standing, will still have jobs in the district.

14 **Why one of North Carolina's top school districts is eyeing closures**



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Category Online News
Source Axios

The board of Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools could close up to two elementary schools as the district grapples with declining enrollment and budget shortfalls.

Why it matters: CHCCS is considered one of North Carolina's best school districts. But its academic excellence doesn't shield it from some of the same headwinds facing public school districts nationwide.

School officials say closing a few aging facilities can help the district right-size itself to suit its current student population.
The latest: CHCCS is considering a few schools for closure: Seawell, Glenwood, Ephesus, Estes Hills and Frank Porter Graham Bilingüe.

Any CHCCS elementary school closures would take effect in the 2027–2028 school year, according to district spokesperson Andy Jenks.
What they're saying: "We're operating more schools than we currently need," Jenks told Axios. "As we look at the future, we think newer, future schools will make us more sustainable."

What's happening: The school district with a population of just over 11,000 has lost about 1,500 students over the last decade, and that trend is expected to continue. There are a few reasons for this, Jenks and other school officials have said:

Historically lower birth rates.
High housing prices throughout the Chapel Hill area are making it hard for young families to move in.
Some families are opting to homeschool their children or send them to charter or private schools.
By the numbers: County staff warned recently of a possible $21 million shortfall in next year's budget, the News & Observer reported.

Closing a school could save $1.7 million a year, plus $10 million to $15 million in maintenance costs, per the N&O, citing Al Ciarochi, deputy superintendent for operations.
The big picture: The district isn't alone in considering school closures to address declining enrollment.

In Philadelphia, public school officials have proposed closing 20 schools and modernizing about 160 buildings. In Atlanta, the Board of Education last year approved a controversial plan to close several elementary schools.
Enrollment is also declining in other districts in the Triangle, including Durham Public Schools and Wake County Public Schools, but neither has proposed closing schools.
Between the lines: Before any closures, CHCCS would undertake a comprehensive redistricting process to balance enrollment districtwide — potentially affecting students beyond those at a closing school.

"We won't just take those 300 students (from a closing school) and drop them at the next closest building," Jenks said.
Yes, but: Nearly all CHCCS schools are under capacity, Jenks said. But a few on the chopping block include ones that aren't — specifically Glenwood and FPG, two schools that house dual language programs.

Glenwood parent Rachel Rossi said the school's Mandarin program "allows my children to learn Mandarin, not in isolation, but with real cultural context," the N&O reported.
The district has said those programs would be housed in other facilities if the board votes to close the schools.
What's next: A decision about closures could come as soon as the board's first meeting in June.

15 'Vast majority' of parents should be involved if children question their gender, schools told

Licensed by the NLA

Date Collected Feb 12, 2026 10:54 AM MST
Category Digital News
Source BBC
Author Branwen Jeffreys
Market United Kingdom
Language English

Parents should be involved in the "vast majority" of cases where a child questions their gender, according to new government guidance for all English schools.

The legally-binding advice says schools should not initiate steps towards social transitioning - when pupils change their name, pronoun or clothes to reflect their gender identity - and should instead consider carefully what other support a child might need.

In primary schools in particular, full social transitioning should only happen "very rarely", it says.

The guidance has been backed by the author of the landmark Cass Review, Dr Hilary Cass, who said the guidance was "a huge step in the right direction".

Her review of gender care services for under-18s, published in 2024, was commissioned by NHS England after it saw a sharp rise in referrals for patients questioning their gender.

Her report said the evidence around medical interventions in gender care was "remarkably weak", and there was a lack of research available.

The guidance also says there are "no exceptions" for single-sex facilities at schools and colleges, including toilets and changing rooms, with single-sex sports also protected.

But schools have been given some flexibility over how they deal with issues such as children's names and uniforms.

The BBC understands single-sex schools will continue to follow the current admissions code, which allows them to admit pupils only on the basis of their

admissions code, which allows them to admit pupils only on the basis of their biological sex.

Cass said the guidance was "practical and reflects the recommendations of my review, giving schools much-needed clarity on their legal duties so they can support children with confidence".

Overall, the new guidance also makes a clear distinction between a child's wishes, and what might be in their best interests.

There is a reminder that while some children explore different gender identities, most do not go on as adults to fully transition to a different gender from their biological sex.

"What comes across quite strongly in the guidance is that proceeding with a social transition is going to be very much the exception, rather than the rule," Cass told the BBC.

She emphasised the importance of involving parents wherever possible, saying "children don't thrive well when there are secrets between them and their parents".

"Too many times during my review I heard about schools having socially transitioned young people without involving parents, and parents were in possession of all sorts of knowledge about what's going on that the school just wouldn't know about," she said.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said the new guidance would deliver "pragmatic support for teachers, reassurance for parents, and above all, the safety and wellbeing of children and young people".

Maya Forstater, CEO of Sex Matters, welcomed the news of the guidance, but criticised its content around social transition.

"Schools are still being left with the idea that they can facilitate 'social transition' – which remains undefined – and that they should negotiate this on a case-by-case basis," she said.

"They are being encouraged to think that children have a 'birth sex' as well as some other concept of sex. This has no basis in law or reality, and undermines safeguarding."

A spokesperson for the charity Stonewall said it would be reviewing the guidance carefully, and the final statutory guidance should listen to and reflect the experiences of young people who are questioning their gender.

"Many in the LGBTQ+ community, especially trans people, are increasingly feeling their voices are not heard," they added.

Children let down by 'weak' gender care - review
What does trans mean and why is there a debate about transgender people's rights?
The new advice around children questioning their gender has been included in an update to existing statutory guidance for schools on how to keep children safe.

It was first promised in 2018 in England.

The long delay has left head teachers navigating one of the most contested social issues on their own.

Some have paid for legal advice, while others have taken mitigating steps such as introducing gender-neutral toilets.

Schools have been reacting to the news.

Tomas Thurogood-Hyde, director of corporate services at Astrea Academy Trust, said: "The language on single-sex spaces and the avoidance of schools acting alone is clear.

"This should give parents confidence in there being a more uniform approach across England, rather than a postcode lottery."

Heather Fowler, head of safeguarding at Endeavour Learning Trust, said: "The safety and wellbeing of every child have always been, and will always remain, at the heart of our work. This updated guidance does not change our approach.

"We have consistently worked in partnership with families to ensure decisions are made carefully, thoughtfully and in the best interests of each individual child."

Thursday's update has been roundly welcomed by head teachers' unions.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said schools had done a "very good job" dealing with the issue during an "often-polarised public debate" in recent years.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said the guidance would address the need for "greater clarity about how schools should manage this sensitive issue and support their pupils".

In December 2023, the previous Conservative government had published draft guidance for consultation, which took a harder stance on some issues, including banning the use of alternate pronouns in primary school.

But that consultation was overtaken by the calling of a general election in May 2024, which ultimately led to a change of government.

A new consultation on Thursday's updated guidance is due to run for 10 weeks.

Devolved governments across the rest of the UK have previously provided their own gender guidance for schools, especially in the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling on biological sex in 2025.

In Scotland, ministers said facilities must be available on the basis of biological sex, but schools could also provide gender-neutral toilets.

In Northern Ireland, guidance on supporting transgender pupils was withdrawn from the Education Authority's website in September 2025.

Education Minister Paul Givan had said he had asked officials to consider the implications of the Supreme Court decision and to seek legal advice.

In Wales, schools were told in 2023 to expect guidance on supporting transgender pupils the next academic year. An update to the Welsh government's LGBTQ+ action plan, published in January, says officials are working to ensure guidance is ready for a new government following May's Senedd election.

16 These 27 DeKalb County schools could close, 8 more may be repurposed



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Author Berndt Petersen, WSB-TV
Market Atlanta, GA
Language English

DEKALB COUNTY, Ga. — The DeKalb County School District released a list of nearly three dozen schools on Thursday morning that could be closed or repurposed.

Administrators say hard choices have to be made to address declining employment. They say that over the last decade, they have 20,000 fewer students.

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But many parents aren't happy at the district's decision to close or repurpose schools.

"They don't get to tell us what's best for our kids. We can tell you what's best for our kids," Blayne Salloway told Channel 2's Berndt Petersen.

The decisions to close or change schools have not been finalized. The school district says the list is just a potential scenario.

"These scenarios are not decisions. Not recommendations at this point, either. They are starting points for conversation. Now we need to hear from you," Interim Superintendent Dr. Norman Sauce said.

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Man found guilty of murdering Buckhead valet who tried to stop car break-in sentenced to life
Dr. Sauce calls this the feedback phase, which will kick off soon with a string of public meetings.

Most of the potential closures come from elementary schools. One middle school was listed among the closing schools, but five others will be converted into elementary schools. Three high schools were listed as being converted into middle schools.

"The DeKalb School Board will do what it's gonna do in the end, but we're going to fight hard," Salloway said.

The first public meeting is scheduled for Feb. 23.

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View the full list of proposed changes below.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Ashford Park Elementary School
Bob Mathis Elementary School
Brocklett Elementary School
Browns Mill Elementary School
Canby Lane Elementary School
Cedar Grove Elementary School
Columbia Elementary School
Evansdale Elementary School
Flat Shoals Elementary School
Henderson Mill Elementary School
Kelly Lake Elementary School
Kingsley Elementary School
McLendon Elementary School
McNair Elementary School
Midvale Elementary School
Oak Grove Elementary School
Redan Elementary School
Robert Shaw Theme Elementary School
Rock Chapel Elementary School
Rowland Elementary School
Stone Mill Elementary School
Stone Mountain Elementary School
Stoneview Elementary School
Toney Elementary School
Vanderlyn Elementary School
Woodridge Elementary School
MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Bethune Middle School (converting to elementary school)
Cedar Grove Middle School
Champion Theme Middle School (converting to elementary school)
Lithonia Middle School (converting to elementary school)
McNair Middle School (converting to elementary school)
Miller Grove Middle School (converting to elementary school)
HIGH SCHOOLS

Cedar Grove High School (converting to middle school)
Lithonia High School (converting to middle school)
Towers High School (converting to middle school)

17 Kansas cell phone ban in schools sparks debate over local control



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Category Digital News
Source Yahoo! News
Author Zane Irwin, Kansas News Service
Market United States
Language English

At the start of the year, a proposal to ban cell phones in K-12 Kansas schools seemed to enjoy the same kind of bipartisan support as legislation that brought the Kansas City Chiefs to Kansas and nixed the state sales tax on food.

Republican legislative leaders and Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly put their full support behind a ban. Lawmakers filed bills in the state House and Senate before the session began.

"Smartphones and social media have exposed our children to a world they are not ready for and to social pressures they don't need or deserve," Kelly said in her annual address to lawmakers in January. "Get that bill to my desk and I will sign it into law."

But the bill has traced a twisting path through the Legislature. A House committee this week voted to change the policy from a requirement to a recommendation — and then partially reversed that decision the next day, exempting only private schools from the mandate.

Link to Image

"Private schools do not receive our funding and so I don't believe that they should have policy from us," Republican Rep. Sherri Brantley said in the Feb. 10 committee meeting.

The original proposed ban would have held school districts responsible for keeping students' phones in an "inaccessible location," like in lockable fabric pouches, for the entire instructional day, with limited exceptions for students with specific medical or learning needs.

Public and accredited private schools would need to start enforcing the ban this fall, at the start of the 2026-27 school year.

The bill would also bar teachers from using social media platforms to interact with students one-on-one, and require school districts to report data on how much screen time students are getting in grades one through four.

Some local school boards have pushed back against the proposed phone ban — as have students and some advocates for private schools, who would also be required to follow the policy under the initial proposal.

Despite widespread agreement in Topeka that students are better off without phones in class, debates over this year's suggested ban have forced policymakers to consider how much the state should shape the role of technology in young people's lives.

The case for "bell-to-bell"

A majority of kids aged 12 and younger have access to a smart phone — as do 95% of teens aged 13 to 17, according to Pew research.

In 2024, the Kansas State Board of Education convened a task force to study the effects of screen time on students and issue policy recommendations.

In its report, the group cited research linking phone use to addiction, negative social comparison and diminished academic performance. Members issued a list of recommendations including a "bell-to-bell" ban, which involves storing phones away for the entire school day, including passing periods and lunch.

Ava Gustin, a Kansas State University student who co-chaired the screen time task force, told lawmakers recently that she developed an eating disorder in high school — partly because the constant presence of cell phones fueled self-comparison.

"That's something that nobody should ever have to face," she said.

More than half of states mandate specific restrictions on cell phone use in classrooms. But only two, North Dakota and Rhode Island, appear to have passed laws as restrictive as the Kansas proposal.

Neighboring Missouri passed a bell-to-bell ban last year, though the law is not as strict as Kansas' bill on how phones should be stored during the day.

Students and staff at one St. Louis-area high school have given the policy mixed reviews, with more socializing but a steep learning curve for teens who have been accustomed to greater phone access.

Link to Image

'Unfairly stripped of my devices'

In testimony, those with concerns about the proposed ban in Kansas have been quick to acknowledge the good intentions behind it — while gently pushing back on policy specifics.

One point of contention is over the scope of the law. Republican state Sen. Renee Erickson, who chairs the education committee, said she does not want the mandate to apply to private schools.

Brittany Jones, who leads the Christian conservative advocacy group Kansas Family Voice, called the private school provision "government overreach." She said the group would support a cell phone ban if private schools were exempted.

And, perhaps unsurprisingly, some students hate the idea. Kailey Howell from Spring Hill High School testified against the bill in January.

"I've learned how to manage my time and put my education first," she said. "So why am I being unfairly stripped of my devices when I never did anything wrong to earn such a consequence?"

In a February hearing, students from Turner High School in Kansas City, Kansas, said their school's policy had been successful, despite allowing students to keep cell phones close by.

Turner student Tessa Stoner told lawmakers that some teens who work part-time after school use their phones to stay notified of schedule changes. She also said that keeping devices around could help kids learn how to take responsibility for their own

keeping devices around could help kids learn how to take responsibility for their own digital habits.

"I have learned that patience and that accountability for my own property," Stoner said.

Local control has been a constant theme

For several of the state lawmakers who initially voted to make the ban a recommendation rather than a mandate, the primary concern came down to two words: local control.

It was a constant theme during legislative hearings on the bill in January and February.

Ann Mah, a former Democratic state lawmaker who spent eight years on the state board of education, said it is not the Legislature's job to dictate policy for each of Kansas' varied school districts.

"There's no way you can write one policy that fits (school districts) from fewer than 100 to more than 45,000 kids," she said.

Representatives from the Kansas Association of School Boards, the Kansas National Education Association, the Kansas Parent Teacher Association and other groups also emphasized local authorities' desire to maintain control of their policies.

Several skeptics balked at a back-of-the-envolope estimate by state budget officials that, if schools purchased special pouches designed to store phones during the day for each student, it could cost about $13.4 million statewide.

The vast majority of school districts already have policies for cell phone use in class, according to a state board of education survey that 90% of Kansas school districts completed.

Policies varied widely, however, and less than 7% said they required phones to be stored in locked pouches as the initial proposed bill recommended.

Joseph Bishop, an education policy researcher who leads the Center for the Transformation of Schools at UCLA, said he's hypervigilant about how much time his three children spend in front of screens.

"I'm doing everything in my power for our kids not to have devices," he said.

But Bishop, who has studied different state policies on school cell phone use, said a one-size-fits-all approach is not ideal.

"Every community is just going to be a little bit different in terms of infrastructure, in terms of capacity of teachers, in terms of student needs," he said.

Parents, school districts and students all need to take part in the decision making process, Bishop said — not just state lawmakers.

He said the debate isn't just about the effects of screen time on students, but about how much autonomy to grant kids and teens in shaping their own digital habits.

"This gets into individual rights and who should call the shots," Bishop said. "There is a struggle right now to figure out a healthy balance."

Zane Irwin reports on politics, campaigns and elections for the Kansas News Service.

This article originally appeared on Topeka Capital-Journal: **Kansas cell phone ban in schools sparks debate over local control**

18 **As More Schools Turn to AI Weapons Detection, Questions Persist**

UNDARK

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Source Undark Magazine
Author Rod McCullom
Market United States
Language English

On the morning of Jan. 22, 2025, Solomon Henderson went inside a restroom at Antioch High School in Nashville, Tennessee. The 17-year-old student posted photos on social media, and, according to news reports, began livestreaming on Kick, a loosely moderated platform popular with video game streamers. The teenager headed to the nearby cafeteria and fired 10 shots within 17 seconds from a 9 mm semi-automatic pistol, killing a 16-year-old student, wounding another, and, finally, turning the gun on himself. One year after that fateful day, investigators at the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department believe that Henderson acted alone.

The robot named "Spot," made by the company Boston Dynamics, is shown at the opening of a new police "Innovation Lab" in Germany. According to a blog post on the company's website, there were more than 1,000 of its Spot robots operating in 35 countries in 2022.

Related
Robot Police Dogs Are Here. Who's Got the Leash?

It's possible that traditional discipline could have prevented the shooting. Henderson had a history of violence and threats against family, students, and teachers. The teenager had recently been suspended for threatening another student with a box cutter, and a ProPublica investigation raised questions around why he was allowed to return to school at that time. The school did not have traditional metal detectors, which probably would have detected the gun, according to critics of the school system's security measures such as former Metro Nashville Public Schools board member Fran Bush.

Instead, the school was using an emerging technology: an artificial intelligence-driven weapons detection system that turns existing video surveillance systems into "smart cameras" that scan the footage in real time to detect visible weapons.

The school's system — developed by the Virginia-based company Omnilert — was active at the time of the shooting but did not detect Henderson's gun because it was not visible from the cameras locations, according to news reports. In an emailed statement to Undark, Blake Mitchell, Omnilert's vice president of marketing, confirmed those reports. "While cameras were present at the location, the weapon was not brandished within the field of view of cameras running visual gun detection," Mitchell wrote, adding that the company has since worked with the school district "and other school partners to reinforce best practices for deployment, including recommending that visual gun detection be enabled on all eligible cameras, where feasible, to maximize coverage."

In the last decade or so, a growing number of school districts have deployed AI-based weapons detection systems marketed to prevent school shootings. There is limited data but it is believed that hundreds of school buildings use some type of AI weapons detection.

Some experts — and representatives from companies themselves — suggest these technologies could complement but not replace existing school safety measures such as metal detectors, video cameras, single-point entry, and safety drills. At the same time, some officials and researchers are questioning the technology's effectiveness and accuracy, citing the many false positives and the mistaking of harmless items — such as a clarinet and even a bag of chips — for guns. In addition, there is little to no empirical evidence that demonstrates that artificial intelligence systems have prevented shootings in a real-world setting like a school, a point emphasized in a 2024 paper that argues for a multidisciplinary approach to firearms detection.

The lack of hard data and several high-profile failures to prevent violent school attacks raise troubling questions about the growth of AI-based weapons detection technology, critics say, and whether security companies are preying on the fears of parents and school districts. There is "a real mismatch between the expectations around what these technologies are capable of and the reality of what they're capable of," said Hannah Quay-de la Vallee, a computer scientist and senior technologist at the Center for Democracy and Technology, a nonprofit advocating for digital rights. "The consequences of that are catastrophic."

As evidence, Quay-de la Vallee and other researchers point to the Nashville shooting as well as a 2022 high school stabbing in Utica, New York, where a student brought a hunting knife in his backpack through the AI-enhanced entry scanners. The student later attacked a classmate with the knife, police say. The victim sued the city of Utica, the Utica School District, and Evolv, the Massachusetts-based company that developed the AI system, as well as its third-party contractor system.

Some officials and researchers are questioning the technology's effectiveness and accuracy, citing the many false positives and the mistaking of harmless items — such as a clarinet and even a bag of chips — for guns.

The Utica case was highlighted by the Federal Trade Commission in November 2024 as part of its investigation into allegations that Evolv had deceptively advertised its ability to reliably detect weapons. As part of a 2024 settlement, the company was barred from making "unsupported claims" about its products and ordered to give schools the option to cancel their contracts. "The FTC has been clear that claims about technology — including artificial intelligence — need to be backed up, and that

about technology — including artificial intelligence — need to be backed up, and that is especially important when these claims involve the safety of children," said Samuel Levine, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, according to a press release on the FTC website. The district decided to remove the Evolv entry scanners at the high school, replacing them with traditional metal detectors, according to news reports.

Evolv's technology has detected weapons that students have brought to school. In one case in January of last year, for instance, a student was arrested after a loaded gun was found in his backpack. Still, Quay-de la Vallee suggests a more effective school safety strategy could include investing in students' well-being. Simone Browne, a Black studies scholar whose research focus is on surveillance, questions whether these schools are doing this already. "[Is there] something holistic around health, de-escalation of violence, mental health counseling, or other ways?" asked Browne. Otherwise, she added, "is it just more and more staging of this very carceral technology?"

AI-based weapons detection technology gained more visibility in 2018 following the school shooting in Parkland, Florida that killed 17 people. The so-called school security industry has grown significantly since then and is reported to be worth up to $4 billion today.

Advances in artificial intelligence have led to improvements in several areas of weapons detection. The algorithms are faster, more sophisticated, and more accurate, with fewer false positives than in earlier versions. But there are still many questions surrounding the technology's accuracy and effectiveness — especially in identifying smaller weapons and knives, experts say.

>From a scientific standpoint, firearm detection algorithms work well, said Beidi Dong, an assistant professor of criminology, law, and society at George Mason University and co-author of the 2024 paper on the limitations of visual weapons detection published in the peer-reviewed Security Journal. But "we don't know yet how successful or valid" the algorithms are in the real world, he added, and more research and data are needed.

There are two main types of automated weapons detection. The first — the kind of system used in Nashville — enhances existing video security systems to identify weapons by analyzing shapes, movements, and situations.

The main suppliers of these systems include Omnilert, VOLT AI, and ZeroEyes. In addition to schools, universities, and hospitals, some public transit systems have also installed these systems. The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada, which serves those in the Las Vegas area, recently became the first transit agency in the nation to deploy the ZeroEyes system across all of its transit centers.

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The technology analyzes each object in a video frame — such as a dog, a human, or potential gun — and assigns it a label. Images showing guns and humans with guns are quickly prioritized and forwarded to a remote operations center to be validated. Alerts are then automatically dispatched to local law enforcement. The entire process — from capturing the image to validation and sending officers — is said to take less than five seconds.

A statement emailed to Undark that Mark Prindle, senior director of Fusion Public Relations, requested to be attributed to a ZeroEyes spokesperson, noted that the company has identified more than 1,000 fake and real guns. "Until a gun is identified, the monitoring screens in the ZOC [ZeroEyes Operations Center] stay absolutely blank," the statement noted. "The team does not see a live feed from any cameras. Further, the platform does not store personal or biometric data or conduct any kind of facial recognition, so there is no risk of bias based on skin color or other personal characteristics."

Omnilert employs a similar technology in its visual gun detection software. Mitchell noted that the system, which is deployed in more than 600 schools across 50 districts, should be one layer of a school safety plan.

"While no single technology can prevent all acts of violence, Omnilert remains committed to strengthening situational awareness and response capabilities as part of a layered approach to school safety," he wrote in an email to Undark.

"We don't know yet how successful or valid" weapons detection algorithms are in the real world.

The second type of automated weapons detection looks for concealed weapons. Used at arts and entertainment venues, sports stadiums, hospitals, and schools, these systems enhance traditional metal detectors or X-ray scanners to detect weapons carried in bags, purses, backpacks, or under clothing. The Evolv Express, for example, uses low-frequency electromagnetic fields and artificial intelligence to penetrate clothing and bags and assess objects — such as keys, mobile phones, or handguns — based on material composition, size, and shape.

These systems — which require the installation of new hardware as well as regular software updates and staffing — are expensive. A typical wireless sensor from Evolv can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Traditional metal detectors, on the other hand, are a one-time purchase and could cost from a few hundred dollars up to as much as

$10,000.

Evolv's technology is used to screen 850,000 people every day in more than 1,500 school buildings across the country, according to Alexandra Ozerkis, chief marketing officer for the Massachusetts-based company.

"Advanced weapons detection, such as Evolv, is one layer of security schools are considering in their safety plan," Ozerkis wrote in a statement to Undark. "It is important to understand that no single technology or layer should be relied upon as a single source of protection; nothing is perfect. Security involves a layered approach to reduce risk."

Despite the millions of dollars committed to buying such systems —Gwinnett County Public Schools in suburban Atlanta, for example, is reportedly spending about $20 million to install the Evolv system — there do not appear to be any independent, peer-reviewed studies on the effectiveness of commercial AI weapons detection systems in schools or elsewhere.

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The lack of hard data is disturbing, said Browne, especially since school systems may be purchased with federal funding.

But recent research has begun focusing on the overall merits of automated weapons detection. A 2024 systematic literature review submitted to a workshop by a research team based at the Federal University of Goiás in Brazil analyzed about 10,500 papers related to artificial intelligence, security, and weapons identification. The team identified 13 papers that were focused on computer vision algorithms used in schools and other public spaces.

The review found "significant gaps in current research, such as the lack of studies focused on specific educational environments," and emphasized the need for more empirical data.

Other limitations cited by the Brazilian researchers and others are the persistently high number of false positives and the accuracy of weapons detection algorithms in detecting smaller weapons like knives. More research is needed on developing algorithms and techniques to identify knives, researchers say, because these weapons are frequently confiscated at schools.

An over-reliance on AI-based weapons detection technology can actually make schools and students less safe, according to scholars such as the Center for Democracy and Technology's Quay-De la Vallee, who recently published a brief on the failures of education-based artificial intelligence in general.

When looking at these types of surveillance technologies, there is a tendency to say "What's the harm and why not use it if it can prevent one school shooting?" Quay-De la Vallee said in an interview with Undark. "The implication is that there is no harm and that implication is not correct. There's the harm to students of that feeling of surveillance. There's the loss of resources. And loss of resources may also mean that schools are not doing other things that would be more effective."

Researchers also note that metal detectors in themselves do not make schools any safer.

In interviews with Undark — as well as in articles published by nonprofit organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Democracy and Technology — experts argue that more transparency and data are needed to understand how students interact with AI-powered weapons detection technology.

"What happens if there is a false positive? What resources are deployed? What is the protocol?" asked Juan Gilbert, a computer scientist at the University of Florida's Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering. "I have no idea. But we need to understand it."

"There's the harm to students of that feeling of surveillance. There's the loss of resources. And loss of resources may also mean that schools are not doing other things that would be more effective."

Gilbert's research largely focuses around "human centered computing" — designing technology with a primary focus on human needs and behavior. "The easy comparison is the metal detector," he said. "We know exactly what the protocol is there. In other words, there needs to be a similar understanding."

The standard protocol with a walk-through metal detector, for example, is an alarm and a secondary screening to confirm that the person does not have weapons.

But protocols and best practices are often absent with emerging technologies such as AI-based weapons detection, said several researchers.

"My biggest concern here is that rather than keeping civilians and also police safer — which is what this technology claims to do — it's going to instead misclassify harmless items like books as weapons and cause more fear and overreaction on the part of police," said Cooper Quintin, a senior staff technologist at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, who co-wrote a 2024 article on the Federal Trade Commission's recent investigation into Evolv.

To this end, critics cite a recent incident outside a suburban Baltimore high school, where the Omnilert detection system incorrectly identified a crumpled bag of Doritos as a gun. Police officers were called to the scene and drew their service weapons on a 16-year student, who was handcuffed and searched.

19 Since E-rate expansion cuts, schools make difficult choices on hotspots



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In South Central Illinois, nearly 1 in 5 families at Bunker Hill Community Unit School District 8 don't have access to reliable broadband internet at home, said Todd Dugan, the district's superintendent.

The rural 620-student district stretches across 70 square miles between its two schools — one for grades pre-K-8 and the other a high school. Students' lack of internet access, Dugan said, isn't solely because of the cost: The infrastructure is simply not there.

To address that need, Bunker Hill CUSD 8 distributed 100 internet hotspots that students could take home to complete their schoolwork, Dugan said. That was made possible through a partnership with wireless network carrier T-Mobile, which gave the hotspots to the district at no charge between December 2020 and December 2025.

Dugan originally planned to use federal E-rate funds to fill the gap when that deal expired. That plan came to a halt in September, however, when the Federal Communications Commission repealed a Biden-era expansion of the E-rate program that helped schools and libraries receive significant discounts for school bus Wi-Fi and internet hotspots.

The FCC's expansion of E-rate to cover those additional services came in two votes — one in 2023 for school bus Wi-Fi and the other in 2024 for internet hotspots. The moves were geared toward helping address the "homework gap," or the disparity between students who can and can't complete off-campus school assignments as a result of their access or lack thereof to home internet.

Before the FCC reversed course, schools demonstrated a high demand to use the federal program for these additional services. For example, schools and districts requested $42.6 million in E-rate funds for hotspots and $15.3 million for school bus Wi-Fi during fiscal year 2025, according to federal data.

If Bunker Hill CUSD 8 was to pay for the 100 hotspots on its own for students now, Dugan said, it would cost the district about $14,000 a year.

For a small rural school district with a $6 million operating budget, Dugan said, "that's a lot to swallow" — especially as school districts like Dugan's are already taking hits to their budgets elsewhere while facing financial uncertainty from state and federal governments.

How districts are navigating costs
The sudden backpedal on E-rate support for school bus Wi-Fi and hotspots has had "significant" impacts on school districts, said Michael Flood, who consults on E-rate services and is founder and CEO of technology consulting firm Alpine Frog.

The FCC's decision occurred in the middle of the funding cycle for E-rate, Flood said. That means districts that had already spent money on hotspots or school bus Wi-Fi and were expecting to receive federal reimbursements never got the money to cover those services, he said.

"So that led to some districts having to terminate those programs immediately to stop the bleeding of revenue," Flood said. Meanwhile, other districts were "trying to find other funding sources to make up that difference to pay service providers what had already elapsed before the decision came out, or to continue their services through the end of this academic year."

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The other option that Dugan said he will likely pursue at Bunker Hill is to have his district offer fewer hotspots and restrict the devices to students who need them the most.

At the same time, low-income urban school districts are also feeling the brunt of the E-rate expansion reversal — from both an infrastructure and affordability perspective.

In 2024, about 24% of the nearly 70,400 students in California's Fresno Unified School District had access to a strong, reliable internet connection, according to an analysis by Philip Neufeld, executive officer of strategic research at the district.

While Fresno USD was issuing hotspots to students before the COVID-19 pandemic, Neufeld told K-12 Dive that the districts' funds for the devices have since dwindled. At peak levels during the pandemic, the district scaled up the number of issued hotspots to at least 10,000 devices, Neufeld said.

The district still continues to prioritize offering students Wi-Fi on 101 school buses, a service it's had since 2017, Neufeld said, which he said costs the district about $50,000 annually.

Without federal support for programs like E-rate, particularly for hotspots and school bus Wi-Fi, it's harder for district leadership to get onboard with fully covering the costs on their own, Neufeld said. Fresno USD is also going through "major budget cuts," Neufeld said, but the student need for hotspots "didn't go away."

The student impacts
Before the FCC reversed its E-rate expansion, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, previously said in a statement that hotspots paid through the broadened federal program were "illegal" and a "blatant overreach by a partisan agency." He added that hotspots could expose students to inappropriate content that parents can't control.

However, school devices — including hotspots and school bus Wi-Fi — are required to have content filters to ensure appropriate student use. Neufeld said that Cruz doesn't understand that school devices are secure with those content filters and don't allow students to go on social networks.

The reversal of E-rate expansion ultimately took away a "lifeline" for students in rural and low-income urban areas, Neufeld said.

For Dugan, the E-rate cuts are a "step backwards" that will further exacerbate already existing digital inequities among students.

"You're going to have suburban and urban kids being able to access probably very powerful search engines — AI, research and things like that," Dugan said. "And you have kids that, because they're born at the end of a road with only two other houses, they'll be lucky to ever watch or stream a video, or if nothing, at least maybe check email."

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