



Manage Account

MONTREAL NEWS

A year later, the kids are alright with Quebec's cellphone ban in schools

Teachers feel it has helped increase student concentration, but some questions about the impact remain.



Cooper McDonald, centre, and Royal West Academy classmates Brayden Gurevitch, left, and Camille Henin-Levine found Quebec's school cellphone ban "a little bit annoying at first," but they've gotten used to it. They are seen at the school on Monday, June 1, 2026. (John Mahoney / Montreal Gazette)

 By **Katelyn Thomas**

June 3, 2026 at 6:00 a.m.

For Grade 10 students at Royal West Academy in Montreal West, the hardest thing about Quebec's cellphone ban in schools is finding their friends at lunchtime.

"You're kind of wandering the halls alone until you find someone," said Cooper McDonald, who called the inconvenience "a little bit annoying at first" — an opinion shared by classmates Brayden Gurevitch and Camille Henin-Levine.

“But after a while, I’ve kind of gotten used to it,” McDonald said.

In place since the beginning of the 2025-26 school year, the ban prohibits students from using electronic devices on school grounds, including during breaks and lunchtime. It follows a 2024 ban on the use of cellphones in classrooms specifically, which was the result of recommendations from a National Assembly committee that studied the impact of screen time on youth. As the first year of the full ban nears its end, parents, teachers and youth alike appear to think of it positively — but some questions about the impact remain.

“Now you get to be with your friends more,” McDonald said. “We used to sit in one of the halls, and everybody would be on our phones. It was not great, now that I look back on it.”



“We used to sit in one of the halls, and everybody would be on our phones. It was not great, now that I look back on it,” says Cooper McDonald, left, seen with Royal West Academy classmates Brayden Gurevitch and Camille Henin-Levine at the school on Monday, June 1, 2026. John Mahoney / Montreal Gazette

The way the ban is applied varies from one school to the next. At Royal West, students can use their phones when the school day ends, which they said they do to figure out how they’re going to get home after extracurricular activities.

“I’m in a lot of bands and I do a lot of other activities ... they don’t always end at the same time, so I use my phone just to communicate with my parents or to find a train to take home,” Gurevitch said.

At Lester B. Pearson High School in Montreal North, a zero-tolerance policy on

school grounds is in place, which teacher Paul Karpontinis suspects might be affecting participation in afterschool activities.

“I find kids are a little more likely to leave at the bell because if they leave, they get to go on their devices,” said Karpontinis, who teaches Grade 9 and 11 personal development and social sciences.

He added that the opposite has been true for lunchtime activities.

Ultimately, Karpontinis said, he accepts the trade-off because of the noticeable impact in the classroom.

“Student distraction on cellphones was an epidemic,” he said. “They probably still have them in their pockets, but they’re not taking them out to watch videos or to scroll through social media or to text someone, because they know that if they’re caught, they’re being sent home.”

The school’s resources teacher for Grades 7 through 11, Michael Gagliano, said he feels the ban has helped increase student concentration.

“They’ve definitely been a bit more present with us,” Gagliano said.

“But it’s tough,” he added. “With teenagers, sometimes all they’re thinking about is ‘When can I have my phone next?’”

Katherine Korakakis, president of the English Parents’ Committee Association of Quebec, said the punitive nature of the ban can have that effect.

“Think about it, when you have a child and you take something away ... they want it more,” she said. “Where we’ve missed the mark is teaching children how addictive the apparatus is and how to mitigate that.”

While most parents are in favour of the ban, Korakakis said some have been struggling with an increase in screen time at home. In a March 2026 survey from the association, nearly half of families reported “tensions around screen management.”

Gurevitch said he finds he is occasionally on his phone “too much” at home, but he doesn’t think it has to do with how much he used it during the day.

Henin-Levine said her use of her phone after school depends on her homework.

“If I have a lot ... I just go home and I do all my work for, like, three hours,” she said. “But if I know I have, like a test in a week ... I can just go on my phone and not study, and then I’ll end up doom scrolling.”

As to whether they were taught about the adverse effects of screen time, Gurevitch said that when he and his friends first got their phones, they didn’t hear much.

“Now that people are very used to having them, that’s when we’re hearing about a lot of the consequences,” he said.

Gurevitch added that he thinks the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on his generation’s use of screens since it hit right before they entered high school.

“I think that got people very, very addicted to their phones,” he said. “I think the ban was very helpful to kind of reverse what the pandemic did to us.”

Like Korakakis, Dr. Vincent Paquin, psychiatrist at the Jewish General Hospital and assistant professor of psychiatry at McGill University whose research focuses on how the use of digital media shapes the mental health of teens and young adults, believes more emphasis needs to be placed on critical thinking and helping youth develop self-control.

“Eventually, students move from high school to CEGEP, where suddenly they’re expected to be fully responsible for managing their phone use in an environment where the academic demands are even higher,” Paquin said. “So we may be missing an opportunity to prepare them for that transition.”

Studies from other places in the world with similar bans have shown there’s no clear effect on mental health or academic performance, Paquin said.

“(It’s) surprising because when you talk to people, their experiences are often mostly positive,” he said.

The mismatch could be due to the increase in screen time at home or because some students had used their phones to help with social isolation at school. For those with behavioural issues, their phones might have helped distract them.

“That doesn’t mean phones were actually solving those problems — they may have been more like a Band-Aid,” Paquin said, adding that schools with more resources and better social cohesion probably have better experiences with bans than those that are disadvantaged.

“At the national level, those effects essentially cancel each other out, making it difficult to observe a clear trend,” Paquin said.

Asked if it intends to evaluate the results of its ban or consider adjustments to its approach in the future, a spokesperson for Quebec’s ministry of education said it “does not intend to make any changes to its directive.”

Meanwhile, Paquin said more needs to be done to regulate the technology companies that design products to maximize engagement.

“Those practices are really at the root of the problem, whether at home, at school or elsewhere,” he said. “No phone ban is going to solve that. If we want the biggest benefits for young people, we need to address the problem at its source.”

kthomas@postmedia.com
