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A New Look General Assembly

With Democrats winning four of five contested Senate seats and increasing their majority in the House, the General Assembly will look quite different in the upcoming session. The blue waive trifecta gives Governor Josh Shapiro a same party General Assembly for at least the first two years of his second term. It is the first time in more than three decades that Democrats will lead the Governor's Office and both chambers in the General Assembly

Democrats have not had control of the upper chamber since 1993 when Senator Frank Pecora of Allegheny County switched parties to deadlock the Senate at 25-25 giving then Lieutenant Governor Mark Singel the tie breaking vote. Leading the new majority in the Senate will be Senator Jay Costa of Allegheny County who will serve as President Pro Tem following a full Senate vote in January. The new majority leader will be Sen. Maria Collett of Montgomery County. Senator Vincent Hughes of Philadelphia will chair the Appropriations Committee.

House Democrats boosted their razor-thin, one vote majority to at least eight giving them 111 seats with three seats still undecided. The current Democratic caucus leaders were reelected: Rep. Joanna McClinton of Philadelphia will (subject to a full House vote in January) again serve as Speaker of the House, the Majority Leader will be Rep. Matt Bradford (Montgomery County), Rep. Mike Schlossberg (Lehigh County) will be Majority Whip and Rep. Jordan Harris of Philadelphia will return as Appropriations Committee Chair.

Democrats also swept four tightly contested Congressional seats eastern and central Pennsylvania. The mid-term election wins will give Democrats 11 seats in the 18-member Pennsylvania congressional delegation. Like the state Legislature, Democrats will control the US Senate and House in January.

With the focus on the November election, there was not a lot of legislative activity in the fall session. Perhaps most notably for schools, the Governor did sign into law a cell phone ban that received by partisan support. Senate Bill 1014, now Act 117 of 2026, was signed into law by the Governor last month at the Central Bucks School District. All school entities (districts, IUs, charters, and CTCs) as well as private schools are subject to the requirements of the new law.

Here is a summary of the major provisions of the “bell to bell” cell phone ban:

- For the 2027-28 school year, schools must adopt a policy covering student possession and use of mobile devices during the school day while on school property.
- The policy shall “prohibit the use of a mobile device during the school day while on school property” “and establish the manner in which a student's possession of a mobile device is to be restricted during the school day while on school property.”
- Parents and legal guardians must receive a written notification at the beginning of each school year or upon enrollment of the methods to available to contact their child during the school day e.g. school building phone number of email address that is staffed during the school day.
- Exceptions can be made for medical purposes, IEP or section 405 service agreement students, and English language learners who need a mobile device for translation.
- Under limited circumstances a teacher may allow a student to use a mobile device for instructional purposes.
- If a school district has an existing policy, it must be in compliance with the new law by the start of the 2027-28 school year.
- Schools must submit documentation to the Pennsylvania Department of Education that the cell phone policy has been posted on the school’s website.