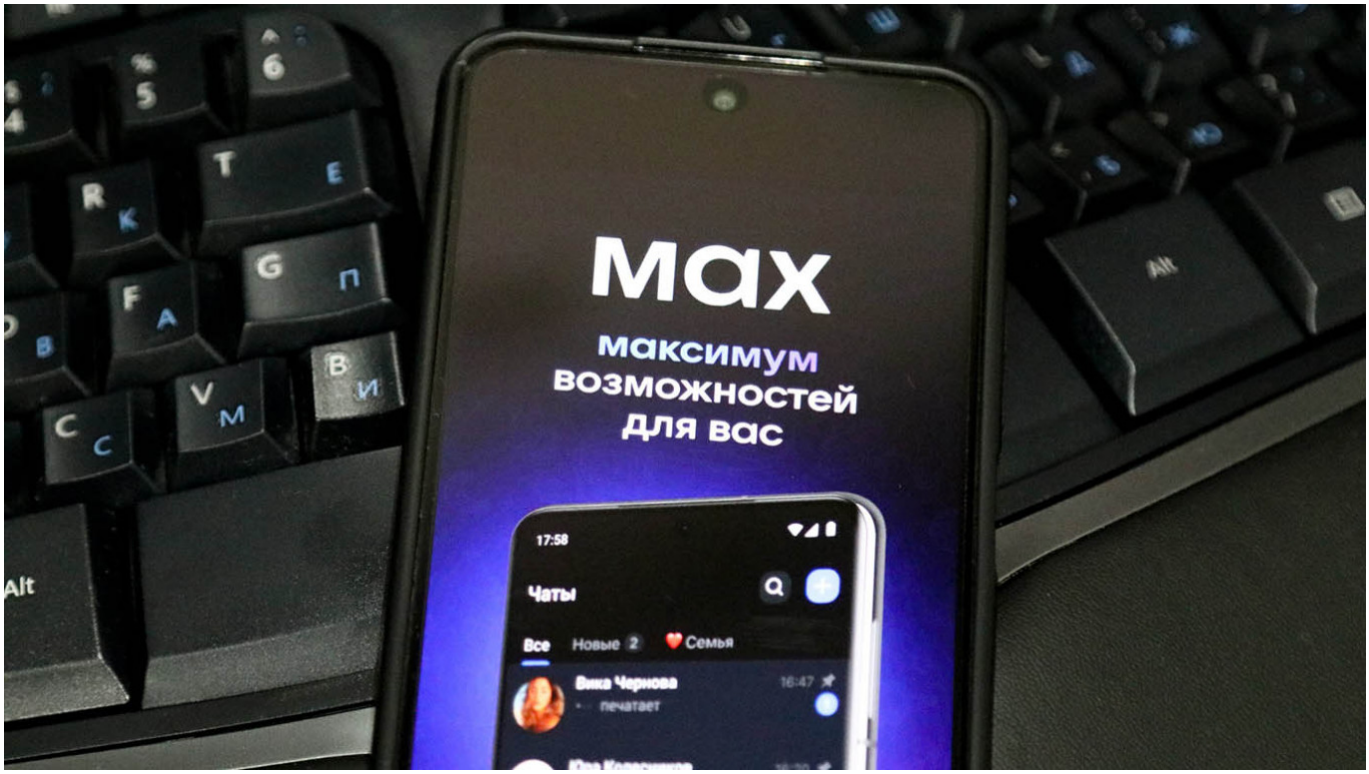
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Moscow Schools to Move Parent, Teacher Chats to Max App

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The parents and teachers of more than a million students in Moscow will be required to start using the Kremlin-backed messaging app Max for all online communication in the upcoming school year, city authorities said on Friday.

"A federal law has been adopted, so from Sept. 1, all school parent chats will be moved to Max," Moscow Deputy Mayor Anastasia Rakova told reporters, referring to a law that designates Max as Russia's official national messenger.

Schools in more than 20 other regions will also be required to use the VK-developed app. The republics of Tatarstan, Mari El and Altai, as well as the Khanty-Mansi autonomous district and the Vladimir and Tver regions, are participating in a pilot project to transfer all school chats to Max.

The move comes just weeks after Russian authorities said they began restricting voice and video calls on WhatsApp and Telegram, both of which are widely used across the country.

Related article: Everything You Need to Know About Max, Russia's State-Backed Answer to WhatsApp

Education Minister Sergei Kravtsov claimed earlier this week that the transition to Max would not be forced on teachers and parents.

"But we see an absolutely user-friendly and intuitive interface and, most importantly, secure data. So I'm sure teachers and parents recognize this, and the education system will switch to the national messenger as quickly as possible," Kravtsov said.

A recent independent analysis described Max as highly intrusive from a privacy standpoint, noting that it collects IP addresses, geolocation and contact lists, while its privacy policy explicitly states that it may share data with government agencies and "company partners."

The app requests access to a phone's camera, microphone, Bluetooth, notifications and biometrics. Developers also rely on open-source code from foreign countries, including Ukraine — a fact that critics argue undermines Russia's claims of technological sovereignty.

Besides schools, universities, property management companies and government agencies have been ordered to move their work chats to Max.

Officials say Max will soon become Russia's "super-app," a single platform for messaging, payments and government services.

The app is required to come pre-installed on all smartphones, tablets, computers and smart TVs sold in Russia starting Sept. 1.

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