



CELL PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS ADDRESSING PARENT CONCERNS DIRECTLY

*INSIGHTS FROM PRINCIPALS AND SUPERINTENDENTS
WHO HAVE IMPLEMENTED A BELL-TO-BELL CELL PHONE POLICY*

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Principals and superintendents who implemented bell-to-bell cell phone-free policies found that **instructional time increased, student safety improved, and family support grew once clear communication protocols were established.** While initial pushback is common, transparent communication and collaborative planning lead to strong, lasting buy-in.



“I get calls from other principals asking, ‘hey Doc, how do you do that?’ And I say, ‘it starts from the top, you have to take a stand.’ ... ***If I connect implementing the policy to securing the safety of your child—what parent is going to challenge that?***”

~ *Principal Dr. Jose LeBron
Kensington High School Philadelphia, PA*



ESTABLISHING EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

While most parents recognize the harms of excessive cell phone use, they are often concerned about how they would reach their student during emergency situations. School leaders stressed the importance of proactive communication with families, especially around:

NON-URGENT MATTERS:

There are many ways to contact and/or relay messages to students, including use of the main office phone line and/or use of the school messenger system or parent communication app.

FAMILY EMERGENCIES:

Students can use office or classroom phones to contact parents at any time, and parents can reach students through the main office phone line.

SCHOOL-WIDE EMERGENCIES:

Law enforcement advises against student cell phone use during lockdowns, as phones can reveal hiding places, jam communication lines, and distract students from life-saving directions.

EMERGENCY UPDATES:

Many schools created parent hotlines or communication channels for real time updates and allow cell phone access once the emergency has passed.

Clear communication protocols build parent trust and ease concerns.

“We added courtesy phones which provide parents, and students, a ‘no excuse’ way to get in touch with each other. These are in every classroom and in the main offices. No excuse, you can get in touch with your kids. So, try to have an answer for parents before it is a problem. Try to get in front of it. That’s what worked.”

~ *Principal Anita Berger, Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, Washington, DC*

STRENGTHENING STUDENT SAFETY AND PRIVACY

Cell phones make it more difficult for schools to enforce privacy and maintain safe environments.

- **PRIVACY RISKS:** Cell phones enable photos and videos to be taken and shared without parental consent, undermining school privacy policies.
- **BULLYING:** Principals noted bullying now occurs during the school day via phones, making it harder for staff to identify and mitigate in the moment.
- **FIGHTS AND ESCALATION:** Instead of de-escalating conflicts, students frequently record fights, which intensifies situation and leads to harmful online sharing.

Removing cell phones during the day gives staff more control over privacy violations, bullying, and fighting, creating a safer school environment.

LEADING WITH TRANSPARENCY AND COLLABORATION

Most of the principals and superintendents interviewed adopted a bell-to-bell cell phone-free policy before state or district mandates. They all shared these best practices for success:

- **TRANSPARENCY:** Sharing data about the extent of classroom cell phone use and its impact on learning.
- **COLLABORATION:** Involving parent groups, PTO/PTA groups, and student government in educating the community about the problem and in shaping solutions.
- **COMMUNICATION:** Using parent/school messaging systems, 9th grade orientations, and new student meetings to explain policies, highlight benefits, and report positive outcomes.

Within three to four months, most schools saw strong support from parents and students, who recognized the benefits firsthand.



District leaders should run, not walk, to implement a bell-to-bell phone-free policy. After we implemented our policy, we had a two-thirds drop in bullying and a one-third drop in suspensions. While we cannot control what is happening at home, we can support progress in the classroom and in school generally.

— Principal Daniel McCabe, Nesaquake Middle School, St. James, NY

