



CELL PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS

A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

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CELL PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS: IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

This guide provides clear steps for solving the problem of rampant cell phone use in schools.¹ It is based on extensive quantitative and qualitative national research across a range of school settings.

THE PROBLEM

Cell phones in the classroom significantly undermine student academic achievement, social development, and well-being, and they play a central role in escalating fights, cyberbullying, and non-consensual recording during school hours.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Bell-to-Bell Versus Instructional Time Only Policies

If you want to address the problem of rampant cell phone use, an effective bell-to-bell policy is required. Instructional time only policies lead to inconsistent classroom implementation, resulting in continued distractions, and students accessing phones between classes and during lunch results in continued harm to students' social development and well-being. **An instructional time only policy is not a solution to the problem of rampant cell phone use.**

¹ In this guide, the term cell phone refers both to personal cell phones and other personal electronic devices with communication capabilities including, but not limited to, Smart Watches, tablets, iPods, wireless headphones, etc.

EFFECTIVE BELL-TO-BELL APPROACHES

Effective Bell-to-Bell Cell Phone Policies Share These Characteristics:



Cell phones are turned off all day



Cell phones are physically stored away from the student



There is effective communication of the new policy to educators, parents, and students



There is strict enforcement with immediate consequences when cell phones are seen

Extensive Research Indicates There are Four Effective, Easily Implemented Bell-to-Bell Cell Phone Policies:

No Phones at School

Cell Phone Lockers

Lockers Only

Lockable Pouches

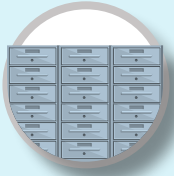
All other approaches are substantially less effective or substantially more difficult to implement.



No Phones at School

Students leave their phones at home.

Best for elementary schools with kindergarten through 8th grades.



Students turn off their cell phone and store their phone in Cell Phone Lockers all day.

Best for middle schools, smaller high schools, high schools with few entrances.



Students turn off their cell phone and store their phone in their lockers all day.

Best for any school setting with lockers.



Students turn off their cell phone and store their phone in a locked pouch all day.

Best for any school setting.

ENFORCEMENT GUIDELINES

Regardless of which effective bell-to-bell approach you select, **success depends on strict enforcement of an effective consequence framework.** Here is a consequence framework drawn from a wide range of schools that have effectively implemented bell-to-bell cell phone policies:

Level 1: First Offense	Level 2: Second Offense	Level 3: Third Offense
The electronic device is confiscated and taken to the main office; the student may pick up their device at the end of the day.	The electronic device is confiscated and taken to the main office; a parent or guardian must pick up the device; the student must turn in their device(s) to the main office every morning for one week.	The electronic device is confiscated and taken to the main office; the student will not be allowed to bring the electronic device onto school grounds for the remainder of the year.

In the 2023-24 school year, there was an average of one social media related incident each week; in the 2024-25 school year, there were only two all year.

** Statistic from Hot Springs World Class High School, Hot Springs, AR*





STORAGE OPTIONS



Image from www.lockers.com/cell-phone-lockers

CENTRALIZED COLLECTION

Cell Phone Lockers with Combination Locks

Strategy	Best for	Cost	Rating*
Students turn off their cell phone and store their phone in Cell Phone Lockers all day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Middle schools ▶ Smaller high schools ▶ High schools with few entrances 	\$20-35 per locker	Effectiveness: 4.5
			Staff Satisfaction: 4.5

* Based on quantitative and qualitative feedback

<h3>Pre-Launch</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicate policy to educators, staff, and parents 2. Purchase and install Cell Phone Lockers near building entrances or in central hallways. 3. Assign each student a Cell Phone Locker and orient them on the first day. 4. Staffing: Assign a staff person to stand near each bank of Cell Phone Lockers to ensure cell phones are stored. 	<h3>Morning</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students power off cell phone and place in their Cell Phone Locker. <h3>Afternoon</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students retrieve their cell phone from their Cell Phone Locker.
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Image from phonelocker.com



Image by overyondr.com

LOCKABLE POUCHES

Strategy	Best for	Cost	Rating*
Students turn off their cell phone and store their phone in a locked pouch all day.	Any school setting	\$8–\$30 per pouch, with annual replacements averaging 20–30% of the first-year cost	Effectiveness: 4.0 ★★★★★
			Staff Satisfaction: 4.0 ★★★★★

* Based on quantitative and qualitative feedback

<h3>Pre-Launch</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate policy to educators, staff, and parents Purchase pouches and magnet stations Determine placement of magnet stations: Place magnets on rolling carts that can be located at building entrances; mount magnet station to either the interior or exterior wall near building entrances. Staffing: Assign a staff person near magnet stations who can provide assistance should students need support, ensure student places cell phone in the pouch and locks/unlocks the pouch. 	<h3>Morning</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Staff at each entrance ensure students turn off their cell phone and swipe pouch over locking mechanism to lock it in their pouch. Students store their pouch in their locker or backpack. First period teacher checks that each student's phone is in their pouch and that the pouch is locked and not damaged (if policy is to keep pouch in backpack). Students arriving late or leaving early: Proceed to the main office to use a magnet station to lock/unlock their phones. <h3>Afternoon</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Retrieving cell phones: Students report to the magnet stations placed around the school and/or held by staff to open their pouch and remove their phone and put their pouch in their backpack.
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LOCKERS ONLY

Strategy	Best for	Cost	Rating*
Students turn off their cell phone and store their phone in their lockers all day.	Any school setting with lockers	None	Effectiveness: 4.0
			Staff Satisfaction: 4.0

* Based on quantitative and qualitative feedback

<h3>Pre-Launch</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate policy to educators, staff, and parents Staffing: Assign a staff person near each entrance to ensure cell phones are turned off and, at least initially, in each locker hallway to ensure powered off phones go into lockers. 	<h3>Morning</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Staff at each entrance to remind students to turn off their cell phone. Students must show the staff person that their phone is off. Students place their phones in their locker for the entire day. Students arriving late or leaving early: Upon entry to the school, cell phone must be turned off and placed in the student's locker. <h3>Afternoon</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students may turn their phones back on after the last bell, or when they leave the building.
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