

WHY SUPPORT AN ‘AWAY ALL DAY’ CELL PHONE POLICY?



The more time spent on cell phones, the greater the negative impact of student learning.

now



A meta-analysis of 44 studies confirms the detrimental impact of phones during school. Growing evidence shows that unrestricted use of personal electronic devices and access to social media by elementary, middle, and secondary school students

- Interferes with the educational and social development mission of schools
- Lowers student performance
- Promotes cyberbullying
- Contributes to higher rates of academic dishonesty

Teachers see the impact on student focus and learning.

now



“Educators who work in schools that allow personal device use find it very disruptive. An overwhelming majority of NEA members—90 percent—support school policy prohibiting cell phone/personal devices during instructional time, and 83 percent support prohibiting cell phone/personal device usage during the entire school day with exceptions for things like medical or assistive-technology needs.” (NEA Member Polling, June 2024)

A break from social media improves students’ mental health.

now



The causes of the current youth mental health crisis are multifaceted, but the weight of the evidence clearly shows a significant relationship with exposure to social media and other digital and online products.

Phone and social media free schools improve academic focus, mental health, and social cohesion, leading to a safer school environment. A break from cyberbullying and other online harm will improve children’s social development and allow educators more time to focus on more important work.

Testimonials



“I used to be on my phone 24/7,” Pickett said. “I feel like I’ve become more social with everyone. Communication has gotten a lot better.”

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Lily Pickett was an avid phone user last year, but enforcement of her district’s cell phone policy helped her cut back on screen time and pay more attention in daily conversations.



“We saw a 75 percent drop in referrals in the last quarter of the 2024 school year, compared to the same quarter the previous year.”

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Callahan credits this improvement in behavior to students spending far less time on their phones, sharing plans to cut class, or meet in the hallways. Issues such as students skipping class or detention, or being out of class without permission, have also reduced “massively,” Callahan said. So have safety violations, like roughhousing and verbal altercations that escalate into fights.

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS



- **What if students don't have cell phones with them during a school shooting or other emergency?**

We know this is a major concern for some parents and students. As parents who care deeply about protecting all children, we were surprised to learn that school safety experts actually recommend that students not have phones during a school shooting or similar emergency. Their attention should be squarely on the adult in charge and what is occurring in real time. The most powerful protective factor against school violence is school connectedness. Student use of cell phones during the school day degrades vital social cohesion and enables increased bullying and harassment.

- **How do parents feel about cell phone-free school policies?**

Our data shows more than 80% of parents do not want their kids to use cellphones during school. When parents help their kids plan their days without text messages, they help them develop valuable executive-functioning skills.

- **What does a model 'Away for the Day' state policy look like?**

- All PreK – 12 schools implement a bell-to-bell phone-free policy, including during lunch, recess, and passing periods
- School districts determine which method to use to store students' personal devices, including pencil pouches, envelopes, locking pouches, or another method that does NOT rely on teachers policing cell phone use from class to class.
- Exceptions would be made for students with medical and special education needs
- A phone is accessible for students to communicate with parents when necessary, with school districts setting guidelines for this

- **How have cell phones in schools contributed to school violence?**

A New York Times review of more than 400 fight videos from more than a dozen states — as well as interviews with three dozen school leaders, teachers, police officers, pupils, parents, and researchers — found a pattern of middle and high school students exploiting phones and social media to arrange, provoke, capture and spread footage of brutal beatings among their peers. In several cases, students later died from the injuries. An Epidemic of Vicious School Brawls, Fueled by Student Cellphones, New York Times, 2024.

- **How serious of a problem is cell phone use among youth?**

Virtually all teens (95%) ages 13 to 17 use social media, and more than 1 in 3 report that they use it "almost constantly." Even though most social media platforms set 13 as the minimum age requirement, nearly 40% of kids ages 8 to 12 use social media. Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024; Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022; The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021.

Studies have shown that higher use among children and adolescents is linked to adverse effects: depression and anxiety; inadequate sleep (which can disrupt neurological development and lead to depression and suicidal behaviors); low self-esteem; poor body image; eating disorder behaviors; and online harassment. Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023. It's often the most vulnerable youth who are most affected by these adverse effects, increasing disparities.

In Jonathan Haidt's 2024 book, The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness, he documents the staggering increases since 2010 in clinical diagnoses of anxiety (134%); depression (106%); anorexia (100%); and substance abuse and addiction (33%). The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness, 2024.

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS



- **Where have phone-free school policies been effective?**

A 2020 study of Norwegian schools that had banned smartphones, found that:

- Banning smartphones lowers the incidence of bullying for both girls and boys,
- Banning smartphones results in girls making gains in both their GPA and externally graded mathematics exams, on the order of 0.22 standard deviations. For comparison, the author notes that reducing class size by one student correlates to an improvement of about 0.00–0.05 standard deviations,
- These benefits are particularly strong for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds,
- The effects are particularly strong at schools with the strictest bans, requiring students to hand in or lock away their phones, not just place them on silent mode. The study's author notes that, even in silent mode, phones can still pull at a student's attention, distracting them as they wonder if someone messaged them, liked their status, or whatever else,
- Banning smartphones reduces the number of consultations for psychological symptoms by about 2–3 visits per child, per year.

Smartphone Bans, Student Outcomes and Mental Health, Institutt for samfunnsøkonomi, 2024.

In a study published in 2016, academics Louis-Phillipe Beland and Richard Murphy found that across the large English cities of Birmingham, Leicester, London, and Manchester, dozens of high schools that instituted bans on mobile phones saw significant improvement in scores on high-stakes tests.

One paper, published in 2014, studied cell phone use and texting in a large sample of college students, ultimately finding that they were associated with relatively lower grades and higher levels of self-reported anxiety. Relatedly, subjects who texted and used their phones less experienced higher “satisfaction with life.”