

February 14, 2024

Dear Members of the Committee on Education,

I currently have 3 children attending Wichita Public Schools. I am very excited to see a bill addressing the use of smartphones and personal electronic devices during the school day! Thank you for bringing this important matter to the forefront.

Prior to the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, our local school district proposed and accepted a new policy dictating that personal electronic devices should not be out during the school day. However, implementation and adherence to the policy varies widely throughout the individual schools. I think passing the bill at the state level could give more credence to local districts trying to support a better learning environment by eliminating the distraction of cell phones in classes during the school day. It will also emphasize to parents and educators statewide that personal electronic devices are harming our children's educational experiences.

I am very concerned about the amount of social interaction and educational opportunities personal devices are displacing at school. Prior to the new policy, and still with a new policy in place, my children mention students using phones on field trip bus rides, video-taping fights at school, and playing games during "free time" in class, among other distractions. Whether brief or not, these distracted phone use times replace developmentally beneficial social interactions and opportunities for some off-screen activities, in a very screen-heavy school day.

A recent Washington Post editorial titled "Schools Should Ban Smartphones. Parents Should Help" said it best- "In educational settings, smartphones have an almost entirely negative impact: Educators and students alike note they can fuel cyberbullying and stifle meaningful in-person interaction."

We are not lacking research at this point as to the detriment caused by personal electronic devices in school. [UNESCO recently reported data](#) which suggests "a negative link between excessive [personal technology] use and student performance." The report continued that "mere proximity to a mobile device was found to distract students and to have a negative impact on learning..."

The surgeon general [released a report](#) concerning social media's negative effect on teen mental health, which can be accessed through personal smartphones and handheld devices during the school day.

Similarly, in journalist Johann Hari's latest book *Stolen Focus*, he spoke about smartphones and addiction. In it, he specifically addresses the ways in which personal mobile devices are *designed* to make it hard for us to think and concentrate and designed to create addictions to the device.

Smartphones are distracting for most of us adults. How can we expect young, still-developing brains to resist the distraction they are designed to provide?

An [article by the 74Million.org](#) details more benefits of a phone-free school. In a 2016 study in England, schools that restricted use of cell phones during the day “saw significant improvement in scores on high-stakes tests. The increase was especially large for the lowest-performing pupils, who saw a jump in scores more than twice as large as the average student. Overall, the authors argued, the greater effects on these students of banning mobile phones — roughly equivalent to adding an hour to each school week — suggested that their higher-achieving classmates were better able to ignore distractions and focus on their work. The lure of texts and apps, therefore, might be expected to increase achievement gaps over time.”

Whether or not schools begin restricting use of personal electronic devices during the school day is not an “if” but rather a “when.” We’ve tried the social experiment. We see that phones are not serving our students well. The current bill, as proposed, has excellent language to allow for special circumstances in which students would be best cared for by allowing an exception (for example, for medical purposes.) It would eliminate the toxic parts of what personal devices bring to the school day, but still allow avenues for communication with family members, when the need arises.

I am encouraged that by passing this bill we are not re-inventing the wheel. We know that this can work because it has worked for decades before students had individual cell phones. Please help Kansas stand out at the forefront of caring for our children’s education, by voting in favor of Bill 2641.

Thank you for your consideration.

Amy Warren
Wichita, KS