

Chair Estes and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of House Bill 2421.

My name is Kim Whitman. I'm a parent of two Shawnee Mission high schoolers and I co-lead for the national nonprofit [Smartphone Free Childhood US](#) as well as our [Distraction-Free Schools Policy Project](#) initiative. We work to ensure every child has a safer, more focused learning environment through strong distraction-free school policies. Our Kansas coalition consists of parents, educators, students, administrators, board members, and mental health professionals. We recently crafted a letter of support for Phone and Social Media Free schools legislation in Kansas that has garnered well over 500 signatures.

As a co-founder of the [Phone-Free Schools Movement](#) and co-author of the Administrator Toolkit, I want to emphasize that there are free research-based resources on how to implement effective bell-to-bell phone-free policies available to districts. Yet most local districts still aren't using this best-practice approach for students OR they fall short by not applying it to all grades. HB 2421 ensures that every student in every district, rural or urban, has access to a truly distraction-free learning environment.

Some have raised concerns about local control. However, local districts have not adopted research-supported phone-free policies on their own, even after the State Board of Education's [Blue Ribbon Task Force](#) recommended this same gold-standard policy - phone-free bell-to-bell with all personal devices stored inaccessible. Currently, only 11% of Kansas public school students are in districts with bell-to-bell phone-free policies. HB 2421 still preserves meaningful flexibility: local districts choose how to enforce the policy, which storage method to use, and what consequences are appropriate. The only requirement is that devices remain inaccessible during the school day.

This matters because phones and social media are intentionally designed to be addictive. A recent [JAMA study](#) found that students spend an average of 70 minutes per school day on their phones, with the top 3 uses being social media, videos, and gaming. That adds up to the equivalent of 30 instructional days per year. Six full weeks of learning lost simply because phones are accessible. When devices are stored away, students focus better and teachers can teach instead of policing phones.

The bill also protects students with IEPs, 504 plans, and documented medical needs, including those who rely on phones for diabetes monitoring. Research shows that broad additional carve-outs are NOT in students' best interest. ESL educators, for example, report that phones hinder language acquisition by pulling attention away from essential verbal and visual cues.

Finally, any concerns about the prohibition on staff–student communication via social media stem from a misunderstanding. The intent is narrowly focused on platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, X, and TikTok—not tools like Gmail or ParentSquare. We support clarifying language and prefer a full prohibition on student-facing communication through social media, so no student is required to use it to participate in school or after school activities.

With this clarification, this bill allows Kansas to join the 19 other states that have prioritized distraction-free learning and already enacted bell-to-bell phone-free school laws. **Please vote yes on House Bill 2421.**

Distraction-Free Schools



POLICY PROJECT

INFORMATION FOR KS LEGISLATORS ABOUT BELL-TO-BELL PHONE-FREE SCHOOL POLICIES

The Distraction-Free Schools Kansas Coalition is comprised of parents, teachers, students, school administrators, board members, and mental health professionals from across the state of Kansas. We support the gold standard practice of bell-to-bell phone-free school policies with all personal electronic devices stored inaccessible to students.

[DistractionFreeSchools.com](https://www.DistractionFreeSchools.com)

Contact: KimSpikingWhitman@gmail.com

36 STATES PLUS D.C. HAVE PASSED PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS LEGISLATION

Bell-to-Bell (19 states + DC)

Alabama
 Arkansas
 Florida (k-8)
 Georgia (k-8)
 Louisiana
 Missouri
 Nebraska
 New Hampshire
 New Jersey
 New York
 North Dakota
 Ohio
 Oklahoma
 Oregon (EO)
 Rhode Island
 South Carolina
 Texas
 Vermont
 Virginia
 Washington DC

Instructional Time

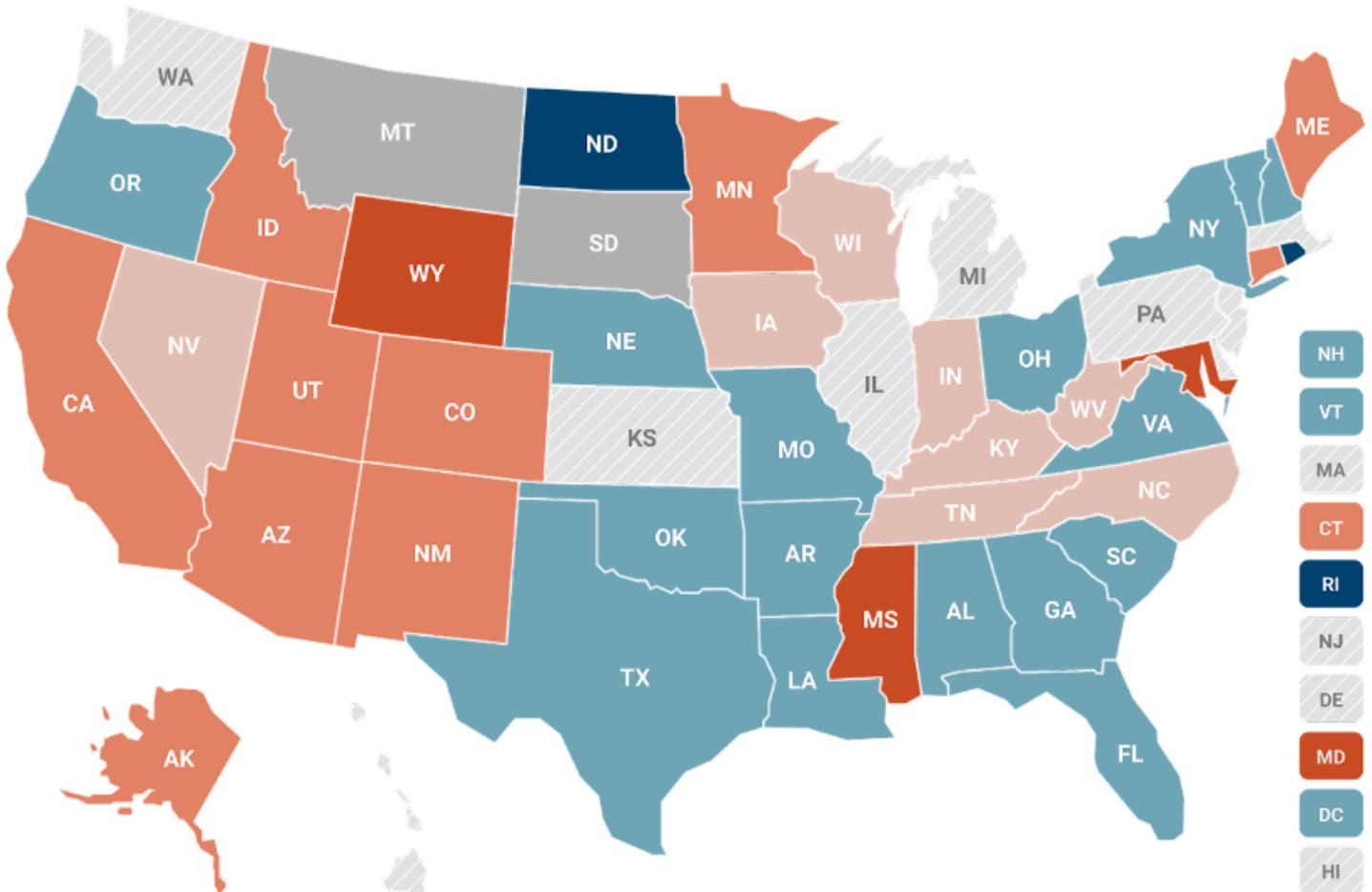
Iowa
 Indiana
 Kentucky
 Nevada
 North Carolina
 Tennessee
 West Virginia
 Wisconsin

Policy Required

Alaska
 Arizona
 California
 Colorado
 Idaho
 Maine
 Minnesota
 New Mexico
 Utah



[Click here to see an at-a-glance list of states by grade](#)



SUPPORT KS STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

BELL-TO-BELL PHONE-FREE SCHOOL POLICIES ARE BEST PRACTICE

Academic Success	Mental Health	School Safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow teachers to teach, rather than “police” devices• Reduce classroom <u>distractions</u>• Increase <u>focus & cognitive performance</u>• Improve grades & test scores• Decrease cheating• Eliminate “partial presence” on phones, which drain cognitive ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create space to build real-life social skills, and grow school <u>connectedness</u>• Encourage emotional resilience, independence, and problem-solving skills without texting or calling home• Reduce <u>cyberbullying</u> & social media drama in the school building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain calm in emergency situations and help kids focus on teachers’ instructions (best practice according to school <u>safety experts</u>).• Keep communication lines clear for first responders• Protect kids from online harms such as <u>sexual predators</u> & <u>access to drugs</u> while at school

OTHER POLICIES FALL SHORT AND PRODUCE POOR RESULTS

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME ONLY POLICIES HAVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

For Teachers: Teachers are burdened with phone storage as well as “policing” device use. This wastes valuable instructional time and teacher energy. Teachers should be free to teach!

In Emergencies: Phones distract students from safety instructions and can reveal their locations.

Academically: Research shows true focus is only possible when devices are completely removed from the learning environment. Maximizing focus increases academic achievement.

Socially: Phones block opportunities to build critical social skills throughout the day – at lunch, in the halls, and during free periods. These skills require practice & are foundational for future success.

Emotionally: Intermittent access tethers kids to social comparisons & pressures. It limits chances to build independence and problem-solving skills.

BELL-TO-BELL HAS BROAD SUPPORT

Teachers want this. 83% of NEA teachers support bell-to-bell.

Taxpayers want this. 6 weeks of learning is lost to smartphone use = taxpayer \$ wasted.

Parents want this. 80% of voters support for bell-to-bell phone-free.

School Safety/Resource Officers want this: NASRO supports bell-to-bell.

Students need this. Their well-being and future work prospects are at stake.

19 states + DC have bell-to-bell policies
Don't let KS fall behind!

Distraction-Free Schools

POLICY PROJECT

www.distractionfreeschools.com
KimSpikingWhitman@gmail.com

DEVICE STORAGE OPTIONS

Storage options in last hour classroom



Locked filing cabinet



Locked phone locker

Storage options in entry and securely stored in front office



Pencil pouches in baskets



Manila envelopes in baskets or bins

DEVICE STORAGE OPTIONS



Homemade wood locker with locked door



Individual phone lockers



ULINE storage cubbies



Homemade wood locker with individual locks



Yondr pouches

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS SUPPORTIVE OF BELL-TO-BELL POLICIES



The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) is dedicated to making schools and children safer by providing the highest quality training to school-based law enforcement officers.

NASRO, the gold standard in school-based law enforcement training, is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1991 for school-based police, school administrators, and school security and/or safety professionals who work as partners to protect schools and their students, faculty, and staff members.

I have been the Executive Director of NASRO for the last 14 years and prior to that I was a School Resource Officer for 14 years.

NASRO is extremely supportive of a statewide bell to bell phone and social media free policy for grades k-12. We do not support an exception for emergencies. We know that schools, students and staff are safer when student cell phones and personal devices are not present during the school day. For this reason, **if students are allowed to bring personal devices to school they should be securely locked away and inaccessible to the student from the first bell to the last bell of the school day.**

We often hear parents say they want to be able to contact their student in an emergency situation such as an active shooter in the school. However, outside communication during this critical time makes students less safe.

In an emergency situation that requires a lock down the following are essential safety procedures:

- 1) Students need to be focused on the adults giving instructions. During this critical time, students need to listen to the teacher and/or first responders for guidance. Messaging or **calling their parents who are not in the building could distract students from life saving instructions.**
- 2) If in hiding, **students need to remain quiet.** Noise and/or light from students' phone could alert an assailant to the location where students are hiding.
- 3) **Phone lines need to remain open** for communication between staff and first responders. If hundreds of students are calling their parents then the communication channels may be overwhelmed and impede necessary communication with first responders.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS SUPPORTIVE OF BELL-TO-BELL POLICIES

4) Clear access to the school allows for faster response times by first responders. **If parents are alerted by students and rush to the school, the extra traffic could potentially block access routes for emergency response vehicles.**

5) **The fewer people approaching the building, the more secure the surroundings.** Parents rushing to the school can risk being mistaken as an assailant.

6) Schools are equipped to manage emergency communication with first responders and with parents. **Misinformation can quickly spread over social media.** If students are texting and posting on social media during an emergency situation it could lead to a more hazardous situation.

For the best outcome it is essential for students NOT to be on their phones during a lockdown. **In addition to phones placing students in more danger during emergency situations, they also contribute to a less safe school environment in general.** A significant portion of discipline referrals result from students having access to phones and social media during the school day. These concerns include privacy violations, social media drama, cyberbullying, and fights. All of which are significantly reduced in schools that require students to lock up their phones for the entire school day. If students have access at any point during the day, lunch or passing periods for example, then these infractions still occur. Therefore, it is prudent that legislation be passed so all students can have a safe and distraction-free learning environment.



Mo Canady

Executive Director
National Association of School Resource Officers

Distraction-Free Schools



Kansas House Bill 2421: Frequently Asked Questions

1. Kansas is a local control state so why do we need a state law?
 2. Would this law be an “unfunded mandate” and place financial burdens on districts?
 3. Why is the policy for the entire school day (referred to as “bell-to-bell”)?
 4. Why do personal electronic devices need to be stored inaccessible to the students?
 5. Will teachers have to police phones with this policy?
 6. How long will it take districts to plan and implement a policy?
 7. How do these policies affect administrator workload and students' tight schedules?
 8. What if students don't have cell phones with them during a school shooting or other emergency?
 9. How can parents and caregivers stay in touch with their children during the school day?
 10. How can schools support marginalized students who rely on phones and social media for connection?
 11. How can we help students learn to use phones responsibly?
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1. Kansas is a local control state so why do we need a state law?

Local districts aren't implementing best practice policies. Statewide consistency positively contributes to the learning environment all students deserve.

- In December of 2024, the State Board of Education's [Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time](#) recommended districts implement a bell-to-bell personal electronic policy for K-12 students and to store personal electronic devices in a secure location inaccessible to them during the school day.
- 91 school districts (32%) have a bell-to-bell personal electronic device policy across all grade levels, representing 11% of all public-school students in Kansas. HB2421 requires the same policy as the State Task Force recommended and most districts are not following.
- According to a [presentation to SBOE](#) in July 2025 on a survey distributed to districts, of 256 districts that responded, 240 districts said they have a cell phone policy. The policies varied widely and only 23.9% of districts reported having a single district policy that applies to all schools and grade levels.
- According to a [National Education Association survey](#), 83% of teachers support bell-to-bell phone policies.

HB 2421 does provide local districts with the latitude to determine implementation, storage methods as well as consequences/discipline that best works for their community.

2. Would this law be an “unfunded mandate” and place financial burdens on districts?

Districts may choose how student's personal electronic devices are stored but they must be inaccessible to the student from bell-to-bell. There are a variety of very affordable storage options available. Some examples include:

- Collecting personal electronic devices in [pencil pouches](#) or [manila envelopes](#) and securely storing them in baskets.
- Other options include: locked file cabinets, phone lockers, or storage cubbies.
- If districts choose to purchase a product, [Yondr pouches](#) offer more flexibility but for best results, need to be stored in student lockers (instead of backpacks). They are also a much more expensive solution.

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Watch the Distraction-Free Schools Policy Project's Phone-Free Schools on a Budget webinar where two school administrators explain the ~~logistics around their~~ affordable storage methods. [_____](#)

- Phone-Free Schools on a Budget webinar highlights [15-minute version](#)
- Phone-Free Schools on a Budget full webinar [40-minute version](#)

For implementation, there are many free resources that districts can utilize to help them implement the policy:

- [Phone-Free Schools Movement Administrator Toolkit](#) (download for free)
- [A Guide For School Administrators provided by ScreenStrong](#)

[Distraction-Free Schools Policy Project](#) will also help guide them through the process

3. Why is the policy for the entire school day (referred to as “bell-to-bell”)?

A bell-to-bell phone-free policy provides far greater benefits than class-time-only restrictions. While limiting phones during class can slightly improve engagement, focus, and academic integrity, it still leaves teachers acting as “phone police,” depends on student self-control (situation modification is more effective) and contributes to student pushback and teacher burnout. Because students still access phones during passing periods and lunch, they miss out on the full advantages of a truly phone-free school day.

Key benefits of a bell-to-bell policy include:

- **Development of social-emotional skills**

Students engage face-to-face more often. Lunchrooms become louder, livelier, and more connected, helping students build essential interpersonal skills.

- **Reduced mid-class absenteeism**

Without phones, students request fewer unnecessary restroom breaks.

- **Improved all-day attendance**

Students can't text parents to be picked up early, reducing avoidable early dismissals.

- **Greater independence**

Time away from constant parent contact helps students build confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Reducing parent-child codependency also supports healthier emotional development.

- **Enhanced safety and fewer discipline issues**

Schools report that 75–95% of discipline referrals stem from phones or social media. Phone-free days significantly reduce cyberbullying, fights, and privacy violations.

- **Higher teacher morale and retention**

Removing the burden of phone enforcement allows teachers to focus on teaching, improving job satisfaction and retention.

- **Better classroom focus**

When students can check phones between classes, emotional distractions follow them into the next class period. A phone-free day helps them transition more smoothly into learning.

- **Improved mental health**

Seven hours away from phones and social media gives students a much-needed break from constant stimulation. More in-person interaction leads to happier students with a stronger sense of belonging.

Watch this [12-minute video](#) of neuroscientist Jared Cooney Horvath explaining research on why anything short of a bell-to-bell ban doesn't work.

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4. Why do personal electronic devices need to be stored inaccessible to the students?

1. Phones and social media are designed to be addictive. Students (even adults) can't resist the constant buzz in their pocket or backpack.
 - Students receive a daily average of 237 notifications with nearly a quarter received during the school day.
 - A recent JAMA research study found that students spend an average of **70 minutes per school day** on their phones, with the top 3 uses being social media, videos, and gaming. That adds up to the equivalent of **30 instructional days per year. Six full weeks of learning lost** simply because phones are accessible.
2. Research shows that when the phone is in the same room as students, it's draining brain capacity. Watch this 2 minute video explaining the brain drain study.

5. Will teachers have to police phones with this policy?

No, bell-to-bell policies with inaccessible storage provide relief from the constant policing of phones by teachers.

1. Teachers are happier and teacher retention increases in schools with bell-to-bell policies.
2. According to a NEA survey 83% of teachers support bell-to-bell policies

6. How long will it take districts to plan and implement a policy?

According to the Phone-Free Schools Administrator Toolkit about 3 months is necessary for successful planning and implementation. 93% of districts have some policy in place so they are not starting from zero. This bill requires that districts move the needle to best practices to ensure students and staff get the best results/most benefits.

7. How do these policies affect administrator workload and students' tight schedules?

Schools of all sizes, including larger than 3,000 students have successfully implemented procedures to support a bell-to-bell policy. Administrators and teachers ultimately regain time in their day with fewer resources spent supporting dysregulated students or handling discipline referrals for situations like cyberbullying. A recent study reported a 46% decrease in bullying among girls and a 43% decrease among boys following the implementation of phone-free policies.

8. 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 and we can all agree we want students and staff as safe as possible during a potential emergency. School safety experts recommend that students not have phones during a school shooting or similar emergency. The National Association of School Resource Officers issued the following statement, Students Safer Without Cell Phones During School Emergencies. Students' attention should be squarely on the adult in charge who has been trained on how to respond to 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.

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9. How can parents stay in touch with their children during the school day?

Developmental psychiatrists note that ~~the school environment~~ provides an optimal setting for children to develop independence within a secure and supportive community. Research further indicates that student anxiety declines when mobile phones are removed during the school day. One study showed banning smartphones significantly decreases the health care take-up for psychological symptoms and diseases among girls. Caregivers may continue to communicate as needed by contacting the school directly or reaching students through their school-issued email accounts.

10. How can schools support marginalized students who rely on phones and social media for connection?

Sadly, data shows that marginalized children are most likely to be harmed on social media. Efforts to build a sense of community and connection for all children is crucially important for the well-being of marginalized students. There are many ways schools can do this, including simple community-building programs like interest-based lunchtime groups, peer-to-peer mentoring, professional development for staff, educational curricula to teach positive bystander, allyship and community-building skills for all students, and clear anti-bullying policies.

11. How can we help students learn to use phones responsibly?

We need to prepare children with communication and media literacy skills, as well as the ability to focus and think critically. These skills are best learned through face-to-face communication, not with devices that are purposely designed to addict them. We do not ask kids to take drugs to learn how to manage drug addiction. We should not ask them to carry phones to learn how to manage phone addiction.

Research Infographic

97%
OF STUDENTS USE PHONES DURING SCHOOL

An average of 43 minutes per day, spent primarily on social media, YouTube, and gaming

Common Sense Media

SOCIAL MEDIA IS NEARLY UNIVERSAL

40% of 8 – 12 year olds are on social media

95% of teenagers are on social media

Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

Teens spend nearly **5 HOURS** a day on social media apps.

American Psychological Association

3+ Hours

PER DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

doubles the risk of poor mental health including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety

Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

NEA POLL

83% of teachers

support an all day phone-free policy

National Education Association

72%

OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS REPORT CELLPHONES ARE A MAJOR DISTRACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

The Mere Presence of a Cell Phone May be Distracting

50%+ of kids get **237 NOTIFICATIONS PER DAY**

Some receive as many as **4,500 EVERY DAY!**

23% occur during school

Common Sense Media

PHONES PREVENT FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION

Research suggests that face to face communications are linked to better mental health.

Psychology today

Students not using their phones during class wrote down **62%** more information.

They also scored a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple choice test

The Impact of Mobile Phone Usage on Student Learning

RATES OF SCHOOL loneliness have

x2 SINCE 2012

Worldwide Increases in Adolescent Loneliness



Since 2010

134% ↑ Increase in anxiety
106% ↑ Increase in depression

The Anxious Generation



Adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were more than

Four Times

as likely to report thoughts of

Suicide & Attempts

as those who didn't

National Institutes of Health

YOUTH REPORTING

LONELINESS

are also more likely to **DROP OUT OF SCHOOL AT THE AGE OF 16**

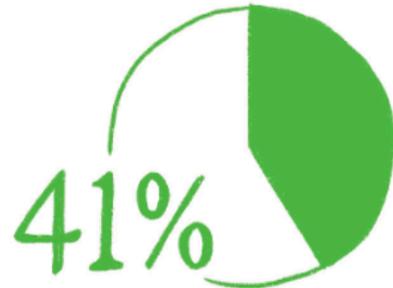
Loneliness During the School Years



95%

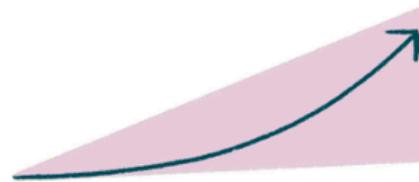
OF TEACHERS SAY ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE A PROBLEM IN PUBLIC K-12 SCHOOLS

National Education Association



OF TEENS WITH THE HIGHEST SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE rate their overall mental health as poor or very poor

American Psychological Association



Each additional hour of total screen time increases the odds of suicidal behaviors

Science Direct

STEEP DROP IN BULLYING

46% & 43%
OF GIRLS OF BOYS

experienced a reduction of bullying after smartphone bans were enacted.

Smartphone Bans, Student Outcomes and Mental Health

87%

of teachers said bullying is a problem in Public K-12 schools

34%

of middle school teachers call bullying a major problem

National Education Association

35%

OF TEENS ADMIT TO USING THEIR CELLPHONE TO

cheat

Common Sense Media

OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS HAVE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED **Suicide** IN THE PAST YEAR

22%

HAVE ATTEMPTED **Suicide** IN THE PAST YEAR

10%

CDC, 2023

Pornography Exposure

1/3 of all teens reported that they have been exposed to pornography during the school day



Common Sense Media



"Brain Drain"

The mere presence of one's own smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity

Brain Drain