

To the Esteemed Members of the Board of Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed policy that would ban high school students from using personal cell phones during their non-instructional free time while on school grounds.

I stand firmly in opposition to this proposed ban and urge the Board to reconsider. We must recognize that high school students are young adults navigating a complex, modern world. Providing them access to their personal devices during designated free time is not a distraction; it is an essential allowance for **safety, responsibility, social-emotional well-being, and academic support.**

1. Immediate Safety and Communication

In today's environment, a cell phone is the most reliable tool for instantaneous communication, especially during an emergency.

- **Student-Parent Contact:** In the event of a personal, family, or school-wide emergency, students need to be able to immediately and discreetly contact a parent or guardian. Restricting access creates unnecessary delays and heightened anxiety.
- **Medical and Personal Needs:** A student feeling suddenly ill, needing an inhaler from a car, or dealing with an unexpected personal matter must be able to call for help without navigating administrative bottlenecks, especially during unstructured periods like lunch or passing periods.
- **Emergencies:** In a critical school-wide emergency, relying solely on school infrastructure is inadequate. Every student should have a personal device to receive emergency alerts and communicate their safety status to loved ones.

2. Academic & Organizational Responsibility

Cell phones are powerful tools for organization and academic extension that support the transition to college and career readiness.

- **Organizational Hub:** Students use their phones as their personal schedulers. They contain digital calendars, reminders for homework deadlines, and to-do lists that keep them on track throughout the day.
- **Quick Reference & Research:** During a study hall or free period, a student may need to quickly look up a forgotten historical date, a formula, or a definition to continue studying. This immediate access to information fosters self-directed learning.

- **Transition to Adulthood:** High school is about teaching independence. Managing a personal device responsibly—knowing when to use it and when to put it away—is a vital life skill that a blanket ban prevents students from practicing.

3. Social-Emotional Well-being and Inclusion

Free time is for de-stressing and engaging with the world, which for modern teenagers, includes their digital communities.

- **Stress Management:** A few minutes of scrolling or listening to music can be a vital, self-regulated stress-relief tool for students dealing with the pressures of academics, sports, and social life.
- **Building Connections:** For many students, especially those who may be shy, new to the school, or neurodivergent, communicating with friends via text or social media during lunch is a less intimidating way to maintain social connections and feel included.
- **Access to Support:** Phones can provide discreet access to mental health resources, support hotlines, or immediate communication with trusted adults outside of the school setting.

The Proposed Alternative: Clear Guidelines, Not a Blanket Ban

Instead of implementing an absolute ban, I strongly recommend the Board focus on **establishing and rigorously enforcing clear, responsible use policies.**

- **Phones Out, but Not in Use:** Define designated "no-use" zones (e.g., during class instruction, assemblies) and **enforce consequences for misuse, not for possession.**
- **Teacher Discretion:** Trust teachers to manage their classroom environments with clear expectations for when phones must be put away.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Incorporate digital citizenship training that explicitly teaches students **how to manage their screen time** and focus during school hours, reinforcing the life skills they need for the future.

Restricting cell phone access during free time sends a message of distrust and hampers a student's ability to manage their personal and academic lives. Let us treat our high school students as capable individuals who, with proper guidance, can manage this tool responsibly.

Thank you for your consideration.

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