

My name is Fran Whitten. I am a resident of Scarborough and a retired educator. I spent 36 years in education as a classroom teacher and an administrator. I implore you to support the Bill for Phone Free Schools, LD1234.

Let me start with parents. Why do parents need immediate access to their children? When at school their children are in a safe environment, under responsible supervision and in a positive learning environment. Children should be able to think for themselves, make choices, and develop a sense of independence without interference from their hovering parents. Do parents really need to be in communication with their child about how they did on their math test, what topic they are choosing for their term paper, or who they are hanging out with in the cafeteria? Wouldn't it be much healthier for all involved to talk about these things at the dinner table vs. interrupting the learning process at school? If it is an emergency, parents can contact the school and the situation can be handled promptly and effectively.

Next, teachers should be setting an example. There is no need for a teacher to be on their phone during class to schedule personal appointments, respond to texts from friends or to make social engagements. In addition, disappointingly so, some teachers allow students to be on their cell phones during class as a means to avoid actually teaching a lesson. It might be due to lack of preparation or simply lack of professionalism; in any case it is unacceptable. More importantly, what about the teacher that is making every effort to provide a valuable learning experience and has to deal with the constant disruption of students being on their cell phones during class. The time lost when a teacher has to constantly tell students to get off their phones is unfair to all involved.

Most significant is the negative impact on students. The distraction of being on their phones is totally detrimental to the learning process. The classroom should be a place where students develop critical thinking skills, learn to engage in discussion, enhance creativity and become socially responsible. These skills are lost when a student is on their phone checking out social media, texting a friend or utilizing artificial intelligence to formulate an answer that isn't even of their own creation.

Need I even address the dangers of social media? It is well documented that student's utilization of social media can be literally deadly. With a "phone free school", at least students can feel safe and focus on learning.

Some say students can use their phones in class as a productive means of learning. I would counter that the teacher can utilize technology in the classroom to provide a far more valuable and shared learning experience for all.

Please vote in favor of Bill LD1234 in the best interest of the entire educational community.