

Testimony: The Case for Restricting Cell Phones in Maine Schools

Good Morning Representatives,

My name is Betsy Follansbee, and I am writing as a teacher and parent, in favor of implementing strict policies regarding cell phone use in Maine schools. As we navigate the challenges of modern education, it's crucial to recognize the impact that unrestricted access to smartphones can have on our students' learning, mental health, and social development. As other folks today will surely talk about the lionshare of these reasons, I want to zoom in on the classroom impact and how this state legislature can best support teachers and school districts.

Distraction and Academic Impact

Numerous studies have shown that cell phones are a significant source of distraction in the classroom. In South Portland (where I teach) and Scarborough (where I live), educators have reported that students often struggle to remain engaged during lessons due to the lure of their devices. For instance, Cony High School in Augusta observed a noticeable improvement in student participation and engagement after implementing stricter cellphone policies. Teachers note that students are more attentive, raise their hands more often and actively participate in class activities. Our charge as educators is to develop students as informed, involved citizens of their communities; unfortunately we know they are going home to devices and a virtual world, so I beg you to keep our classrooms and learning spaces an environment of face-to-face social interactions, to build their communities and their social skills. By reducing screen time during school hours, we encourage students to engage more with their peers, enhancing their social development and emotional intelligence.

Mental Health Concerns

The mental health of our students is another pressing issue. The constant connectivity provided by smartphones leads to increased anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. All of these impact students' readiness and ability to learn; I see it every day in my students. As teachers we can only respond with a reactive intervention to these problems; therefore I beg of you to create law or policy that would make a universal Tier 1 solution to this problem in prohibiting cell phones during the school day. As the adults with the best decision-making capabilities, we have a responsibility to our children to give them the best chance possible to build their friendships, connections with others, and create the social and community net that we know helps prevent mental illness.

Cyberbullying and Safety

Cyberbullying is a pervasive problem that has devastating effects on students. Schools like Lewiston Middle School have taken steps to restrict cellphone use during school hours to combat this issue. By limiting access to devices, we reduce the opportunities for students to engage in harmful online behaviors, fostering a safer and more supportive school environment—allowing them to focus on interpersonal skills and academic learning during the

school day. I believe the Maine Legislature has a duty to support teachers and school administrators in this effort by creating a law that takes this hard decision off teachers' plates. Teachers and principals have enough to worry about and work at, without having to police students' cell phone use during the school day.

Conclusion

In conclusion, restricting cell phone use in schools is not about rejecting technology but about creating an environment where students can focus on learning, develop healthy social relationships, and prioritize their mental well-being. I urge policymakers to consider the evidence and take action to implement laws that limit cellphone use during school hours. Our teachers deserve the backing of the state of Maine, and our students deserve the opportunity to thrive in a focused and supportive educational setting.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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