

Fred Follansbee
Scarborough
LD 2212

Testimony in Support of Bell to Bell Phone Free Schools in Maine

Good morning. My name is Fred Follansbee from Scarborough Maine.

I am former History teacher of a combined 15 years at Kennebunk and Bonney Eagle High Schools, and Gorham Middle School.

I witnessed Gen Z come of age after the iPhones were widely adopted in the early 2010's, and I can testify to the "before and after" contrast in student performance. While everything I am sharing with you is anecdotal, I am convinced that smartphones had a negative impact on my students' performance and resilience. Before every kid had an iPhone (and thus 24-7 access to social media), Kennebunk HS was a school of excellence and a wide body of students performed at a high level. Kennebunk experienced widespread participation in AP, International Baccalaureate, and Honors classes and my students were capable fantastic accomplishments. But sometime around 2015 or so, I noticed a decline in student rigor and resilience. The frequency of students seeking accommodations, extensions, behavioral disruptions, and social emotional disruptions increased significantly with some correlation to the amount of focus students paid to their phones. I could go on but there are plenty of professionals here who can more capably explain why there is no academic purpose for smartphones in school.

I am here to empower the legislature to do something about this this epidemic. First of all, this is not an issue to take lightly, and your decision is not easy. For my part, I had a good handle of the smart phones in my classroom. At the beginning of every single block, every single day, I required my students to place their phones in a pouch. Consistency and ruthlessness was key to this method and it worked. For a millennial, I was old school in the classroom. At the school level, I thought we had a good handle on smartphones. We proudly created a new shiny policy during the summer only to watch it crumble a week into the school year. Why didn't it work? While strictness was my personal asset, most teachers and building administrators were too afraid of tarnishing relationships with students or angering parents, and thus, nothing of substance happened.

Here is where the legislature can help. If you vote to enact "bell to bell" legislation, you will provide the necessary cover for school districts and teachers to do the responsible, lawabiding thing. Instead of defending policies on the phone to parents or at schoolboard meetings, a tremendous burden will be taken off the shoulders of teachers and administrators who will instead be able to focus on academics while following the law.