



Regional School Unit 1

34 Wing Farm Parkway, Bath, ME 04530

Patrick Manuel, Superintendent
Debra Clark, Business Manager

Katie Joseph, Assist. Superintendent
Sarah Rent, Director Special Education

Think - Care - Act

Public Testimony in Support of LD 1234

An Act to Ban Cellular Telephones from Public School Classrooms

Submitted by: Katie Joseph, RSU 1 Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Bath, Maine

Chairpersons, members of the committee, and fellow citizens,

My name is Katie Joseph, and I proudly serve as the Assistant Superintendent of Schools for RSU 1 in Bath, Maine. I am writing to express my strong support for LD 1234, An Act to Ban Cellular Telephones from Public School Classrooms.

In the spring of 2024, RSU 1 embarked on a thoughtful and collaborative journey to address growing concerns about student mental health, engagement, and academic performance. Through extensive surveying of our students, families, staff, and local law enforcement, and in-depth research into the effects of screen time and social media on teenage well-being, it became clear that significant change was needed.

With the full support of our School Board, we made the decision to implement a phone-free and smartwatch-free school day for all students in grades 6 through 12. We invested in Yondr pouches for every student, and this shift has had a profound and overwhelmingly positive impact on our school communities.

Since implementation, we have observed the following changes:

- **A calmer, more focused school environment:** Bathroom trips are shorter, hallways are quieter, and transitions are smoother.
- **Improved classroom engagement:** Students are more talkative with one another before and after class, contributing to a stronger sense of community. "Do now" routines are underway more quickly, and students are engaging in conversations rather than silently scrolling.

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- **More effective teaching and learning:** Teachers are giving directions fewer times, and they report feeling less fatigued—energy is being spent on instruction, not on battling phone use.
 - **Increased sense of safety and professionalism:** Teachers no longer worry about being secretly recorded, which has contributed to a more trusting and respectful classroom environment.
 - **More reading and learning:** Students are seen reading more often, completing more classwork and homework, and even charging their laptops more reliably for productive in-class use.
 - **Stronger student socialization:** Lunchrooms are louder—but with the buzz of conversation, not the silence of screen time. More library books and games have been checked out in the past months than in previous years.
 - **Reduced disciplinary and health issues:** Administrators report fewer vaping incidents, fewer investigations related to cell phone misuse (bullying, inappropriate social media posts, etc.), and less time spent on reviewing screenshots or confiscating phones.
 - **Positive student response:** After an initial adjustment period of about a week and a half, students no longer expressed much desire for their phones during the day. Many report feeling more productive, especially during study halls, and are submitting more schoolwork.
 - **Improved health service usage and attendance accuracy:** Our School Based Health Center saw a significant increase in visits—449 in September 2024 compared to 331 in September 2023, for instance. Medical staff attribute this to students no longer texting parents to be picked up; they are instead using the appropriate in-school channels, which has helped them access needed care and improved the accuracy of attendance data.
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- **Students are not rushing to get their phones back at the end of the day:** While students are allowed to unlock their pouches at the dismissal bell, many take their time, indicating a healthier relationship with their devices.
- **Academic improvement is emerging:** Though full data is still being compiled, we've already seen a decrease in our class failure rate for this year in comparison to other years in all subject areas.
- **No increase in calls to school offices:** One of our original concerns was that families would inundate front offices with calls during the school day. This has not materialized and families have adjusted well to the new guidelines.

The impact of this initiative has been transformational. By removing the constant distraction and emotional weight of cell phones and social media during the school day, we have created a more connected, attentive, and emotionally safe school environment for our students and staff alike.

For all these reasons and more, I urge you to support LD 1234. Our experience in RSU 1 has shown that a phone-free, smartwatch-free school day is not only possible—it is powerful.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katie Joseph
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

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