



Suffern High School Cell Phone Policy Update 2024-25 School Year



Dear SHS Families and Students,

I hope you have enjoyed a wonderful summer. This past year, our school organized a cell phone committee to better understand the impact of mobile devices on our students and their classroom environments. The committee was initially made up of seven teachers across several departments, including art, English, special education, and science. We later incorporated both student and parent input to help us learn more about their experience at Suffern High School.

The committee looked at the latest research on cell phone use in schools, including:

- The book, "The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Haidt
- Various news articles, including those from *EdWeek* and *The New York Times*
- Local news on states and districts that have changed their cell phone policy

From our readings and research, we learned the following:

- By 2023, according to "The Anxious Generation", more than 46 percent of teens report being online "almost all of the time" and "childhood transformed into something unrecognizable. And it has caused an epidemic of mental illness among our youth."
- Los Angeles Unified School District has moved to completely ban cell phone devices.
- Governor Kathy Hochul is intent on banning cell phones in all schools in New York state.

We also surveyed families, staff, and students about cell phone use. We found that parents and staff were aligned in wanting to remove cell phone use during class, but to allow use during non-instructional times.

To learn more about limiting cell phone use in classrooms, we piloted a new system across 10 classrooms where students checked their phones into hanging pouches on the wall at the start of each class. Classrooms included 9th grade Earth Science, 9th grade English, 12th grade AP US History, 9th-12th grade art, 9th-12th grade music, 9th-12th grade health, 9th-12th grade ENL seminar, and 9-12th grade special education. After that pilot, we gathered input from students and families. Here are some responses from students:

“ I noticed more kids understood, and knew, the material when they were not looking at their phones during class ”

“ When our teacher gave us time to start our homework in class I actually did it instead of going on my phone and saving it for later. ”

“ There was not temptation to look at my phone and we were able to socialize more. ”



Suffern High School Cell Phone Policy Update 2024-25 School Year



Given the research we studied, the survey results, and the success of the pilot, Suffern High School is adopting a consistent approach to cell phone use across classrooms. Students are still welcome to bring cell phones to school and use them during non-instructional times, such as passing periods, lunchtime, before and after school. During instruction, students are expected to place their phones in classroom pouches to ensure they are not a distraction to instruction.

Knowing that the state is heading in this direction, we feel it best to be ahead of the curve and create a clearly defined and consistent approach to cell phone usage. This way, if the state were to move to a ban, we would be able to show a healthy and working system in place that would not require a full ban.

We are excited to see our students experience an improvement in social connection, academic achievement, and mental health!

Please see some FAQs below that I hope help address any questions or concerns you may have.



Is this a total cell phone ban? Can students use cell phones during non-instructional time?

This is not a total ban. Students can use their phones during arrival, passing periods, lunch, dismissal, and during after-school programming.



What if I have an emergency at home and need to contact my child during class time?

In the event you need to reach your child during an emergency or time-sensitive situation, call the main office (845-357-3800) for assistance. Someone can then call the classroom and connect you to your student.



What if there is an emergency situation at school? How do I stay in touch with my child?

During emergencies, students will be able to collect their phones from the pouches so long as it is safe to do so.



What if students would like to use cell phones to assist with their learning?

If there is a learning activity that can be aided by cell phones, the teacher will instruct students to collect their phones from the pouches to use them for instruction. However, the majority of tech-based learning can be done via chromebooks. Please ensure your student charges their chromebook each night so they can depend on it during class time!