



Saint Paul
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

First Reading: Board Policy 550: Cell Phones and Personal Electronic Devices

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Board of Education
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Cell Phone Policy Work Group

- School Board Director Carlo Franco
- Assistant Superintendents Nancy Páez and Adam Kunz
- Principals Jamil Payton (HS), Shandyn Benson (ALC), Jocelyn Sims (MS) and Lauren Bolopue (Elementary)
- Teachers Dan Perelstein (HS), Libby Arnosti (HS), Molly Brown (MS)
- Health and Wellness Director Becky Schmidt
- School Support Director Kathy Kimani and College and Career Readiness Assistant Director Beth Coleman
- Communications Director Erica Wacker
- Cora and Samia (Students)
- Schools and Learning Director Jodi Danielson
- Project Manager Maria Vincent

Policy 550: Cell Phones and Personal Devices

Why are we proposing to adopt this policy?

- MN legislature made a law in spring 2024 that all school districts must have a district policy regarding cell phones, due to impacts to:
 - Academic performance
 - Mental health
 - Learning environments
 - Effective teaching

Source: [The Cell Phone Toolkit](#), (July 2024), MESPA and MASSP

Assumptions

- Personal devices should be managed during instructional time at all grade levels
- Procedures will include expectations around wireless accessories (e.g., watches, glasses, earbuds, etc.)
- Cannot be cost prohibitive
- Cannot put undue burden on families (e.g. school dismissal/suspension)
- Cannot perpetuate inequitable practices across student racial and ethnic and other traditionally marginalized groups
- There will need to be an exception for medical needs
- Adoption in spring; implementation in September 2025

Assumptions Added by BOE on Nov 6

- Disciplinary responses should be tiered
- The policy will need to be taught to students
- The policy will need to reference the impact on staff use as well
- The policy needs to outline a way to communicate to school communities
- Emergency procedures need to be taken into consideration

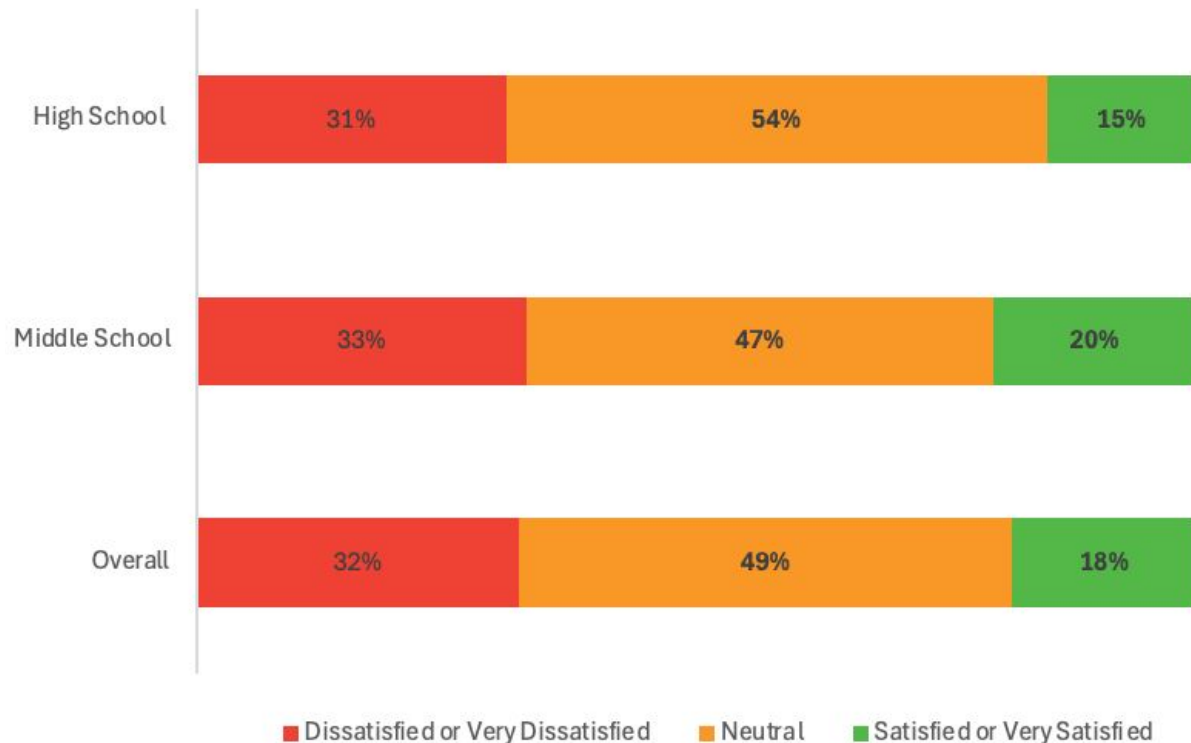
Community Feedback

Survey Response Frequency

	Response Rate	Number of Responses	Number of Invitations
Students	21%	3,974	16,752
Families*	20%	5,870	28,999
Staff	22%	662	3,047
<i>Total</i>	22%	10,514	48,798

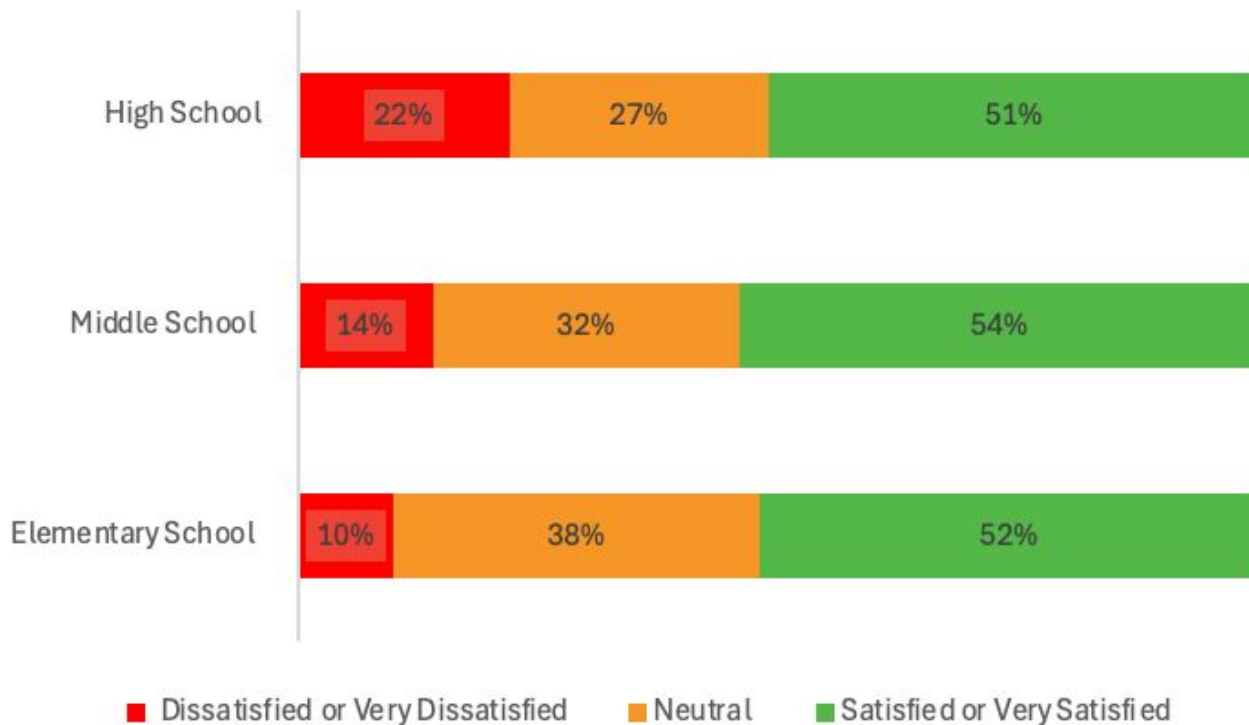
*higher response rate in languages other than English compared to most most SPPS surveys

Students' Satisfaction with Current Rules



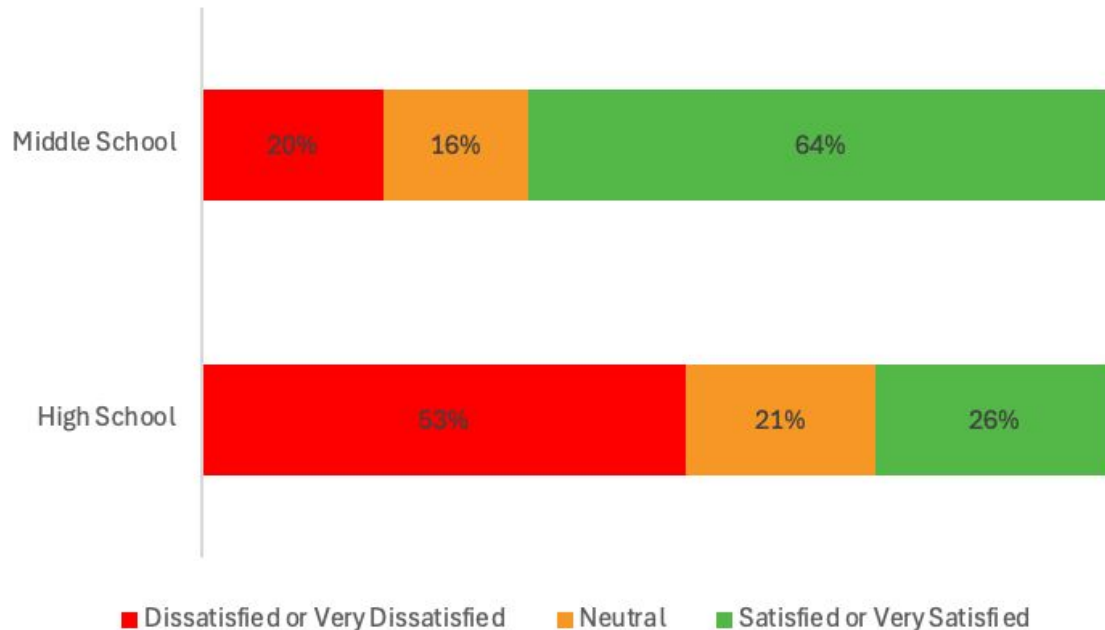
Students generally preferred less restrictive policies

Families' Satisfaction with Current Rules



Families that were less satisfied generally desired more restrictive policies

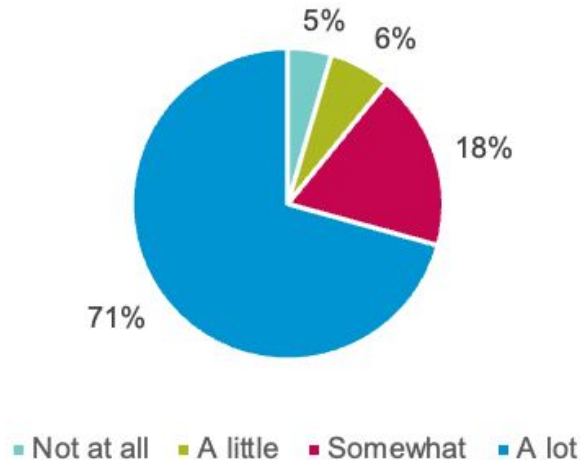
Staff Satisfaction with Current Rules



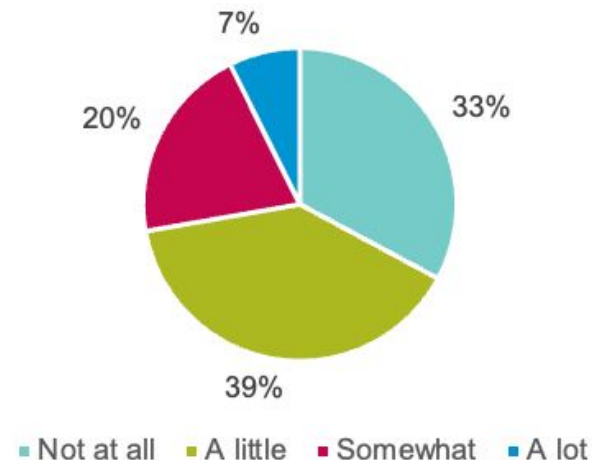
Staff at buildings with more restrictive rules reported higher levels of satisfaction

Impact on Student Learning Perceptions

Staff Reported
Distraction/Disruption



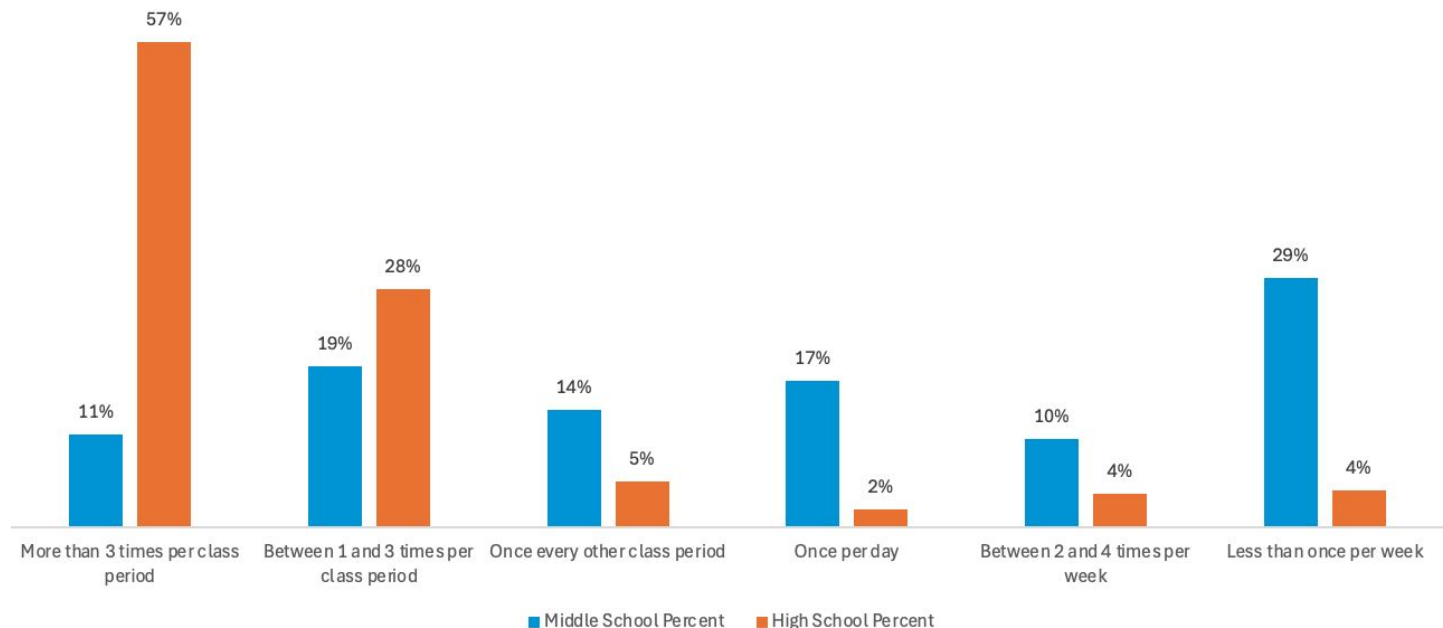
Student Reported
Distraction/Disruption



52% of Middle School students and 87% of high school students report using their phone during the school day

Frequency of Addressing Cell Phone Violations

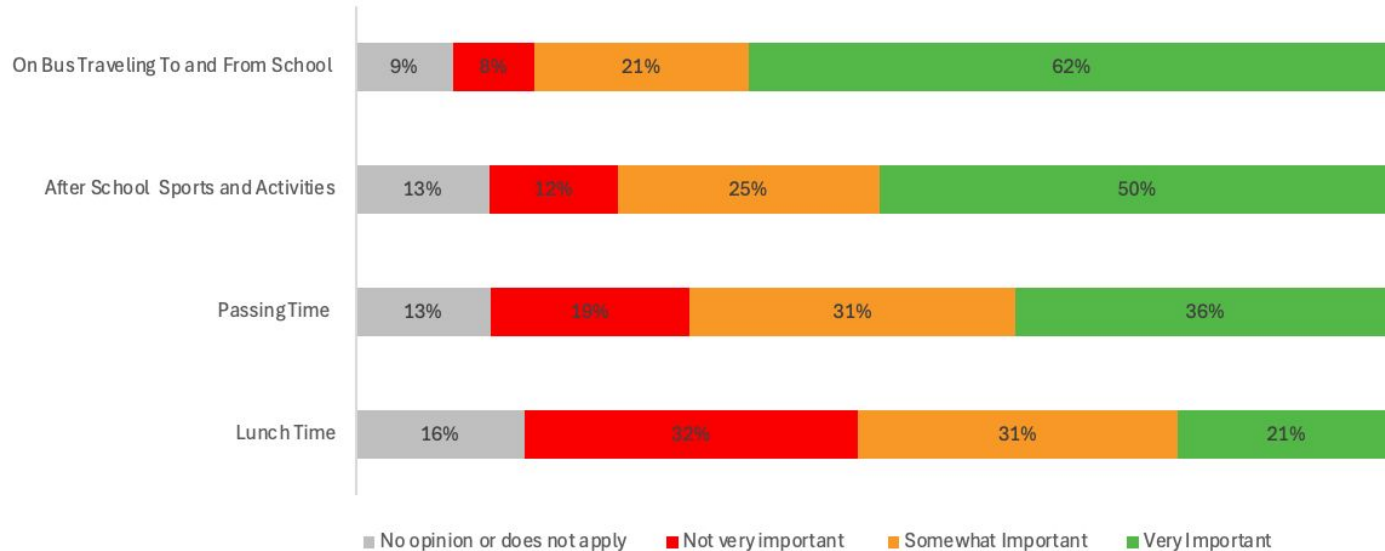
High School Versus Middle School Staff



Notably, teachers at a middle school with less restrictive rules reported over double the rates of having to address cell phone use during class.

When Middle School Students Want their Phones

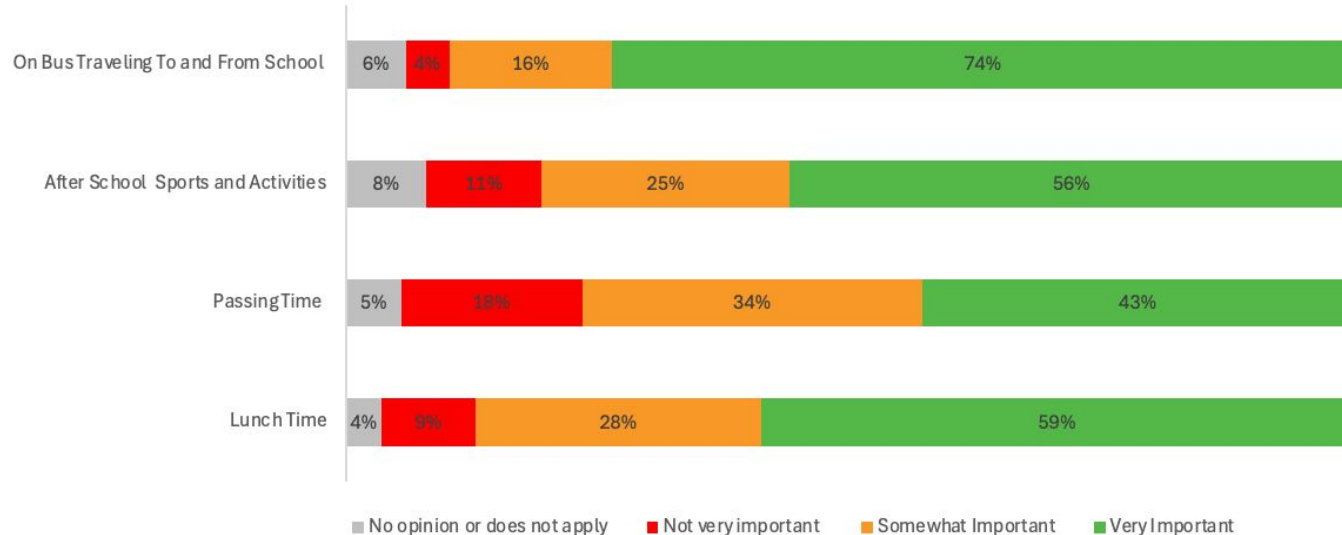
Students' Feelings on Importance of Cell Phone Access by Setting



"I just wish it wasn't so strict, like what could my phone possibly be distracting me from during lunch time? My Italian dunkers??" - Student

When High School Students Want their Phones

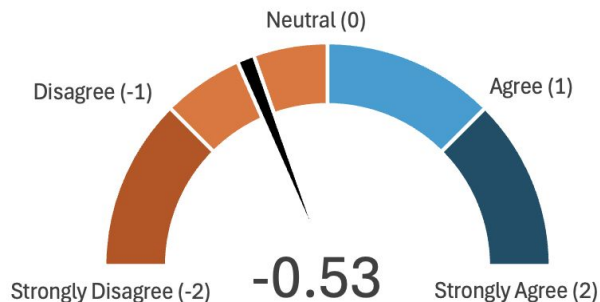
Students' Feelings on Importance of Cell Phone Access by Setting



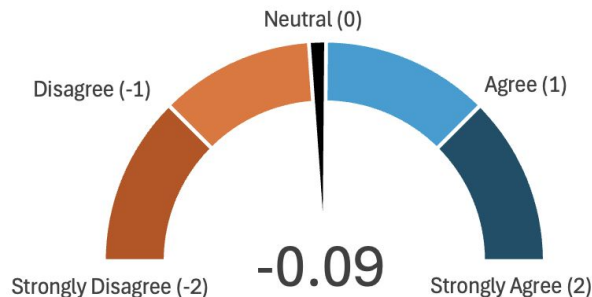
“Students should be able to use their cell phones to research stuff off of the internet because SPSS blocks certain websites, and we need all the information we can get.” - Student

Parent Views on Cell Phone Access

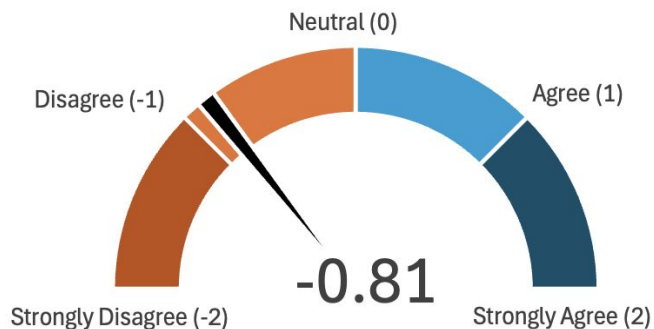
Middle School Lunchtime



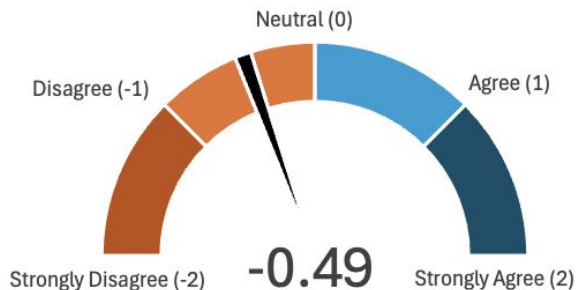
High School Lunchtime



Middle School Passing Time



High School Passing Time



Policy Preferences

- High School parents and staff preferred a policy that allows phones at lunch and passing time
- Middle school parents and staff preferred a policy that limits phones during school hours
- Elementary parents preferred a policy that limits phones during school hours as well as before and after school
- Staff should follow the spirit of the policy with reasonable exceptions

Reflection

What are you noticing in the information presented so far?

Parent Advisory Councils

- Met with all Parent Advisory Councils, including:
 - American Indian Parent Advisory Council
 - Gender and Sexual Diversity Parent Advisory Council
 - Hmong Parent Advisory Council
 - Karen Parent Advisory Council
 - Latino Consent Decree Parent Advisory Council
 - Parents of African American Students Advisory Council
 - Somali Parent Advisory Council
 - Special Education Advisory Council
- 102 attendees

Communication Needs

- Parents want reliable ways to reach their students
- Many said they would contact the school, but had concerns about reliability
- One parent suggested emailing their student
- Top concerns:
 - Safety and emergencies
 - Communication about daily family logistics

“Phones can be useful for communication between parents and students—texting for non-emergencies, like appointment reminders, is more efficient than calling the office.” - Parent

Parent Perception of Current Practices

- Often weren't aware what current practices are
- Would like consistent implementation
- Expressed the importance of families helping students learn responsibility with their devices
- Exceptions for specialized needs must be noted

"Middle and high school students should be involved in creating and understanding the policy, teaching them responsibility." - Parent

Recommendations for District Policy

- Should be clear and consistent
- Should be equitably enforced
- Do not want to result in increased suspensions or exclusion
- Would like it tiered and accounting for unique programs
- Should be explicit about all devices
- Want to balance the needs of learning and instruction with parent concerns about safety and communication

"I agree to not have cellphones in the classroom, but I think about emergency situations when they don't have access to the phone and something is happening in the school, how am I going to hear from my kids?" - Parent

Student Senators Roundtable

- 42 Como Park Sr students
- During school day
- 1 hour 15 minute discussion
- Hosted by Senators Erin Murphy and Alice Mann



Senator Mann, Hayyat A., Senator Murphy

Student Cell Phone Use During School

- Communication with family and friends
- Listening to music
- Scrolling social media
- Watching videos
- School work
 - Replacing or supplementing school-issued iPad

How Cell Phones Impact Students

Adds:

- Useful for academic tasks
- Mental breaks
- Quick tasks
- Listening to music

Takes Away:

- Creates distractions
- Missing important information
- Creates disengagement

Policy Recommendations

Policy 550 Overview: Introduction

Community Feedback		How it Shows Up in the Policy
Rationale is included in the policy	⇒	Includes purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Research● Values
Policy expands definitions beyond cell phones to include a range of personal electronic devices	⇒	Definitions section includes all personal electronic devices as well as a definition of “use”

Policy 550 Overview: Primary Component

Community Feedback		How it Shows Up in the Policy
Allows for staff and student voice	⇒	<p>Not allowed during school hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools with grades 9+ (e.g. 6-12, 9-12, 12+) can develop a documented plan with a team of school stakeholders to allow use before and after school, at passing time, and/or during lunch<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ E.g. principal, staff, students, and/or parents
Empowers students		
Includes supporting students in learning responsible management of devices		

What Will Students Experience?

- Most schools already have similar practices
- Policy lends itself to greater consistency across staff and schools
- Removes social pressure to be on devices
- Removes potential distractions
- Balances the responsibilities of high school students as young adults

Discussion

What are your thoughts on this adaptive approach to the main component of the policy?

Policy 550 Overview: Primary Component

Community Feedback		How it Shows Up in the Policy
Accounts for unique programs	⇒	Special education transition programs allows cell phone use to support independent travel and employer communication

Policy 550 Overview: Additional Elements

Community Feedback		How it Shows Up in the Policy
Need alternative ways for parents to reach students	⇒	Students and families will have an alternative method of leaving messages, defined by the school.
Consequences should be tiered, non-exclusionary, and consistently applied	⇒	Consequences for violations of this policy: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Cannot be exclusionary.2. Should be tiered.3. Should be consistently applied.
Needs to account for emergency situations	⇒	During emergency situations, use of personal electronic devices must follow the School Emergency Operations Plan.

Policy 550 Overview: Additional Elements

Community Feedback		How it Shows Up in the Policy
Families have a responsibility as well	⇒	Asked to limit calling/texting students to minimize disruptions
School staff should follow the spirit of the policy	⇒	School staff should follow the intent of the policy
Communication to stakeholders about the policy is needed	⇒	Notification of policy built into Rights and Responsibilities and schools communicate annually
Needs to allow exceptions based on individual needs	⇒	Medical, IEP, volunteer firefighter, and emergency medical services exceptions

Policy 550 Overview: Additional Elements

- Not responsible for theft or loss
- Cannot engage in prohibited conduct; devices may be searched if relevant

Next Steps

- Make adjustments if needed based on Board feedback
- Student and staff focus groups in January to understand how the policy looks like in practice
- Second reading at January 21 Board of Education meeting
- Third reading at February 18 Board of Education meeting
- Add to Rights and Responsibilities Handbook
- Schools adapt practices as needed
- Implementation September 2025

Policy 550: Cell Phones and Personal Devices

- See entire proposed policy [here](#).

Questions?