

ANN ARBOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
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# Skyline High School

Our Cell Phone Journey

**During the 2023–24 school year, cell phone use rose to the top of the list of concerns raised by teachers**

As a result, we began to collect data around cell phone usage and feedback from staff, students and parents/guardians using surveys and focus groups.

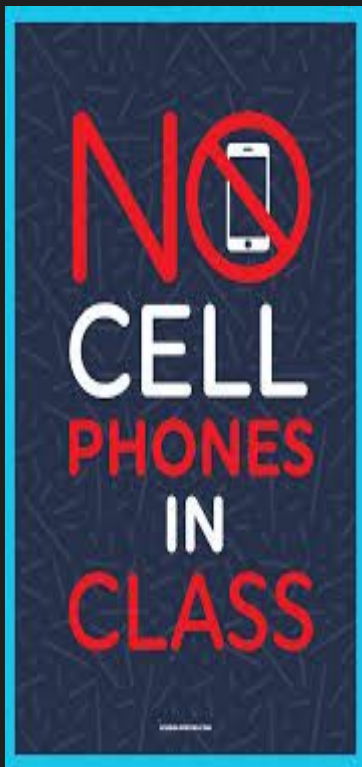


# In response to the feedback...

We continued researching cell phone policies in schools and looked at current research about the effects that cell phones were having on student achievement. We then drafted a policy as a Skyline leadership team and tuned it with the staff in the spring of 2024. We finalized a school based policy and shared the school policy with the students and families letting them know the policy would take effect in the 2024-2025 school year.



# NEW: Skyline School-Based Cell Phone Policy 2024–2025



OR

**Cell Phone Policy at a Glance-** these posters were printed and hung in each classroom along with a cell phone pocket chart.

# SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL CELL PHONE POLICY

## Objective

The cell phone, headphone, and electronics policy is established to create a conducive learning environment by minimizing distractions and fostering student engagement during class time.

If asked to do so by a staff member, students must surrender their cell phones and/or headphones. Confiscated phones and headphones will be taken to a SLC Office for storage. Failure to respond to a reasonable request may lead to serious consequences under the AAPS Rights and Responsibilities handbook. AAPS will assume no responsibility for loss of/damage to these items. If you do not agree to these guidelines, please do not bring a cell phone or headphones to school.

## Storage

- At the beginning of each class period, students are required to place their cell phones in a designated pocket chart located at the front of the classroom. In their designated number pocket. Pocket charts will be placed away from the door.
- The pocket chart will be clearly labeled with individual pockets corresponding to each student's name or assigned number.
- All headphones, airpods, earbuds, etc must be out of ears and stored away in the student's backpack for the duration of the class period.

## Responsibilities

- It is the responsibility of each student to place their phone in the designated pocket and headphones and other electronics in their backpack upon entering the classroom. (Phones remain in the pocket during trips to the bathroom, drinking fountain, on hall passes, etc.)
- Students must ensure that their phones are turned off or set to silent mode before storage.
- It is the responsibility of each student to adhere to this policy and to respect the learning environment of the classroom.
- Teachers are responsible for enforcing the policy consistently and fairly.

## Access to Phones

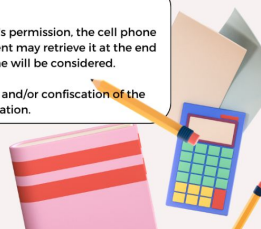
Students will not have access to their phones during the class period unless there is a specific educational requirement approved by the teacher.

In case of an emergency, students may request permission from the teacher to access their phone.

## Consequences

If a student removes their cell phone from their pocket without the teacher's permission, the cell phone will be turned into the SLC office for the remainder of the day and the student may retrieve it at the end of the day. If this becomes a pattern of behavior, progressive discipline will be considered.

Subsequent Offenses: Progressive disciplinary action, including detention and/or confiscation of the phone, parent/guardian notification by the administration.





# Our stakeholder groups reported...



## Staff

Overwhelmingly, staff reported that cell phones were a huge distraction in the classroom. They were spending too much time dealing with cell phone use and the resulting loss of engagement. They were engaging in frequent power struggles and students were struggling to talk to and interact with each other in classrooms.

## Parents/ Guardians

85% of the parents who responded to the survey felt that there should be some restrictions on cell phone use at school.

## Students

About 82% of the students who responded to the survey reported that cell phones were some level of distraction in the classroom however, students were less supportive of any cell phone restrictions at school.

# Feedback during 2024-2025

- Teachers reported that the cell phone policy was having a huge impact on the classroom environment and they were seeing increased engagement and student interactions.
- Teachers reported that some students were still struggling to comply with the cell phone policy. There was some inconsistent implementation across classrooms.
- Most parents were ecstatic and told us how happy they were with the implementation of the policy
- Many students grumbled initially and then after experiencing class without the distraction of cell phones appreciated the policy and they noticed how much more focused they were in class. Many reported that they got more work done in class and had less work to do at home.

# For the 2025-26 School Year...

We made one adjustment to the process... starting this year, all teachers are expected to take attendance by the student's cell phone being in the pocket chart. Reports from teachers are that this is cutting down on some of the power struggles and is making the policy much easier to implement and they are spending less time managing cell phones in the classroom so far this year,



Photo by Rick Bowmer/AP



# Voices From Our Teachers..

Since Covid, it has been a real challenge to get students to talk in class, in all circumstances: small group or partner talk, whole class discussions, and presentations. They have gotten used to interacting online – “IRL” conversations seem harder, now. As we know, teaching and learning are interactive, social ac – learning is amplified when students participate. One important benefit I am seeing with the Skyline phone policy is that it allows for a lot more conversation. Students have been more focused, interactive, and collaborative. And I am a less distracted teacher because I no longer have to stop instruction every few minutes to manage someone's phone use.

I LOVE the cell phone policy. It makes all the difference in the world. Using the cell phone pockets to take attendance is a genius addition to the policy and it works extremely well. I haven't had a single issue with student compliance.

The cell phone policy is highly beneficial to student learning and engagement. I express to my students that this policy is not about "finger wagging" or telling you what to do with your personal items. It is about the management of the many technology tools that we have. It's not easy! We have to unlearn addictive behaviors and relearn how to engage and learn from each other. Students talking to each other and smiling, crazy!

I have found that my students are more attentive to the curriculum, more social with their peers, and more in tune with themselves (emotionally, mentally, etc.) because of the cell phone policy. The cell phone policy has been a positive game changer for both students and staff.

# More Teacher Voices...

As a classroom teacher, I want to express my strong support for the cell phone policy and share some positive impacts it has had on the students and the classroom environment.

1. Improved focus and academic engagement: Since the implementation, there has been a significant improvement in students' attention and engagement during lessons. They are more willing to participate in discussions and collaboration sessions.
2. Healthier Classroom culture: Without their phones, students are talking to each other more, learning about each other more in a friendly setting, and it is heartening to witness students rebuilding their social skills that are essential to both their personal and academic growth. It has improved the culture of the holistic learning environment I aspire to create.
3. Early Identifying and Recognizing Learning Needs: Without the phones, it is now easier for me to spot learning challenges or learning barriers in my students' learning. They do not have their phones to hide behind. This further helps me to reach out to the support team sooner rather than later.



The cell phone policy is incredible and I am in awe of the difference it makes in all of my classes. Coming from another school district where we tried to enforce a cell phone policy, the one implemented at Skyline is next to none. It is critical that ALL staff members are behind it in order for it to work well in all rooms, which is what has happened at Skyline. The students listen, engage, read, talk, communicate, collaborate a lot more because they do not default to their phone as soon as they are done working or if they feel uncomfortable with a new partner. They are forced to sit with those feelings and own them and work through them, and fill the void with something more rewarding or academic. I feel like I already have stronger connections with the students because they are more eager to talk vs hide. It is also a healthy practice for teens to disconnect from social media and other distractions that can increase anxiety and stress in an already anxious generation. I am obsessed with this policy and am behind it 100%. I can never go back! It makes teaching enjoyable again, too!

# More Teacher Voices...

At the beginning of the 25-26 school year, Skyline instituted a new policy of students placing their cell phones in the pocket holder in order to be counted as Present for attendance. Since it was the procedure from day one in every class, it has become an expected routine, and in my experience, it is extremely effective in making phone distractions a minor or nonexistent issue. I have noticed that students go to the bathroom less because they don't have their phones with them. I've noticed less students in the hallways during class time on their phones. Students are more engaged in learning and in interacting with each other. I also find it less frustrating as a teacher since I rarely have to address phone use, whereas in previous years lessons were constantly interrupted and tensions could be high due to conflicts with students who were playing games or watching videos on their phones. There have been many positives, and I am so glad our school decided to take steps to collectively address the issue.



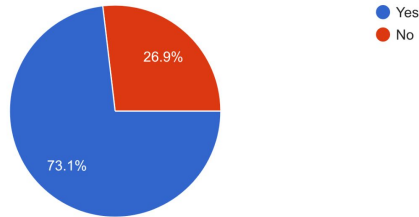
Since we have begun the cell phone pocket policy (this is our second year), I have noticed an increase in student involvement with the curriculum, and more social interaction between students. It has greatly reduced the stress that I have during class time as I began to become a "police officer" going around catching kids trying to hide their phones on the music stands. This year I have noticed more kids being compliant with this policy and taking attendance by using the pockets creates a greater need for it to be in the pocket at the start of class.

# Voices From Our Students...



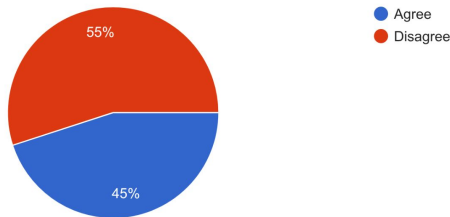
While I may not love the cell phone policy, I can see how it helps eliminate distractions in the classroom.

160 responses



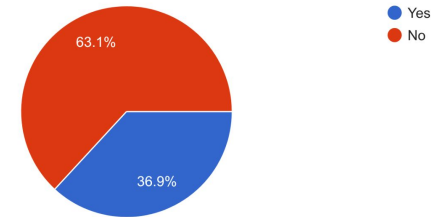
I find myself less distracted in classes with my cell phone not available.

160 responses



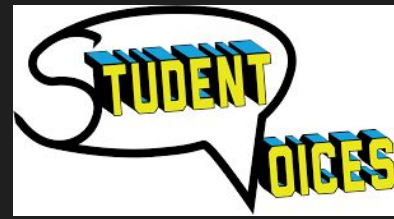
Do you feel more connected to classmates and teachers without phones being used during class?

160 responses



- I think I am more productive with my school work because there are less distractions.
- I like it because we can still use phones in passing to quickly send a text or something and are still able to use at lunch. The phone pockets are good in class because it allows you to focus more.
- I think especially for freshmen and new students it greatly improves the process of making new friends because when they have no one to talk to or it gets awkward they can't just go non their phones.

# More Student Voices...



- I grayscale'd my phone years ago so I haven't struggled with phone withdrawal for a while now. (do consider teaching my fellow students how to wean themselves off their phones instead of purely using cold turkey methods in the classroom THERE NEEDS TO BE SOME KIND OF WORK OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM in order for students to stop being addicted to their phones, remember, your brain developed without a phone, for many of us, we didn't!)
- It doesn't change anything for me. It does make it easier for teachers so that they don't have to take someones phone every few seconds, but that's about it.
- I don't like the phone policy because I think it's useless. The phone policy doesn't change or limit any distractions because people can still be on their laptops or talk to their peers. I think that students should be able to have their phone on them and when it's time to put it away they put it away. They should also ask permission to use it before taking it out our bag.
- I would suggest having the phone policy optional and implementing a system where you can have your phone as long as your attentive to the class and assignments.



# More Student Voices...



- It doesn't help me at all it just takes away my one way to communicate with my family
- I understand the need to make sure students aren't using their phones in class, but making them put them in the phone pockets every day every class seems excessive to me, and it does not help prepare students for the real world when they will have to learn to focus and ignore their phone. I believe that instead, if a student is using their phone without permission, then it should go in the pocket, but other than that it can stay with the student.
- Allow us to at least have our phones when the learning is done. If we finish the assignments and we aren't doing anything it makes no sense to not let us have our phones.
- I personally believe phones shouldn't automatically be taken away. I think the students should be allowed to keep them, but if the teachers see a phone out at any point during the period, then the student should be forced to put their phone in the phone holder. I believe this would discourage kids from using their phones in class and get rid of all the hassle and complaints about having to put our phones away immediately as soon as we enter the classroom.



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