



**Cell Phone Policy Research
Board Presentation**

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Presentation Purpose:

Today, we will review the timeline and purpose of this qualitative research, report on findings from the study, and discuss relevant next steps.

Late last fall, Jeffco launched a study of current school-based cell phone policies as a starting place for creating a district policy on cell phone use in schools.

National Context: Cell Phones and Young People

A Cultural Inflection Point

- The 2024 book *The Anxious Generation* by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has galvanized national debate by linking increased smartphone and social media use to rising rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among teens.
- Haidt describes a "great rewiring of childhood" around 2010–2012 when smartphones and social media became ubiquitous, especially for girls — coinciding with spikes in adolescent mental health challenges.

Public Health Crisis: There is national debate and discussion on how cell phones are impacting students' physical and mental health. (*What the Science Says: Smartphones in Schools*, Digital Wellness Lab, September 2024)

How It's Influencing Policy

- State legislators and school leaders are increasingly framing cell phone restrictions as a public health and child development issue.
- Many recent state laws and district-level policies explicitly cite research from *The Anxious Generation* and related studies to justify bell-to-bell cell phone bans, limits on social media use, and tech-free environments during the school day.

National Context: Cell Phones and Young People

Angela Duckworth, renowned psychologist and the Rosa Lee and Egbert Chang Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, is leading a national study titled **Phones In Focus**, aiming to evaluate the effectiveness of school cell phone policies. The project seeks to gather data directly from educators to understand how different policies impact student learning, well-being, and social interactions.

Duckworth underscores the importance of this study by stating, **"Nobody really knows what's working and what isn't—and, yet, we need to make decisions about what to do."**

National Context: Cell Phones and Young People

Statewide Legislation

- 26 states have enacted laws banning or regulating cell phone use in schools.
- 8 additional states and the District of Columbia have issued rules or recommendations to local districts.
- 17 states passed such laws in 2025 alone, reflecting a bipartisan effort to address concerns over student mental health, academic performance, and classroom distractions.
- 10 states and the District of Columbia have implemented comprehensive bans covering the entire school day, surpassing the 7 states with restrictions limited to instructional time

Notable District Policies

- **New York City:** A "bell-to-bell" cellphone ban will be enforced starting September 2025. Schools have discretion in implementation methods of where phones will be kept when away.
- **Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD):** Implemented a full-day ban on cellphones and social media use beginning in the 2024–25 school year, aiming to reduce distractions and improve student engagement.

Jeffco Qualitative Research Project Timeline

- **October 2024:** Hire consultant to support the work
- **November 2024:** Identity Focus schools (Tier 1 and Tier 2)
- **January 2025:** Survey 1 administered to Tier 1 and 2 schools (teachers, students, caregivers)
- **February- March 2025:** Student Focus groups and teacher interviews at Tier 1 schools
- **April- May 2025:** Survey 2 administered to Tier 1 and 2 schools (teachers, students, caregivers)
- **June 2025:** Present findings to the BOE
- **Fall 2025 - Spring 2026:** Policy development and stakeholder engagement
- **Spring 2026:** Board vote on policy
- **July 1, 2026:** All CO school districts are required to adopt and implement a policy regarding student communication devices
- **Fall 2026:** Implementation of policy in accordance with state policy

Purpose of the Cell Phone Study

Understand Current Landscape:

- There are cell phone “policies” in place in many Jeffco secondary schools
- These “policies” vary significantly from school-to-school
- 35 schools shared their cell phone policies for our review

What we studied related to current landscape:

- Intended and unintended outcomes
- Consistency in application
- Perceptions (students, staff, families)
- Discipline data

NEW: Under Colorado House Bill 25-1135 (HB25-1135), enacted in May 2025, school districts are required to adopt and implement a policy regarding student communication devices by July 1, 2026. The legislation mandates that each policy must, at a minimum, describe any prohibitions and exceptions concerning student possession and use of communication devices during the school day. However, the bill does not prescribe specific rules or restrictions that districts must adopt. Colorado General Assembly

Key Project Areas

- **Identified 11 Pilot schools for deeper investigation of their individual school policies: 6 Tier 1 and 5 Tier 2**

- **Tier 1 Schools:**

- Completed January and May survey
- 6 school leaders interviewed 2X throughout study
- 17 Interviews with teachers
- 6 student Focus Groups

- **Tier 2:** Completed January and May survey

- **Cell phone discipline data**

- Added a place to track cell phone infractions and in the discipline within student information system (Infinite Campus)
- A code was available and communicated to schools on 12/3/24

Tier 1 Schools

Arvada West HS
Bear Creek HS
Oberon MS
Three Creeks K-8
Wayne Carle MS
Wheat Ridge HS

Tier 2 Schools

Dunstan MS
Evergreen MS
Falcon Bluffs MS
Pomona Jr/Sr
Standley Lake HS

Key Findings from Qualitative Research

Overall Project Themes

- Teachers strongly support **clear, enforceable** cell phone policies.
- Both teachers and students emphasize the need for **consistent enforcement** across classrooms and staff.
- **Sustained communication** and alignment throughout the school year is critical for successful understanding of policies.
- **Parents want more information** about the purpose and expectations of current policies.
- Students want **guidance**—not just rules—on how to use phones productively for learning.

Survey 1: Administration

January 2025: 5,336 student responses, 1,838 parent responses, and 517 staff responses

Key Research Questions:*

- Do students, parents, and staff understand the school's cell phone policy?
- Do stakeholders believe the policy is meeting its goals?
- How often are cell phone rules enforced in classrooms?
- Do phones impact learning, participation, and social interaction?
- How much effort does it take staff to manage phones during class?
- Do parents believe the policy improves student well-being?
- Do students, parents, and staff believe students know how to use phones to support learning?

*All questions are posted in Board materials

Survey 1 Themes: Parents

- **Opportunity for Stronger Communication:** 56% of parents report understanding school cell phone policies well
- **Value, Reinforce, and Parent Priorities Emerged:** 75% of parents believe their children know how to use phones for academic success
- **Reinforcing Shared Goals:** 49% feel policies are improving learning (reframed in survey 2 to ask about well-being)
- **Parent Priorities that emerged:**
 - Minimize distractions and social media harm.
 - Maintain emergency contact access in a thoughtful way.
 - Foster an emotionally safe, learning-centered environment.

I want my child focused at school, but I also want to know they're okay. Policies should make space for both.

— Parent response

Survey 1 Themes: Students

- **Confidence in Digital Skills:** 88% of students say they know how to use phones to support their learning
- **Mixed Perceptions of Policy Impact:** 56% find current rules effective
- **Opportunity to align on enforcement:** 66% say policies are consistently enforced
- **Focus on learning:** 50% agree that putting phones away improves focus and connection

Phones help with classwork sometimes, but not when people are on them all the time. It depends how we use them.

— Student response

Survey 1 Themes: Staff

- **Clarity on Roles:** 87% of staff understand the policies well, and 84% know their role
- **Unified Belief in Impact:** Nearly all staff (96–97%) agree students are more focused, participatory, and socially engaged when phones are put away
- **Consistent Enforcement aligns with student perspective:** 45% seeing consistent enforcement
- **Effort to enforce policies:** 26% of staff putting in a lot or extreme effort to manage cell phone use at the beginning of the 2024 school year

We need clear expectations and backup. It shouldn't fall on one teacher to carry this alone.

— Staff response

Survey 1: Stakeholder Alignment/Misalignment

- **Parents are divided on policies overall:** Some believe cell phones need to be restricted, while others perceive them as crucial for safety
- **Parent and students differ from teachers on how cell phones support academic success:** Parents and students believe students know how to use phones for academic success; teachers less so
- **Teachers and students are aligned on varied enforcement:** Both groups agree, enforcement is inconsistent

Survey 2 Administration

May 2025: 2,749 student responses, 1,818 parent responses, and 408 staff responses

Key Research Questions

- What is the distinction for staff between personal vs. school-wide consistency in enforcement?
- How have staff perceived change in enforcement effort over the year?
- How important is administrative support to enforcement to staff?
- Do parents know where to find the school's cell phone policy?
- Do students feel safer with their phones?
- Does the policy support student well-being and safety?
- Added specific questions about earbud use and policies for all stakeholders.

Survey 2 Themes: Parents

- **Limited Awareness of Policy Location:** Only 23% of parents say they know exactly where to find their school's cell phone policy.
- **Value of a Clear Policy:** 65% say having a clear phone policy is "very important," showing support for structure.
- **Mixed Beliefs About Impact:** 41% believe the policy has a positive effect on student well-being
- **Safety Still a Priority:** 58% feel their child is safer with a phone, indicating continued interest in emergency accessibility and reassurance.

We need to reach our kids if something happens — but if phones are hurting learning, I support limits. Just don't cut us out completely.

— Parent response

Survey 2 Themes: Students

- **Confidence:** 50% say rules are working — down from 56% in January.
- **Perception of Policy Impact:** Fewer students agree that phones away improves learning:
 - Focus: 45% (↓ from 52%)
 - Participation: 38% (↓ from 47%)
 - Peer interaction: 47% (unchanged)
- **Safety:** 88% of students agree or strongly agree that they feel safer when they have their cell phone with them.
- **Earbuds:** 75% say their school has a policy; 68% believe rules for earbuds should be less strict than those for phones.

Phones should be used to help with class, not for texting or TikTok. If we had clearer rules, it'd be easier to know what's okay.

— Student response

Survey 2 Themes: Staff

- **Strong Individual Consistency, Schoolwide Gaps:** 75% say policies are consistently enforced in their own classroom, but only 38% say that's true schoolwide.
- **Effort Remains High:** 27% report a lot or extreme effort managing phones (similar to January survey: 26%)
- **Administrative Support is Essential:** 95% say consistent leadership support is “extremely important” for enforcement success.
- **Earbuds:** 57% call earbuds a moderate or significant distraction; 80% want cell phone rules to apply to earbuds.

Phones, earbuds, smartwatches... should not be allowed in classrooms. If parents need to reach students, they can call the office.

— Staff response

Survey 2: Stakeholder Alignment/Misalignment

- **Teachers and students continue to be aligned on varied enforcement:** Both groups agree, enforcement is inconsistent
- **Students and Teachers see earbuds as a growing issue:** Students and teachers agree that policies should include guidance on wearables
- **Parents and Students agree on safety:** Both students and parents express that they feel students are safer/they are safer when they have their cell phones

Teacher Interview Themes

Educators Want Clarity, Consistency, and Collaboration

- Teachers support strong, enforceable policies and see value in a district-wide approach
- Teacher report having to choose between using their time for instruction versus managing cell phones
- Many describe inconsistent enforcement—even within buildings—as a barrier to effective implementation
- Parent partnership is seen as critical: teachers say success improves when families understand the “why” behind policies
- Educators highlight developmental needs: middle school students need clear boundaries; high schoolers need support building independence
- Teachers are increasingly focused on earbuds and wearables, which are harder to monitor than phones alone

Student Focus Group Themes

Students Seek Clarity, Fairness, and Voice

- Students consistently noted frustration with inconsistent enforcement from class to class
- Many shared that putting phones away does help with focus and peer interaction, but say this works best when rules are clear and evenly applied
- Students want policies that make room for trust and accountability, rather than only punishment
- They value guidance on using technology productively – not just banning it – and want their voices reflected in policy decisions
- Earbuds and smartwatches present mixed opinions—some students find them helpful, while others acknowledge misuse

Cell Phone Infractions - Infinite Campus

- Code added to Infinite Campus for school-based staff
- Code became active on December 3, 2024.
- Information was communicated to schools through District memos (included in Leadership Memos) and the Friday update from the Community Superintendents to principals.
- In Tier 1 schools, we reviewed data with school leaders.
- Interviews showed that there was variability in who was tasked with entering the code (teachers, counselors, administration).

Cell Phone Infractions — Schoolwide Patterns

- Total classroom-level incidents across all schools: 5,678
- Total incidents in the 11 pilot schools: 895
- Total number of Jeffco schools: 145
 - 66 schools (46%) recorded at least one classroom-level incident using the system
- 29 schools across the district logged at least one consequence in the classroom-level tracker.
- Pilot Schools
 - 9 of 11 pilot schools recorded one or more incidents; 9 pilot schools logged infractions in the system (ranging from 2 to 325 incidents).
 - 5 of those 9 schools also logged consequences which ranged from warnings to confiscation to in-and-out of school suspensions

Bear Creek High School Case Study

Guardrails and Policy Timeline

HB25-1135: Policy for Student Communication Devices

HB25-1135 provides districts with flexibility in crafting their policies, allowing them to consider factors such as **age-appropriate guidelines, emergency situations, instructional uses, and accommodations for students with disabilities or medical conditions**. The law emphasizes local control, enabling each district to develop a policy that best fits its community's needs while ensuring that certain protections and considerations are in place.

The law requires districts to have a policy in place by July 1, 2026.

Guardrails to Consider in Policy

Important considerations that emerged during our study:

- Emphasis on school-based context and autonomy with foundational/baseline district standards
- Exemptions for medical needs/special needs
- Student access to communicate with employers/doctors/law enforcement
- Differentiation for elementary, middle, and high school-age students related to use restrictions
- Balance: Digital literacy with cell phone use restrictions; time to monitor cell phone use v. time to focus on instruction; student accountability v. student engagement
- Alignment among district teams and initiatives on the approach to cell phone/digital literacy guidance

Engagement Plan for District Policy

1. **Fall/Winter 2025-2026:** Plan opportunities for stakeholders to help draft policy/regulation (including DAC and TDPAC)
2. **Spring 2026:** Revise draft policy/regulation based on feedback
3. **Spring 2026:** Present proposed district policy/regulation to the board for adoption
4. **Summer 2026:** Develop implementation guides and sample parent communications to support schools
5. **Fall 2026:** Implement district-wide policy
6. **2026-2027 School year:** Collect data on implementation and revise if necessary

Developed with guidance from [Thought Exchange Report, Education Leaders Survey Report on Cell Phone Policies](#)

Questions and Discussion