



Phone Homes Parent FAQs (Fall 2026)

INTRODUCTION:

All OPRF teachers are required to use the [phone home](#) in their classrooms (with the exception of certain P.E. spaces and other designated areas in the building).

Below are a series of Parents FAQs, grouped into three categories: 1) Rationale; 2) Institutional Support; and 3) Common Parent Concerns.

If you have questions or concerns about the information below, don't hesitate to reach out to the OPRF cell phone committee (cellphonecommittee@oprfrhs.org). If you'd like to skip to specific sections or questions, use these bookmarks:

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I. RATIONALE

A. Why are teachers doing this?

Answer: The decision to keep classrooms phone-free reflects a [nearly unanimous view](#) among the 200 faculty members who responded to a Spring 2022 survey (of the 200 respondents, 96.5% expressed strong agreement with phone-free classrooms; even if everyone who *didn't* respond felt otherwise, we would still have a strong consensus). Moreover, this approach aligns with [current research](#) around best practices with respect to the effects of cell phones on teenagers' academic achievement, social and emotional well-being, and mental health. In light of the [Surgeon General's recent push for restraints on how adolescents use social media](#), as well as [UNESCO's call for a global ban](#) and all sorts of [national media attention on the harmful effects of phones in schools](#), we believe we are taking important steps to ensure that our students' daily experiences at the high school are not consumed by their phones (their gateway to social media) and that instructional time is treated with the respect and focus it deserves to give kids their best chance at success.

B. Why does OPRF need a school wide phone-management system?

Answer: The school-wide approach provides much-needed consistency and fairness in the eyes of students, who are keenly attuned to (and often frustrated by) inconsistent practices among teachers when it comes to this particular issue. This way, they are not exposed to a wide range of views, options, procedures and consequences. Consistency around behavioral routines also benefits teachers, who can now point to the schoolwide practice when trying to enforce a classroom norm that, historically, has been difficult to enforce for many.

C. Shouldn't OPRF teachers teach students how to use their phones responsibly instead of putting them in phone homes?

Answer: We believe we *are* teaching them to use their phones responsibly; the responsible thing to do is to not use them at all during instructional time. But because the draw of the phone is so powerful for so many students, it is simply unreasonable and unfair to expect them to make this choice on their own, with their phones in their pockets or easily accessible; it flies in the face of everything we know about the teenage brain. The primary distractions of the phone for our students – social media, text, chat and video games – are specifically designed to exploit the under-developed frontal lobe of the adolescent brain. Without physical separation from the device, those distractions are simply too tempting for too many students.

D. How did it go in the first year with phone homes?

Answer: By any measure, the first year with the phone homes was a [remarkable success](#). More than 94% of teachers reported improvements in instructional quality, with more than 72% reporting gains in instructional time. While it may not have been a smooth transition for every teacher in the building, the vast majority of teachers report improved instructional quality (and more of it), kids who are more more engaged, and a tremendous sense of relief at no longer having to play the whack-a-mole game with students and their phones. Year two was no different, and we're exceedingly optimistic about what this looks like when all students in the building have only experienced phone-free classrooms (the class of 2026 will be the first class to do so). Many teachers across divisions believe the phone home policy has been the most successful school initiative they've ever experienced at OPRF or anywhere else. Schools across the western suburbs and beyond are looking to us as leaders in this area, with the school culture around phones having become one of the touchstone educational, and indeed societal, issues of our time.

II. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

A. How is the District supporting this initiative?

- The District has funded the purchase and installation of the phone homes – enough for all instructional spaces.
- Both Superintendent Greg Johnson and Principal Lynda Parker are pledging their full, continued support throughout the year in sustaining this school-wide expectation.

B. Are the Student Handbook and Behavior Education Plan aligned with this policy?

Answer: Yes. The BEP provides as follow:

Use of Unauthorized Items

- The presence of a cell phone on a student's person, in their backpack or otherwise in their physical possession is expressly prohibited during instructional time.
- The use of 'Smart Watches', AirPods or other listening devices, or any other non-educationally required device, electronic or otherwise, that detracts from and/or disrupts the learning environment for any student(s) during instructional time is expressly prohibited and may be subject to confiscation at the teacher's discretion (e.g., laser pointer, gaming device).

While the BEP does not include the specific consequence framework, the student handbook, in a section immediately preceding the BEP, lays out that framework in full. It is building policy.

III. COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

A. When and how will this expectation be communicated to current and incoming students and families?

Answer: Returning students already know about the phone home, having been in the building last year. At the start of the 2022-23 school year, the committee provided teachers with a [variety of resources and talking points](#) to discuss with interested students; those resources may prove valuable for incoming freshmen as well.

Additionally, Principal Parker will share details about the phone homes in the start-of-year announcements, which includes a variety of important updates and information for families.

B. How does the phone home system work?

Answer: Students will be assigned a numbered slot in all of their classes. They will drop off their phones in their assigned slot when they walk into class, whether on time or tardy, and pick them up on the way out of class.

C. Will students have to remember their numbered slot in each class?

Answer: Most teachers post phone-home rosters for kids to quickly reference when walking in. Within the first few weeks, most students remember their assigned spots, and if they're having trouble with remembering, they can always ask.

D. What if someone grabs my student's phone by mistake?

Answer: Hopefully, the student will notice and return the phone quickly. If not, teachers can reach out to one of the student's teachers in a later period and ask them to have the student return the device. Parents are **strongly encouraged** to have students label their phones with their names. But parents who have serious concerns about potential accidents, damage, theft or anything else can always choose not to send their students to school with a phone. If that is not a viable option (for whatever reason), the expectation is that if they do bring the phone to school, it goes in the phone home. We fully recognize the concern about the safety of the device itself, but we have no reason to believe there will be widespread issues in this regard.

E. Can my student keep the phone in their pocket or backpack and still be in compliance with this rule?

Answer: No. The expectation in all classrooms for all students is to separate themselves from the phone; that's where the research suggests the greatest benefits will materialize. If it is a building wide expectation, we cannot allow students to choose their own method of compliance. The idea is to have consistency across the building. That's what makes this work.

In most classrooms, students have long been asked at the start of class to put their phones away. Most do so consistently and keep them in their pockets or under their leg or somewhere else out-of-sight but immediately accessible. And then, predictably, they check the phone throughout class ([expecting dozens of notifications](#)). Or they ask to use the bathroom, which has become just another place to hang out on the phone.

Needless to say, this is not the case for all students; many students are capable of controlling themselves, or they are able to achieve at high levels despite the distraction of the phone. Rules, however, are in place for *all* to follow – not only those who might be more likely to violate them, both in and out of school. Moreover, it might be difficult for parents to appreciate just how frequently teachers have had to ask students – and that includes students across all levels and of all demographics – to put their phones away over the years, or how much resistance teachers encounter in those moments, or how distracting it is for neighboring students when one student is on their phone. Every time a student reaches for their phone, they lose focus, however briefly. Recovering that focus takes time, and it is time neither teachers nor students can afford to lose.

Some might be inclined to think, “If the teacher or class was more engaging, the phone wouldn’t be a problem.” But who can possibly be expected to compete on a daily basis with the allure of a device that gives students access to their entire social lives, endless entertainment, news, video games, self-esteem barometer, and more? Teachers are working hard to deliver meaningful content and improve academic skills, and it is challenging work. They should not have to ‘earn’ the privilege of a phone-free classroom based on the level of engagement they can facilitate; rather, a phone-free classroom should be the expectation so as to facilitate engagement, and that’s exactly what the phone home provides.

F. How will I be able to reach my student during the day?

Answer: In the same ways you always have, just not during class. Students will still have plenty of access to their phones – during passing periods, lunch, and other non-instructional times of day. It is during these times that students and parents can communicate with the ease and speed of text messaging. Too often in the past, students have been using their phones in class and explaining to teachers that “I just need to tell my parents something” (often related to timing and other family logistics). These sorts of exchanges do not warrant making exceptions to the expectation of phone-free classrooms; they can wait until passing periods or other non-instructional gaps in the day. While we respect parents’ and students’ need to communicate with each other throughout the school day, we are prioritizing students’ capacity to focus in the classroom over instant access through text messaging.

For non-emergency situations, all classrooms have phones in them if a parent needs to reach a student. In all likelihood, the fastest way to get a hold of students in a non-emergency situation is to email them, given how much time they already spend on their computers. Another option is to call the attendance office. While these options are surely slower than a text message, we know that the benefits stemming from phone-free classrooms and students’ physical detachment from their devices far outweigh the slight delay around non-urgent communications.

G. How can I contact my student in an emergency or for a truly time-sensitive matter if they’re in class and don’t have their phone on them?

Answer: Fortunately, genuine emergencies are rare occurrences. During a school-related emergency, however, school safety experts across the country assert that students should not be using their phones to communicate, for a number of reasons:

- Using phones can distract students from the actions they need to be taking in the moment, such as running, hiding and listening to directions from school personnel and first responders.
- Intermediary contact to parents by students leads to an increase of mis-information and major confusion around the school campus, thus affecting response and rescue times.
- The sound of the phone, whether ringing or on vibrate, could alert an intruder to a hiding place.
- An intruder could be monitoring the event themselves on social media and find more victims or elude capture that way.
- Victims and worried family members trying to get through can jam communications, interfering with first responders.

If a crisis is taking place, parents and guardians will be informed through ‘Skylert’, an emergency messaging system. Students being on their phones during a lockdown puts their own safety and that of others at greater risk. Horrifying as it is to imagine, if we were in an actual lockdown scenario (not a drill), students would need to **immediately** retreat to a hidden area of the room and stay silent, as the teacher turns off the lights and locks the door. Any attempt to retrieve a phone slows that process down, and any use of the phone has the potential to alert an intruder with light, sound, or otherwise. Though it may seem counterintuitive, the phone home approach is actually *safer* than the emergency procedures we had in place for years.

H. Are teachers expected to use the phone homes during advisory and study hall?

Answer: Not at this time, but many teachers will choose to do so, and students will be expected to comply.

I. Doesn’t this process take up class time on both ends?

Answer: Yes, but the instructional time *gained* in between the start and end of class more than compensates for the time spent collecting and retrieving phones. The data from the first year using phone homes confirms that trade-off.

J. Can teachers allow students to use the phone for legitimate instructional purposes?

Answer: Yes. Teachers can tell the student(s) to retrieve the phone if a genuine need arises. We recognize the numerous educational uses the phone can, and often does, support for many teachers, and it is for those reasons that we decided not to push to eradicate phones from the classroom altogether. Rather, we’re trying to make it easier

for all teachers to manage this issue by having a school wide expectation, and to limit phone usage to those instances when it has real instructional value that the Chromebook cannot replicate. Moreover, if a student has an urgent personal situation that requires them to make a personal call, teachers know how and when to be reasonable and can easily allow that student to step out for a moment.

K. What if my student doesn't have a charged Chrome book?

Answer: The District has provided 1:1 Chrome book technology for students at a significant cost. It is students' responsibility to come to class prepared, and that includes coming prepared to use the technology the District has provided. Teachers will not be asked or expected to make exceptions to this school wide expectation for students who do not come to class with charged Chrome books (or with chargers).

L. Are there consequences for non-compliant students?

Answer: In the first instance of non-compliance, the teacher will address the situation "in the classroom" by talking to the student when time permits. The teacher may also choose to confiscate the device.

For the second infraction, the teacher will contact parents or guardians to let them know the student did not comply with the classroom expectation for a second time, and again may choose to confiscate the device.

In response to a third instance of non-compliance, the teacher will issue a disciplinary referral that will result in the loss of phone privileges for two school days (deans will arrange to have students bring their phones to their office in the morning and retrieve them in the afternoon).

If the student continues the behavior, teachers will issue another referral. The consequences will escalate with the deans.

M. Won't students try to find ways around this expectation?

Answer: Of course they will. They're teenagers; they often don't like rules, and they push boundaries – particularly when it comes to a device that is, for many, an addiction or close to it. No news there. And when it comes to phones, many parents are likely all too familiar with how far their teens will go to push back. Students will say they don't have a phone, or they'll claim it's in their backpack when it's in their pocket, or they'll place a 'dummy' phone in the phone home to hold onto their 'real'

phone, despite not being allowed to use it anyway. And no doubt some students will get away with it, but what is it that they've proven? That they can 'beat the system,' or that they cannot even separate themselves from their phones – which they can't use anyway – while they're supposed to be learning? We hope parents will support this endeavor by reminding students that despite how it might appear, this is actually for them; any efforts they undertake to skirt the rule are only self-defeating.

N. Can parents or guardians opt students out of this classroom expectation?

Answer: No, there is no opt-out provision for this building-wide expectation.

We want all families to understand the rationale behind the rule and we are asking for parents' support. While it might strike some as sufficient for students to simply leave their phones in their pockets or keep them in backpacks under their desks, the research indicates that it is physical separation from (i.e. without direct access to) the phone that yields the greatest academic, social and emotional benefits.

O. What happens if my student's phone breaks or gets stolen?

Answer: We know from data provided by our deans that the number of phones that either broke or went missing last year is miniscule (an incidence rate no greater than in previous years without phone homes). While accidents or misconduct can happen, we do not believe the worst-case scenario – particularly given its low probability based on historical data – should drive decision-making on this issue. That being said, in the event a student's phone breaks or goes missing as a result of using the phone home, the District will remain committed to its current practice of investigating the situation and determining the appropriate solution.

P. What if my student needs to keep the phone on them or handy for medical reasons?

Answer: This sort of situation would be covered by a student's 504 plan or IEP, which teachers are legally obligated to follow. These students cannot be required to place their phones in the phone homes, and we will of course follow any such accommodation.

Q. What about a fire drill, fire alarm or other evacuation situation?

Answer: The phone home protocol in the student handbook makes clear that students will not be allowed to get their phones before leaving the room in these situations. We do these drills to be prepared for real emergencies, and in a real emergency there is no time for students to be scrambling for their phones, let alone

to be on them the whole time and not listening to instructions. If we're taking safety and security seriously, we should be simulating the real thing.

R. Does this expectation include/address AirPods and Smart Watches?

Answer: While the phone home policy does not address these other devices, the BEP does include those items as unauthorized technology in the classroom. Teachers are authorized to intervene, confiscate, or contact parents or deans as needed with respect to these items.