

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Arlington School Board  
FROM: School Health Advisory Board  
DATE: December 3, 2024  
SUBJECT: Final Recommendation

### RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

1. **Background:** The School Health Advisory Board (SHAB) assists with the development of health policy in the school division and the evaluation of the status of school health, health education, the school environment, and health services.
2. **Recommendation:** Approval of Policy J-30–Student Use of Personal Electronic Devices (**see Appendix A**).
3. **Rationale for consideration:**
  - a. Mounting data indicates harm to children of having cell phones:
    - i. Student Health
      1. Mental health issues.<sup>1</sup>
      2. Childhood myopia incidence (increase with excessive screen time).<sup>23</sup>
      3. Reduced physical activity– potentially impacting student obesity levels, participation in sports, and play/socialization during the lunch hour.
    - ii. School Environment/Climate
      1. Increased likelihood of online bullying<sup>4</sup> (various state school districts have filed [lawsuit](#) against the social media companies).
      2. Reduced in-person interaction between students to build relationships and interpersonal skills
    - iii. Academic
      1. Multitasking leading to reduced comprehension and distraction during class time<sup>5</sup>.
    - iv. School Security
      1. Planning meet ups for drug sales and fights
      2. Concerns during lockdowns <sup>6</sup>(Contribute to fear and rumors, distraction, create a less safe emergency response).
  - b. A Fall, 2024 survey APS did of staff, students and families at both ‘pouch’ (use of locking storage pouches for personal devices) vs ‘non-pouch’ (personal devices ‘silent and away’ during class) schools. There were clear differences between staff at pouch and non-pouch schools on various aspects of perceived student distraction, learning engagement, classroom management, as well as degree of perceived socialization among students, with the pouch schools scoring more favorably on all of these metrics. (**see Appendix B**).
  - c. Many schools nationwide have successfully implemented this policy and seen positive effects (**see Appendix C**).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/23/health/mental-health-crisis-teens.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2784348>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9512310/#:~:text=The%20behavioral%20changes%20during%20the,Ma%20D%20et%20al>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=hp\\_lead\\_pos7](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=hp_lead_pos7)

<sup>5</sup> <https://northernvirginiamag.com/family/education/2022/10/24/fcps-cell-phone-policy/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://schoolsecurity.org/trends/cell-phones-and-text-messaging-in-schools/>

4. **Proposed methods:** Approval of Policy J-30–Student Use of Personal Electronic Devices by the School Board.
5. **Budgetary Implications:** The cost of a locking storage pouch like Yondr. Storage pouches are recommended for MS and HS (and ES as needed). (\*Of note, we are aware of grants available to cover the cost of the storage pouches. We strongly recommend APS to seek out such grants.) A system-wide policy with pouch use at its center will establish student and community expectations, thus reducing staff time needed to apply unique and individual strategies as well as reduce time spent redirecting students from their devices for teaching and learning.
6. **Strategic Plan Alignment:**
  - a. Supports core values of **Integrity and Inclusivity** (fostering direct person to person visual and verbal communication and participation that is available to persons of all means and backgrounds, and promoting a welcoming school environment) and Stewardship (by maximizing the unique benefits of in-person education and preparing students to be engaged citizens.)
  - b. Meets **Student Well-Being** goal – “Create an environment that fosters the growth of the whole child. APS will nurture all students’ intellectual, physical, mental, and social-emotional growth in healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments”. The “Away for the Day” policy gives the students the opportunity for the social-emotional growth that they are lacking due to the personal devices they currently use at school. It will help to establish a culture of physical, social, emotional, and mental health wellness.

**Summary:** The committee respectfully requests that the School Board pass the J-30 policy–Student Use of Personal Electronic Devices.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

### **Appendix A: J-30 Policy–Student Use of Personal Electronic Devices**

This policy can be found here:

[https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/arlington/Board.nsf/files/D9QGXXQ45F7ED/\\$file/J-30%20Student%20Use%20of%20Cell%20Phones%20and%20Personal%20Electronic%20Communication%20Devices.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/arlington/Board.nsf/files/D9QGXXQ45F7ED/$file/J-30%20Student%20Use%20of%20Cell%20Phones%20and%20Personal%20Electronic%20Communication%20Devices.pdf)

### **Appendix B: APS Oct/Nov 2024 APS Pouch vs. Non-pouch School Survey Results**

Survey questions and results follow. There were clear differences between staff at pouch and non-pouch schools on various aspects of perceived student distraction, learning engagement, classroom management, as well as degree of perceived socialization among students, **with the pouch schools scoring more favorably on all of these metrics.**

#### **To briefly summarize:**

→Students don't want a cell phone policy or pouches—with little difference between each (**9% vs 10%**).

This is not surprising.

→Staff think the cell phone policy is **somewhat effective** and think the pouches are **very effective**--only **17%** think phones are a distraction at pouch schools vs. **39%** at non-pouch schools.

→Students are blind to how phones keep them from socializing face to face but other students notice this a little and the staff notices it a lot. Staff reports this being far less of an issue at pouch schools (**55% vs 18%**).

→1 in 4 teachers (**26%**) at non-pouch schools think phones are difficult to manage during class, vs. 1 in 10 (**11%**) at a pouch school.

## Survey Results:

Feedback on the current implementation of cell phone rules in schools was collected from students, staff and families. The survey questions focused on the following areas: the use of cell phones during school hours, impact on instruction and classroom engagement, the impact on social interactions, impact on classroom management, and the communication of school policies/rules. The specific questions included in each type of survey are provided below.

Survey Questions	Students	Staff	Families
<b>Student cell phone status (has a phone, keeps it away all day, uses it between periods/lunch, uses a pouch)</b>	X		X
<b>At this time, I believe that cell phones are causing a distraction during (my) classroom lessons and instruction.</b>	X	X	X
<b>At this time, I believe the pouch pilot program is helpful in managing student cell phone use in my classes.</b>		X	
<b>Student: At this time, I believe that cell phones are interfering with the connections I make and how much time I spend talking with other students at my school</b> <b>Family: At this time, I believe that my student's cell phone interferes with the connections they make and how much time my student spends talking with other students at school.</b>	X		X
<b>Student: At this time, I believe that cell phones are interfering with the connections other students make and how much time other students spend talking with each other at my school</b> <b>Staff: At this time, I believe that cell phones are interfering with the connections students make and how much time students spend talking with each other at my school</b>	X	X	
<b>Student: At this time, I feel it is difficult for my teacher to manage student cell phone use during class.</b> <b>Staff: At this time, it is difficult for me to manage student cell phone use during class.</b>	X	X	
Schools using the pouch pilot: <b>At this time, I believe the pouch pilot program is helpful in keeping students engaged in learning.</b> Schools not using the pouch pilot: <b>At this time, I believe the cell phone rules/policy is helpful in keeping students engaged in learning</b>	X	X	X
<b>The updates to the cell phone policy, including consequences, at your student's school have been clearly communicated to me and my student/s</b>		X	

The table below outlines the timeline for the survey analysis following the survey administration window. Data will be disaggregated (when group sizes meet a minimum of 10) to identify trends across stakeholder groups and any differences between groups.

Survey timeline		
<b>Survey Administration</b>	10/18-11/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was a two-week survey window for each stakeholder group.</li> </ul>
<b>Initial survey Analysis (provided below)</b>	11/4-11/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A descriptive analysis for survey responses focused on the percentages of response categories across question topics.</li> <li>Data was disaggregated by those respondents associated with pouch and non-pouch schools.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional analysis</b>	11/13-12/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data will be disaggregated by level (middle school and high school).</li> <li>Staff survey data will be disaggregated by position if the sample size is adequate.</li> <li>Mean scores and standard deviations will be calculated.</li> <li>Qualitative data for open-ended questions in the staff and family survey will be analyzed.</li> </ul>
<b>Follow-up data collection</b>	February 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cell-Phone survey questions for each stakeholder group will be asked again in the Your Voice Matters Survey, to track change over time.</li> </ul>

Table 1: Response rate by stakeholder and pouch status

Stakeholder	Pouch school	Non-pouch school
Student (n=3245)	31%	69%
Staff (n=837)	37%	63%
Family (n=919)	47%	53%

Table 2: Student cell phone status as reported by student and families, by pouch and non-pouch school

	Pouch school		Non-pouch school	
	Student (n=982)	Family (n=429)	Student (n=2244)	Family (n=486)
Student does not bring cell phone to school.	13%	9%	3%	10%
Student does not have a cell phone.	12%	5%	8%	2%
Student keeps their cell phone in a school-issued pouch for the school day.	51%	63%	4%	2%
Student keeps cell phone off/silent and away for the entire school day (not in a pouch).	17%	8%	26%	23%
Student keeps cell phone off/silent during class time, but uses it how they want between classes/during breaks.	5%	8%	48%	50%
Student keeps cell phone off/silent for some classes but not all classes.	1%	1%	6%	6%
Student uses cell phone at school when they feel they want/need.	2%	1%	4%	3%
I don't know (Family only)	--	5%	--	3%

Table 3: Agreement levels with the following statements from stakeholders, by pouch and non-pouch school

Rating	Pouch school			Non-pouch school		
	Student (n=991)	Staff (n=306)	Family (n=428)	Student (n=2247)	Staff (n=521)	Family (n=487)
<b>1</b> Strongly disagree	37%	50%	15%	39%	23%	17%
<b>2</b>	34%	23%	14%	33%	20%	15%
<b>3</b>	20%	10%	15%	19%	19%	13%
<b>4</b>	6%	5%	10%	6%	16%	12%
<b>5</b> Strongly agree	3%	12%	36%	4%	23%	34%
I don't know (Family only)	--	--	9%	--	--	10%
Mean rating						
Median rating						
Standard Deviation						

Figure 1: Percent of respondents who selected a 4/5 level of agreement to the statement “At this time, I believe that cell phones are causing a distraction during my classroom lessons and instruction.”

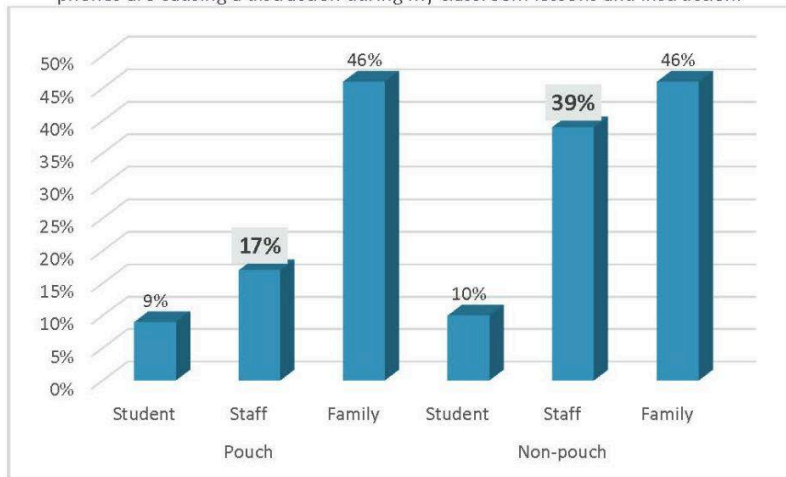




Table 4: Agreement levels with the following statements from **Staff**, by pouch and non-pouch school

	<b>At this time, I believe the pouch pilot program is helpful in managing student cell phone use in my classes.</b>	<b>At this time, I believe the cell phone policy is helpful in managing student cell phone use in my classes.</b>
Rating	<b>Staff (n=307)</b>	<b>Staff (n=526)</b>
<b>1 Strongly disagree</b>	5%	12%
<b>2</b>	8%	12%
<b>3</b>	16%	17%
<b>4</b>	19%	22%
<b>5 Strongly agree</b>	53%	37%

Figure 2: Percent of respondents who selected a 4/5 level of agreement to the statement “The pouch program/cell phone policy is helpful in managing student cell phone use in class.”

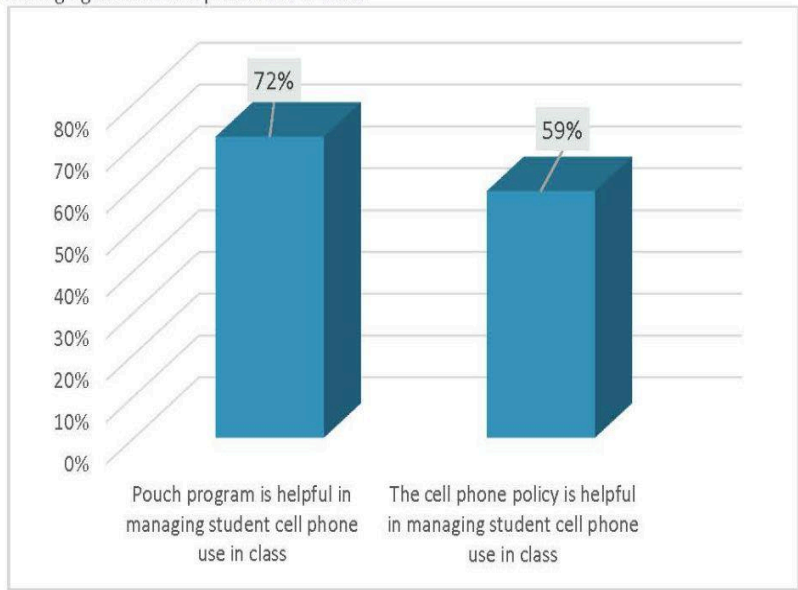


Table 5: Agreement levels with the following statements from stakeholders, by pouch and non-pouch school

	Rating	Pouch school		Non-pouch school	
		Student (n=989)	Family (n=428)	Student (n=2246)	Family (n=488)
<b>STUDENT:</b> At this time, I believe that cell phones are interfering with the connections I make and how much time I spend talking with other students at my school.	<b>1 Strongly disagree</b>	59%	30%	61%	29%
	<b>2</b>	20%	15%	23%	21%
	<b>3</b>	12%	12%	9%	12%
<b>FAMILY:</b> At this time, I believe that my student's cell phone interferes with the connections they make and how much time my student spends talking with other students at school.	<b>4</b>	6%	10%	4%	10%
	<b>5 Strongly agree</b>	3%	23%	3%	19%
	<b>I don't know (Family only)</b>	--	10%	--	9%

Figure 3: Percent of respondents who selected a 4/5 level of agreement to the statement that cell phone use interferes with the connections being made (by themselves or their student) and time spent talking to other students.

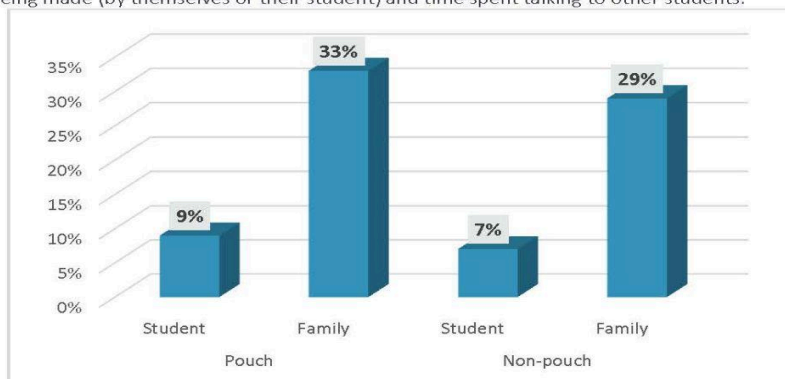


Table 6: Agreement levels with the following statements from stakeholders, by pouch and non-pouch school

	Rating	Pouch school		Non-pouch school	
		Student (n=988)	Staff (n=309)	Student (n=2249)	Staff (n=525)
<b>STUDENT:</b> At this time, I believe that cell phones are interfering with the connections other students make and how much time other students spend talking with each other at my school.	<b>1 Strongly disagree</b>	47%	38%	49%	15%
	<b>2</b>	24%	21%	26%	13%
	<b>3</b>	18%	14%	16%	17%
<b>STAFF:</b> At this time, I believe that cell phones are interfering with the connections students make and how much time students spend talking with each other at my school.	<b>4</b>	6%	10%	6%	17%
	<b>5 Strongly agree</b>	5%	18%	4%	38%

Figure 4: Percent of respondents who selected a 4/5 level of agreement to the statement that cell phone use interferes with the connections being made by students and the time spent talking to each other.

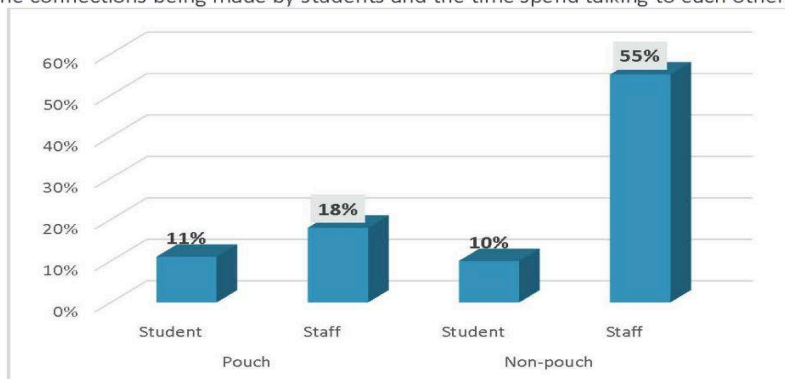


Table 7: Agreement levels with the following statements from stakeholders, by pouch and non-pouch school

	Rating	Pouch school		Non-pouch school	
		Student (n=980)	Staff (n=308)	Student (n=2246)	Staff (n=525)
<b>STUDENT:</b> At this time, I feel it is difficult for my teacher to manage student cell phone use during class.	<b>1</b> Strongly disagree	51%	56%	53%	29%
	<b>2</b>	24%	23%	24%	23%
	<b>3</b>	17%	10%	15%	22%
<b>STAFF:</b> At this time, it is difficult for me to manage student cell phone use during class.	<b>4</b>	5%	5%	5%	13%
	<b>5</b> Strongly agree	4%	6%	4%	13%

Figure 5: Percent of respondents who selected a 4/5 level of agreement to the statement that cell phone use is difficult to manage during class.

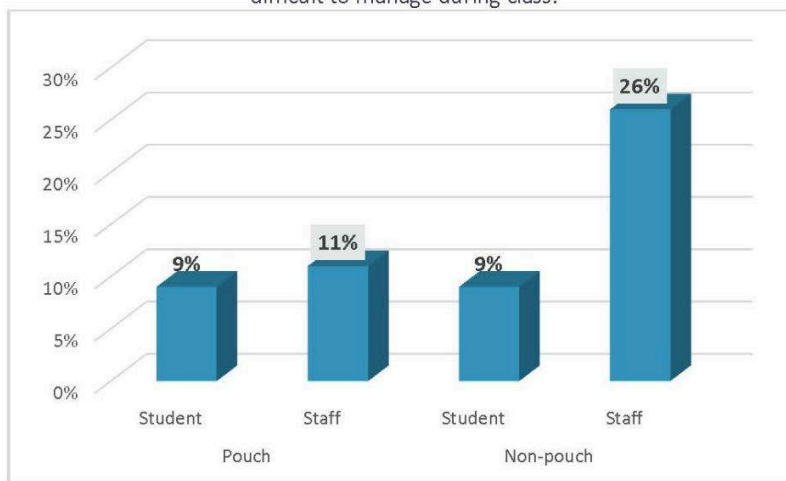




Table 8: Agreement levels with the following statements from stakeholders, by pouch and non-pouch school

Rating	Pouch school			Non-pouch school		
	Student (n=989)	Staff (n=309)	Family (n=431)	Student (n=2231)	Staff (n=525)	Family (n=488)
<b>1</b> Strongly disagree	60%	3%	24%	33%	8%	7%
<b>2</b>	20%	5%	12%	26%	10%	8%
<b>3</b>	13%	16%	12%	22%	19%	19%
<b>4</b>	5%	21%	12%	10%	21%	22%
<b>5</b> Strongly agree	2%	55%	32%	9%	43%	33%
I don't know (Family only)	--	--	9%	--	--	11%

Percent of respondents who selected a 4/5 level of agreement to the statement that pouch program/cell phone policy is helpful in keeping students engaged in learning.

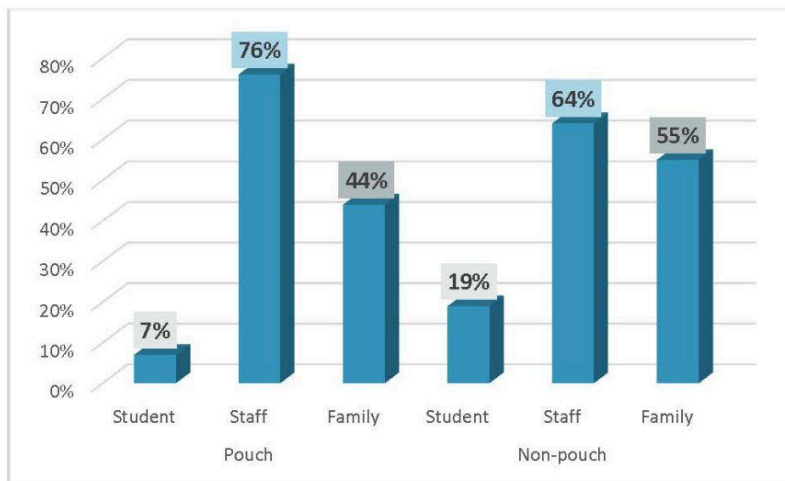


Table 9: Agreement levels with the following statements from Families, by pouch and non-pouch school

Rating	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly agree	I don't know
<b>Pouch (n=429)</b>	9%	12%	15%	20%	39%	4%
<b>Non-pouch (n=487)</b>	9%	14%	21%	19%	26%	10%
<b>Arlington Career Center (n=19)</b>	5%	37%	11%	11%	26%	11%
<b>Arlington Community High (n=5)*</b>	--	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Dorothy Hamm (n=36)</b>	6%	8%	11%	17%	50%	8%
<b>Gunston (n=41)</b>	5%	2%	27%	27%	32%	7%
<b>HB Woodlawn High (n=52)</b>	6%	10%	17%	35%	25%	8%
<b>HB Woodlawn Middle (n=38)</b>	0%	16%	16%	24%	45%	0%
<b>Kenmore (n=23)</b>	13%	9%	17%	13%	30%	17%
<b>Swanson (n=77)</b>	6%	8%	14%	22%	44%	5%
<b>Thomas Jefferson (n=32)</b>	9%	13%	19%	25%	31%	3%
<b>Wakefield (n=282)</b>	11%	12%	15%	19%	38%	5%
<b>Washington-Liberty (n=91)</b>	4%	16%	20%	19%	30%	11%
<b>Williamsburg (n=59)</b>	10%	12%	24%	22%	20%	12%
<b>Yorktown (n=161)</b>	16%	19%	26%	14%	17%	8%

\*Minimum response n not attained and cannot be reported.

## Appendix C: Phone bans make schools safer

Phones are a safety concern. Smart devices are used for meetings for drug activity. Additionally, cell phone and smart device use during a tragedy can detract from school safety and create a less safe environment by distracting students from listening to staff and teachers and creating noise that would be unsafe in a lockdown. Experts quoted in [the Washington Post](#) said, “The general rule is, when you’re in a lockdown, educators and safety officials don’t want kids on the phones because you want their full 100 percent attention on the teacher or other educators.” Per [National School Safety and Security Services](#), “A phone can make unwanted noises, and in a silent lockdown, even a vibration could be too loud. Depending on their age, kids might also be tempted to post about an ongoing incident to social media, which experts say could both inspire other potential gunmen seeking fame or reveal details about their location. Even the ability to call 911 isn’t a good reason, because an entire school full of people calling at once could overload a switchboard.” Also, “[Cell phone use also accelerates the unintentional \(and potentially intentional\) spread of misinformation, rumors, and fear.](#)”

A new podcast explores the emerging research around the idea that phone bans make schools safer: <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/blog/how-phone-bans-improve-school-safety>

## Appendix D: Nationwide Landscape of Away for the Day and Evidence of Benefit

Many public schools have implemented this type of policy and have seen it create a more socially interactive student body. The students were happier and more focused during the day as well. CBS news just recently reported that according to the Department of Education 77% of public schools now have this type of policy.

Additionally, the VDOE issued guidance this fall recommending a [‘bell-to-bell’ away for the day policy](#) in all VA public schools.

There are also multiple studies which show that when cell phones are banned from classrooms standardized test scores went up and the increases were much greater for those previously well-below proficiency. One study published by the London School of Economics looked at the impact of banning cellphones at schools on exam scores. Researchers found that students in schools with phone bans got on average 6% higher test scores and that low-performing students benefited the most with 14% higher scores. They concluded in the study that “**Restricting mobile phone use can be a low-cost policy to reduce educational inequalities.**”

There are many studies showing the increase in myopia among children since the pandemic. There is a consensus among the researchers that, as stated in this [study](#), “Our review found that children used near-viewing devices such as smartphones and tablets more than other electronic devices such as televisions or personal computers. We discovered that strict home quarantine, reduced time spent outdoors, and increased screen time are associated with myopia progression in children during the pandemic. Increased use of mobile phones and tablets was also associated with myopia progression.”

Giving the students a break from screens from their own devices during the day will help with this ongoing eye health problem.

The students spend a large amount of time at school learning by way of school issued devices. During breaks It would be healthier for the students emotionally and physically to not use a personal device. School should be a place where the students learn how to interact with each other face-to-face with eye contact and converse with each other without a device in their hand to distract them. They also will be more inclined to move about during breaks if they are not looking at their device, which is healthier for

their bodies. Additionally, legislators nation-wide have grown concerned about social media use in children<sup>7</sup>.

An Education Next article called Take away their cellphones by Doug Lemov founder of Teach Like a Champion discusses why it is far better to restrict cell phones:

*“I often hear: ‘the role of schools is to teach young people to make better choices. We should talk to them about cell phones, not restrict them.’*

*The argument that ‘schools should teach young people the skill of managing technology’ is patently unrealistic. Schools are not designed to address, much less unravel, psychological dependence on portable supercomputers designed to disrupt and hold our attention. Teachers already have a daunting list of educational priorities. They are not trained counselors, and the school counselors on staff are in woefully short supply.*

*It’s magical thinking to propose that an epidemic that has doubled rates of mental health issues and changed every aspect of social interaction among millions of people is going to go away when a teacher says, ‘Guys, always use good judgment with your phones.’ We’re not really wrestling with the problem if our response assumes that the average teacher, via a few pithy lessons, can battle a device that has addicted a generation into submission.*

*Restriction is a far better strategy. These efforts won’t be simple to execute, but the alternative is simply too damaging to students’ learning and well-being. Keep cellphones turned off and out of sight during the school day—and give students and educators a fighting chance to focus, reconnect, and build school cultures that nurture belonging and academic success.”*

*School systems that have implemented this type of cell phone policy have had very positive results for the students and teachers. Parents have been very supportive and the students adapted to the change quickly. It is a policy that can work when presented for the right reasons.”*

## **Appendix E: Away for the Day: Success Stories From Schools Who Have Implemented It**

As noted above, many school systems have implemented Away for the Day policies with excellent results. Below are specific testimonials from schools who have implemented it.

As of 2022, more than 75% of US K-12 public schools banned non-academic cell phone use (Source: <https://stateline.org/2024/03/13/if-schools-wont-ban-kids-cellphones-some-lawmakers-say-they-will/#:~:text=More%20than%20three%2Dquarters%20of,enforced%20weakly%2C%20if%20at%20all>)

Parents want it: in one survey, more than 80% of parents said they did not want their children to be able to access phones during school (Source: <https://www.awayfortheday.org/research>).

Teachers and administrators like it because it has reduced disciplinary incidents and led to happier, more engaged students and a better learning environment:

- In Pittsburgh, the superintendent said post-ban that “the majority of our teachers would say that it is much better. There are fewer distractions.” (Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/09/school-cellphone-ban-yondr/>)

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.arlnow.com/press-releases/warner-introduces-legislation-to-make-social-media-safer-for-kids/>

- In Philadelphia, 27 public schools ban cell phone usage, with Assistant Superintendent Jonathan Brown saying “It’s completely changed the tone of the hallways.” He also added that there is more student engagement, fewer fights, calmer hallways, even a decrease in parents coming to school threatening teachers. (Source: <https://archive.ph/yYLgN#selection-679.0-679.206> )
- VA Beach schools also banned cell phones with the Chief Schools Officer saying the district has “seen some great strides” in reduced disciplinary incidents. (Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/09/school-cellphone-ban-yondr/>)
- In Colorado, where a district banned phones, the superintendent said he sees more interaction between teachers and students, more focus, and less conflict in hallways. And very few students are second-time offenders. “The majority of our students, when we surveyed them, were thankful for it because it has reduced the stress in their life,” (Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/09/school-cellphone-ban-yondr/>)

Here is what other principals and school administrators are saying (Source: <https://www.awayfortheday.org/voices-of-change>)

- “Things are much better! Parents who attended the orientation before school started applauded when I announced the change. Teachers are raving about the better classroom atmosphere they feel the new policy promotes. Kids are not balking and I truly think they enjoy the forced down-time, but at dismissal, they are like “flies on sugar” to check their phones. I would still say 80%+ of the conflicts we deal with have some social media/cell phone component, but almost always it occurs off campus and outside of the school day.” —Rob Thomas, Principal, Twelve Corners Middle School, Rochester, NY
- “This is our second year, and teachers and parents love it. Students follow the rules and the teachers and parents appreciate the leverage it gives them with the students.” —A. Robert Jessen, PhD, Monte Del Sol Charter School, Sante Fe, NM
- “Students honestly said they were surprised at how much less stress they felt knowing they couldn’t check their phone during class. They hadn’t realized how distracting their phone was until they didn’t have it.” — Cassie Sinichko, Director of Operations, GW Community Schools, Springfield, VA

There are many potential benefits to schools when Away for the Day is implemented, in addition to the numerous benefits to student well-being. Given our current budget and staffing challenges, reduced fighting, bullying and other disciplinary incidents, and more engaged students and an improved learning environment can reduce the need for staffing and improve morale among educators and principals. Away for the Day is a change that can produce major benefits all around for APS.

## **Appendix F: Slides from ACTL Presentation (Spring, 2024)**

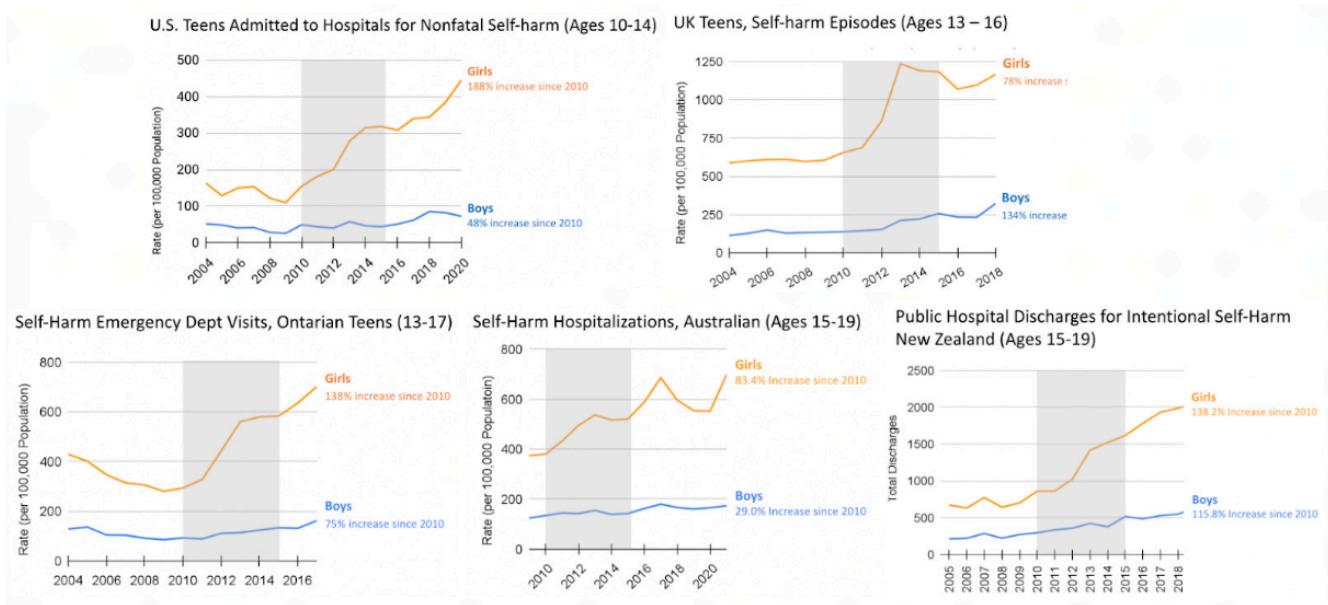
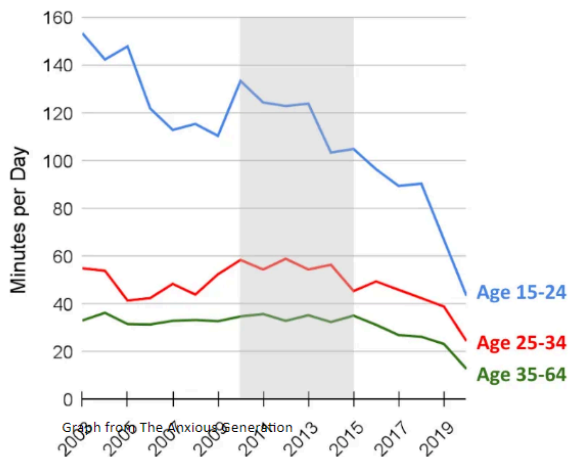


Photo courtesy After Babel

### Slide 1:

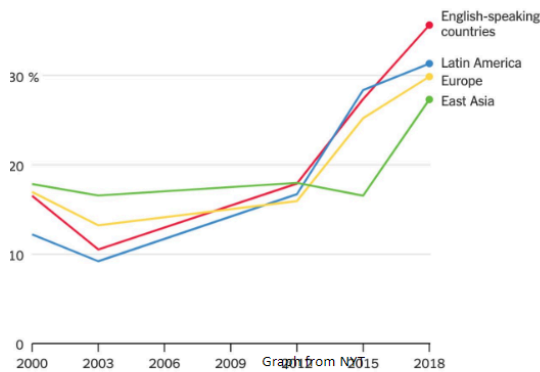
Implementing J-30 impacts not only the school environment, but academics, mental health and student health, myopia, brain health, reduced physical activity, loneliness, bullying, safety and more. For example, there has been a spike in anxiety, depression, and self-harm among adolescent girls that began in the early 2010s. The grey area on this graph is when adolescence changed to a phone-based form; adolescents went from nearly all owning flip phones (or other basic phones) to nearly all owning smartphones with high-speed data plans and continuous (and nearly unlimited) access to the internet and social media. 2012 was the first year that a [majority of Americans owned a smartphone](#); by 2015, [two-thirds of teens](#) did too. This was also the period when social media use moved from [optional to ubiquitous](#) among adolescents. As an article in the [New York Times](#) states, “By 2012, as the world now knows, the major platforms had created an outrage machine that made life online far uglier, faster, more polarized and more likely to incite performative shaming. In addition, as Instagram grew in popularity over the next decade, it had particularly [strong effects on girls](#) and young women, inviting them to “compare and despair” as they scrolled through posts from friends and strangers showing faces, bodies and lives that had been edited and re-edited until many were closer to perfection than to reality.” In my mind, Away for the Day is also Away from Social Media for the day.





### Lonely at School

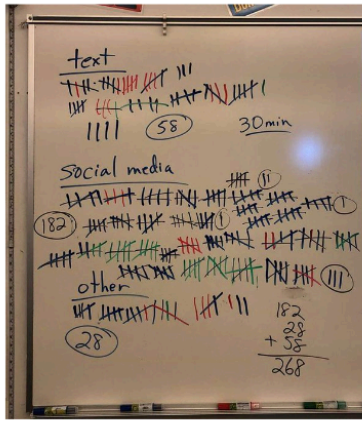
The share of students reporting high levels of loneliness at school has increased sharply since the early 2010s.



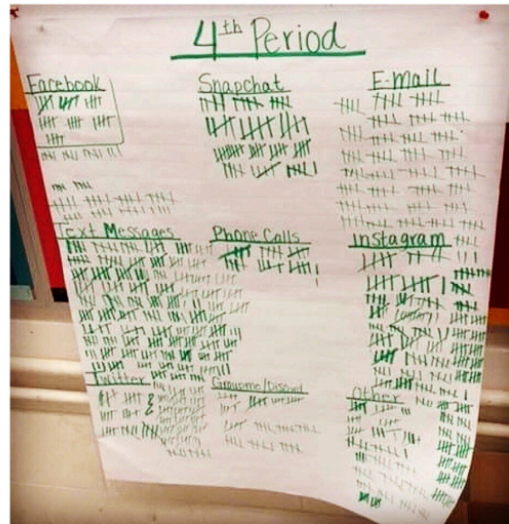
Slide 2:

Phones and devices also impact our students lives AT school WHILE at school. Their interactions with their peers, learning conflict and interpersonal relationships is wildly different in person than it is over text or social media. You can see the possible influence in the slides above. As we all know, Bullying that happens over social media or text or messages and images can last forever. Children also can't handle being bored anymore and will often choose screens over a real-life interaction (even adults are guilty of this). The overstimulation caused by devices creates a feedback loop whereby most other experiences pale in comparison, causing kids to crave more and more stimulation. This sensory seeking behavior and inability to control one's attention are why personal devices also increase the incidence and severity of ADHD as shown in a studies. According to NIH, "Based on the current meta-analysis results, our study found a positive correlation between screen time and the risk of ADHD. **Excessive screen exposure may significantly contribute to the development of ADHD in children. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce screen time per day in children to prevent the occurrence of ADHD.**" ScienceDirect. "Longitudinal analyses indicate a directional effect of white matter microstructure on the ADHD scale, and a bi-directional effect between the ADHD scale and longer screen time utilization." The university of California San Francisco cohort study showed a causal relationship with video games, streaming videos and social media and increases in OCD for preteens. Per [a Meta-analysis and systematic review](#), smart phone use can literally change the structure of the developing brain. "...the impact was more pronounced in adolescents than in adults.... Conclusions: Our findings demonstrated a potential association of excessive smartphone use with a reduced brain volume and altered activations." Schools can and should be more a break from screens to help with screen addiction.

SHAB also wants to support our on-the-ground educators and staff. A 2023 survey SHAB did of the Middle School principals supports the benefit to the students and staff of having an "Away for the Day" cell phone and smart device policy. The five schools *unanimously responded* that it has been well received by parents and teachers and had a positive impact on the students. All of the principals said an APS Policy or PIP would help support them and teachers in their interactions with students and families.



One half hour of a math class in the US



Canadian class for one period

Up to 95% of U.S. teenagers own a **cell phone** and kids receive about 500 **notifications** a day – many during school hours.

### Slide 3:

Additionally, the phones and smart devices are a distraction. A Canadian math teacher asked her students in one class period to mark how many notifications their phones got. The image above is one class period of one class. per CBS 2023 Up to 95% of U.S. teenagers own a **cell phone** and kids receive about 500 **notifications** a day – many during school hours. They quoted a teacher saying that the “no-phone” movement has been a game changer and she “Saw kids’ faces again.” Think about how hard it is for you to stay on task and sustain a train of thought while working on your computer. Email, texts, and alerts of all kinds continually present opportunities to do something easier and more fun. If you are over age 25, you have a fully mature frontal cortex to help you resist temptation and maintain focus, and yet you probably still have difficulty doing so. Now imagine a phone or a smart watch in a child’s pocket , buzzing every few minutes with an invitation to do something other than pay attention. There’s no mature frontal cortex to help them stay on task. A study called “[Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One’s Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity](#),” The students involved in the study came into a lab and took tests that are commonly used to measure memory capacity and intelligence. They were randomly assigned to one of three groups, given the following instructions: (1) Put your phone on your desk, (2) leave it in your pocket or bag, or (3) leave it out in another room. None of these conditions involve active phone use—just the potential distraction of knowing your phone is there, with texts and social-media posts waiting. The results were clear: The closer the phone was to students’ awareness, the worse they performed on the tests. Even just having a phone in one’s pocket sapped students’ abilities.

### STAFF RESPONSE:

The issue of cellphone use by children and adolescents continues to be a complex discussion in communities across the U.S., including in Arlington County. APS staff acknowledge that there are many facets to this issue, including academic focus and success, the development of pro-social skills in youth, and family access and communication with their children.

While research into the impact of cell phones on students has taken time to develop, it is now

available and overall provides us with the following information:

- In October of 2024, [the CDC released the finding](#) that about 1 in 4 teenagers with 4 hours or more of daily screen time have experienced anxiety (27.1%) or depression symptoms (25.9%) in the past 2 weeks. Students with less screen time had significantly lower reports of anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- In May of 2023, Sapien Labs, a non-profit engaged in global research on mind and brain health and wellbeing, [published a report](#) that examined the impact of the age of first cell phone use on mental wellbeing in youth. It found a correlation between significantly later cell phone use (e.g. 17 or 18 years old) and positive mental wellbeing in youth. Sapien Labs shared this and additional information about youth mental health and well-being at the invitation of SHAB leadership in October of 2024.
- In APS' own fall 2024 survey of staff, students, and families, the perception of staff and families was that the cell phone policy implementation procedure was positively impacting both students' attention in class and academics, as well as increasing social connectivity. Social connection to peers and adults is a [known protective factor for youth](#), helping to mitigate mental health risks such as symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Thus, SHAB's recommendation to implement a cell phone policy that limits student cell phone use from bell-to-bell is in alignment with research, not only for the promotion of academic success but for positive student well-being and the development of stronger social-emotional skills and resiliency. Moreover, a bell-to-bell policy has the support of APS principals and staff and is viewed as a means to help our educators do their best work with our students during the school day.