

**TOWN OF EAST HAVEN, CT
EAST HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR BOARD MEETING MINUTES
35 WHEELBARROW LANE, EAST HAVEN, CT 06513
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2022
7:00 P.M.**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DeLucia called the board meeting to order at 7:18 pm.

- Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. DeLucia requested everyone stand for the Pledge of Allegiance

2. ROLL CALL ATTENDANCE

Ms. DeLucia requested roll call attendance.

Ms. DePalma	Present ▾
Ms. DiLungo	Present ▾
Mr. Hennessey	Absent ▾
Mr. Milano	Present ▾
Ms. Putney	Absent ▾
Ms. Santiago	Present ▾
Ms. Torello	Present ▾
Mr. Stacey	Present ▾
Ms. DeLucia	Present ▾

ALSO PRESENT:

Ms. Erica Forti, Superintendent ▾

Mr. Richard Caponera, Chief of Operations and Fiscal Oversight ▾

Dr. Jennifer Murrihy, Assistant Superintendent ▾

Mr. Robert Swan, Director of Pupil Services ▾

3. REPORTS

- Chair's Report
 - Ms. DeLucia spoke briefly about the cellphone discussion had in the workshop prior, and made it clear that the East Haven High School students are not being searched due to cell phones.
 - She also mentioned a Scarecrows on the Green event that is being held from 10/1/22 to 11/2/22 for business, community, and school organizations (flier for this event is attached to the end of these minutes.
 - Ms. DeLucia spoke about an educational partnership with Avelo Airlines and her excitement for future collaborations.
- Committees
 - Policy: Ms. Santiago stated that there was a policy meeting prior and that there would be two policies on the agenda for this evening's meeting.
 - Communittee: Ms. Santiago spoke about the East Haven Rotary golf ball drop that is coming up, and also spoke about a town activity that is happening Friday September 16, 2022, which will involve movies and games on the East Haven Town Green.
 - Athletics & Arts: Mr. Stacey gave some brief updates on athletics.
- Superintendent's Report
 - Family Engagement: Ms. Church highlighted the new methods for family surveys by way of QR codes and flyers. She mentioned that parents will be able to take the upcoming survey by scanning a QR code and answering some questions which will better assist the district in it's abilities to help the community and offer workshops for parents. Ms. Church also spoke about the recent Community Conversations meeting that was about the new safety protocols ALICE. She explained that the meeting was poorly attended and that only one parent came to the meeting. She asked parents watching the meeting to send in any suggestions that would help the district in communicating with parents and guardians so they are more aware of these events. The district currently uses facebook, emails, texts and the district website to communicate.
- Assistant Superintendent's Report
 - Ms. Murrhiy's report is attached to these minutes.

4. ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

- Invoices for FY 2021-2022 - \$25,354.20
- Invoices for FY 2022-2023 - \$ 397,485.19
- Hires, Rehires & Stipends
- Meeting Minutes: August - 23, 2022

Ms. DeLucia - asked if there were any objections to the consent agenda. No objections were raised.

5. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

- Jenifer Gargano, 1083 N. High Street- Spoke about her child’s bus stop and safety concerns that she had. She expressed her concern and explained that she was having difficulty reaching someone who could assist her with this matter.
- Yazia -East Haven High School Student- Expressed concern about the cellphone policy and the safety issues she felt could result from having cellphones not on her person during the school day.

6. NEW BUSINESS

6.1 Discussion and possible action on the approval of the second reading and the approval of the new Policy 6146.11 Grade Weighting/Class Rank.

Ms. Santiago ▾ made a motion to approve the second reading and the approval of the new Policy 6146.11 Grade Weighting/Class Rank. Mr. Milano ▾ seconded the motion. Ms. DeLucia asked if there were any further questions or comments at that time. None were brought forward.

A roll call vote was taken:

Ms. DePalma	Yes ▾
Ms. DiLungo	Yes ▾
Mr. Hennessey	Absent ▾
Mr. Milano	Yes ▾
Ms. Putney	Absent ▾
Ms. Santiago	Yes ▾
Ms. Torello	Yes ▾
Mr. Stacey	Yes ▾
Ms. DeLucia	Yes ▾

Motion passes unanimously.

6.2 Discussion and possible action on the approval of the revision of the Policy 5117.1- School Attendance Areas-Intradistrict Choice/Open Enrollment.

Ms. DePalma ▾ made a motion to approve the revision of the Policy 5117.1- School Attendance Areas-Intradistrict Choice/Open Enrollment. Mr. Stacey ▾ seconded the motion. Ms. DeLucia asked if there were any further questions or comments at that time. None were brought forward.

A roll call vote was taken:

Ms. DePalma	Yes ▾
Ms. DiLungo	Yes ▾
Mr. Hennessey	Absent ▾
Mr. Milano	Yes ▾
Ms. Putney	Absent ▾
Ms. Santiago	Yes ▾
Ms. Torello	No ▾
Mr. Stacey	Yes ▾
Ms. DeLucia	Yes ▾

6 in favor, 1 opposed. Motion passes.

6.3 Discussion and possible action on the approval of the EHHS Volleyball Fundraising Request.

Mr. Caponera explained the reason for these specific fundraising events being brought forward to the Board. He stated that this fundraiser and the next agenda item were both SNAP fundraisers projected at raising over the \$5,000 dollar threshold.

Ms. Santiago ▾ made a motion to approve the EHHS Volleyball Fundraising Request. Ms. DiLungo ▾ seconded the motion. Ms. DeLucia asked if there were any further questions or comments at that time. None were brought forward.

A roll call vote was taken:

Ms. DePalma	Yes ▾
Ms. DiLungo	Yes ▾
Mr. Hennessey	Absent ▾
Mr. Milano	Yes ▾
Ms. Putney	Absent ▾
Ms. Santiago	Yes ▾
Ms. Torello	Yes ▾
Mr. Stacey	Yes ▾
Ms. DeLucia	Yes ▾

Motion passes unanimously.

6.4 Discussion and possible action on the approval of the EHHS Softball Fundraising Request.

Mr. Stacey ▾ made a motion to approve the EHHS Softball Fundraising Request. Ms. Torello ▾ seconded the motion. Ms. DeLucia asked if there were any further questions or comments at that time. None were brought forward.

A roll call vote was taken:

Ms. DePalma	Yes ▾
Ms. DiLungo	Yes ▾
Mr. Hennessey	Absent ▾
Mr. Milano	Yes ▾
Ms. Putney	Absent ▾
Ms. Santiago	Yes ▾

Ms. Torello	Yes ▾
Mr. Stacey	Yes ▾
Ms. DeLucia	Yes ▾

Motion passes unanimously.

7. DISCUSSION CONCERNING FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Forti explained that the survey of teachers regarding the new cell phone policy at EHHS and an article based on a study done in regards to cellphones in school, would be attached to these minutes

- **Next Board Meeting September 27, 2022**
- **K-5 Smarter Balance Presentation 9/27/22 prior to next meeting**

8. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Milano ▾ motioned to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Santiago ▾ seconded the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele DeLucia/mna

MICHELE DELUCIA, BOARD CHAIR

MINUTES ATTACHMENTS

Jennifer Murrihy
*Assistant Superintendent of
Curriculum and Instruction*



*East Haven Public Schools
35 Wheelbarrow Lane
East Haven, CT 06513
Phone (203) 468-3860
jmurrihy@east-haven.k12.ct.us*

To: East Haven Board of Education
From: Jennifer Murrihy
Re: Assistant Superintendent's Report June 22, 2021
Date: September 12, 2022

Transparency & Information for K-5 Families and Teachers

- I would like to invite the board and the community to view many changes to our [EHPS Teaching and Learning](#) website. The district curriculum page now has Family Partnership Learning Guides Interdisciplinary Curriculum Scope and Sequence for K-5. These are documents that invite families to learn more about our instructional programming. This summer, teachers worked on curricular enhancements to enhance engagement by linking disciplinary themes across STEM and Humanities content areas. We also had an opportunity for feedback from peers at our district PD day. I would like to extend a sincere thank you to our curriculum leads, writers, and teachers as well as Tracy Bureau and members of the Curriculum Advisory Council.

District Literacy Plan and District Numeracy Plan Priority Goals 2022-2023

- Our numeracy and literacy teams meet monthly to review and reflect on ways to increase student achievement to make sure all readers, writers, and mathematicians are prepared to be college and career ready. For the board's

reference, I am enclosing a summarized list of priority goals on our literacy and numeracy plans within this report.

- **Priority goal 1:** Implement leadership **routines and systems** necessary to improve evidence-based numeracy and literacy practices to ensure sustainability
- **Priority Goal 2:** Create a consistent knowledge base and common language among teachers that is based on current literacy and numeracy research and **evidence-based practices** in mathematics and reading **instruction.**
- **Priority Goal 2:** To establish a framework and process for using scientifically-based dynamic **assessments** to make **instructional decisions** at the district, school, grade, classroom, and individual student levels.
- **Priority Goal 2:** Develop and implement a **family engagement model** that supports parent involvement and student learning at home.

Proposed Meeting Dates 2022-2023

- **September 27, 2022 5:00 PM-** BOE Workshop State Summative Assessment Overview (K-5)
- **September or October date TBA** (with 6-12 instructional leadership) State Summative Assessment Overview (6-12)
- **October 12, 2022, Time TBA-** BOE Workshop or Longer Assistant Superintendent report- BOY Data discussion
- **November 22, 2022 5:00 PM,** Curriculum Advisory Council (possible agenda topics: Perkins grant/ manufacturing & Library, Research & Integrated Technology curriculum)
- **January 10, 2023 5:00 PM,** Curriculum Advisory Council (possible agenda topics related to Science of Reading, District Literacy and Numeracy plan, and Visual Thinking Strategies)
- **Date TBA (January/ February)** MOY Data discussion
- **March 21, 2023 5:00 PM,** Curriculum Advisory Council (possible agenda topics related to STEM curriculum)
- **June 20, 2023 5:00 PM,** Curriculum Advisory Council (possible agenda topics related to Humanities and Unified Arts curriculum)
- **June/ July (Date TBD)-** EOY Data discussion

Town of East Haven, East Haven Chamber &
Shoreline Garden Club

Present

ScareCrows

on the Green

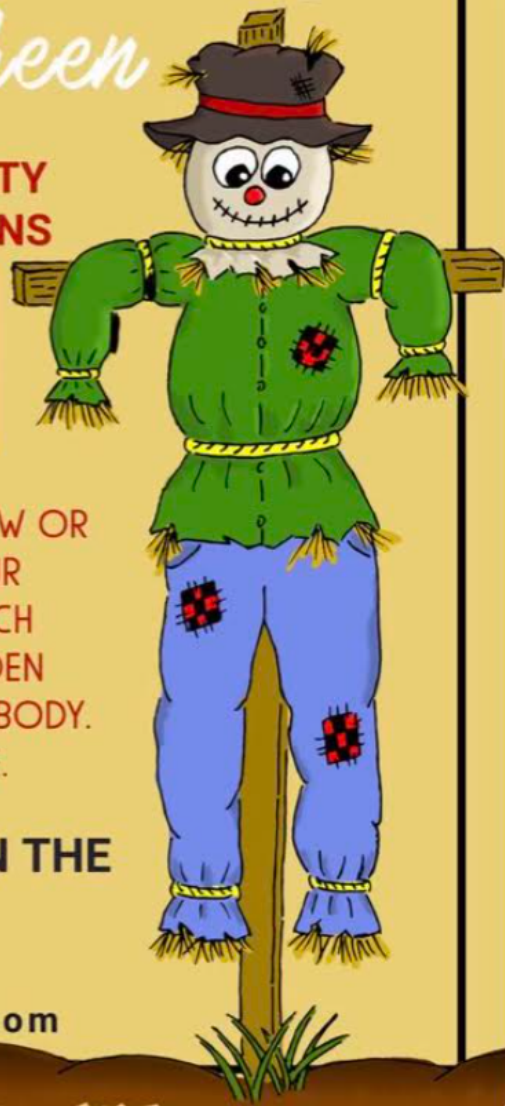
**SPECIAL EVENT FOR
BUSINESSES & COMMUNITY
& SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS**

**MAKE YOUR OWN SCARECROW
TO PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS
OR YOUR ORGANIZATION**

BUILD YOUR THEMED SCARECROW OR
IF YOU NEED HELP BUILDING YOUR
SCARECROW COME TO THE BEACH
HOUSE 9/27th 6-8 PM THE GARDEN
CLUB WILL HELP YOU BUILD THE BODY.
YOU DECORATE TO YOUR THEME.

**DISPLAY WILL BE UP ON THE
GREEN 10/1 - 11/2**

Sign up at
www.easthavenchamber.com



What percentage of students have been compliant with the new cell phone regulations?

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

76% - 90%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

91% - 100%

How have the cell phone regulations impacted student engagement?

yes

Way more engaged

It has greatly increased student engagement!

Students seem more present and engaged in class

It's been better to not fight with students regarding phones, though some are now accessing messages through their watches. As a whole I think it's much better than last year and with less distractions!

The students are more engaged in the lessons. They are participating, and asking intelligent questions. They are staying on task.

It's helped a LOT. They don't just disappear into their phones. So their choice is to sit there doing nothing, or engage with the activity.

Much better!

It's nice not to be on the lookout for students sneaking their phones. They are much more engaged and focused.

Getting better but slowly

It seems to have made it better. They are less distracted.

More kids are paying attention and engaged.

I see more students completing their work than before.

Students are significantly less distracted and significantly more engaged.

The students are engaged in class, paying attention and completing the work with success. It has been such a pleasure teaching these past few weeks due to this new policy, thank you!

My students are engaged - focusing, participating, on-task!

My students are engaged - focusing, participating, on-task!

My students are more engaged and staying on task.

Helps a LOT!!

So much higher! Students have been much less distracted and more focused. When they leave the classroom, they are returning more quickly.

Students are talking more with each other and I do not have to repeat the same instructions several times .

There are very few interruptions because I do not have to keep stopping class to remind students to put phones away. There are much less discipline problems because the students would argue with you over the phones.

I am enjoying teaching a lot more.

Students seem more engaged so far. Less distraction in the classroom.

Yes I think kids are less distracted. Im sure there are a few kids who are lying about now having a phone and are keeping it on them - but even those students have been good about keeping it away since they know the policy is to have them removed if they try to use it.

Students are completing in class work more quickly. They are also talking to each other more when asked to discuss at their table groups. I can also sense that they are more aware of classroom activities and they don't really want down time.

I am so impressed with the levels of student engagement. I have found that students are more attentive to the content being provided and are actually asking questions and participating more. They seem to be more focused and interested in the material.

It has drastically improved engagement

Much less distraction.

The student engagement level has skyrocketed. I even had a voice that he was glad that he no longer could use his phone because it distracted him from getting his work done.

the kids are definitely paying more attention to me and their work

Students have told me they will do the work because "what else is there to do." As a new teacher to EHHS it's helped me start to build a classroom community as students will talk to me and one another throughout the period.

Tremendously!! Kids are definitely more engaged! It's also so nice to see students' faces in the hallway and not just the tops of their heads!

I have noticed more students are actively listening when directions are given- direct eye contact. I also have noticed that majority of my students have consistently handed in work on time.

In my observations, student engagement has increased significantly due to the cell phone regulations.

It has been great!

Great engagement! I do not waste time during class addressing the use of the phone.

They seem to be more attentive to the work and spending more time on their chromebooks.

Students remain on-task and require less redirections/correction. Thumbs up!

It is wasting a lot of time at the beginning of class to get everyone to comply. Earbuds and iWatches continue to be an issue.

Amazing improvement. Close to full engagement/participation

they are much more attentive and willing to talk to their classmates during class activities. they seem less anxious about interacting with their classmates as well.

While they are not participating as much still, they do not seem to be questioning what we are working on or what they need to do as much.

I did not have a big issue with cell phones and engagement in years past; however, it has definitely helped enforce a culture of not zoning out into cell phones. This culture has impacted students' focus during class - students are spending more time trying to do work before they will give up and find gratification on their phones. They are demonstrating more perseverance in their work time.

Students are much more engaged in the lesson and less likely to rush through assignments to simply get time to work on their phones. Students are also remembering a lot more from class because they aren't splitting their time between their phone and listening to our discussions

Better student engagement overall

100% BETTER!

Very positively! Students are much more engaged and focused.

They are more engaged. They are doing the job faster than the last year. They participate more in class when there is a debate.

Students seem engaged, they are socializing and interacting more with each other rather than being silent and scrolling phones

More student participation and less distraction about what's going on outside of class. Less passes written and those that go out come back in a timely fashion. I'm seeing their faces and not just the tops of their heads. Their work is being done and turned in more than not.

Not sure - I only have a FLEX class. Students who don't want to engage simply go on YouTube or Netflix on their Chromebook instead of on their phone.

Students are engaged in more discussion with each other and are paying more attention to group discussions.

- more engagement in restorative circle conversations
- more attentive overall

Less distracted, more on task behavior and engagement.

Student engagement has been much better across the board

It is WONDERFUL!!! Still a bit early in the year to see how it will impact student performance, but it certainly can only be positive. Students are much more engaged in every way.

The students seem to be more engaged in classroom learning and activities.

Yes I feel it definitely has. Students are more engaged and not so worried about their phones. It has made it so much easier in class not having to constantly ask them to put their phones away.

How have the cell phone regulations impacted the classroom environment/climate?

yes

Yes, positively - everyone interacts with me and each other more

Students are talking to each other more, asking more questions, and interested in the class.

Students are more willing to talk to one another and myself

It's made it better in terms of attention and focus to the task. There are a few who are sneaking earphones in but now I make them turn those in too :).

They have had a positive impact on the classroom. The students are completing the activities and staying on task without the draw of looking at their phones.

No more looking at girl's pictures on instagram during class. That was always a disruption to a comfortable learning environment.

Students are trying to find alternate ways but overall very positive! they actually talk to each other.

It has been less stressful all around. Class time does not have to stop as reminders to put phones away are continually being stated.

I think better. So far so good.

None really. I make sure to put my phone up there as well. Seems to be received well from students.

They have made them more positive and engaging.

I think it has been positive- but they have learned the loophole that if they say they don't have one, they can keep it. I have not had an issue with them taking it out in my class though. On my lav duty, I see a lot of kids with phones, so something is not working.

VERY positive. Very little push back to the policy.

We have a working classroom again. Students will answer questions and really get involved with the lessons.

Students actually talk with each other, and to me more. Group work works better too as all students are focused on the assignment rather than their phones.

Students actually talk with each other, and to me more. Group work works better too as all students are focused on the assignment rather than their phones.

My students are able to communicate more effectively in class with each other.

Calm and focused students.

Students responding more quickly, making greater eye contact with each other. More student to student interactions!

yes in a very positive way. More conversations between myself and the students and the students with each other.

Classroom climate has improved.

kids for the most part are more engaged in the lesson.

It eliminates the constant reminders about cell phone use which can have a negative impact on climate. It is easier to build relationships with and between students because they are not preoccupied.

I think that they have had a mixed impact on the classroom environment/climate. On one hand, I notice that students are beginning to interact more and actually learn their classmates names (we quickly found out that none of them really knew each other). On the other hand, I have noticed that students who have been distracted with their phones in the past, are struggling to make positive contributions to class. This

is something that we are working on and are finding different strategies that work best for each student/class.
more engaged in talking to one another
Less interruption telling kids to put their phones away.
The classroom environment is positive. The students are completing their work and communicating with each other.
so far so good...the kids are really compliant
Students are more willing to engage one another and do work "because what else is there to do." I've also found that I have had to teach other means of finding information, but that's a good thing.
The last few minutes when phones are handed out are the quietest moments of the class - no one engages one another, no one is aware of the class around them.
I was expecting huge amounts of whining and non-compliance but there has been very little, if any. Granted, I have primarily freshmen, but still...
I feel less stressed knowing phones are away- less to worry about and less distractions.
Classroom climate has improved.
Also Great! More involvement, less distractions and outside issues being brought in for the class.
Better use of the class time. We do more work in class; less distractions.
Those that choose to comply do so very well. There has not been an incident of someone being on a phone they did not turn in as of yet.
When the students cooperate, it is fantastic. When one student challenges it, it becomes a power struggle and the dynamic shifts to one where I have to be more authoritarian.
It has reduced the distractions.
Much more positive and team oriented
Students appear less distracted
Has not really as the expectations are restated every day while doing attendance.
This policy has helped all students engage in the learning time - no students can hide behind on their phones and not participate. It has also forced more students to engage with one another because they do not have a cell phone to hide behind.
The environment and climate is much better in the classroom regarding this. I would have to spend at least 10-15 mins per class block redirecting students off their phones and back on the assignment. I also have not had to have any confirmations about cell phones in the classroom which has allowed things to move much smoother
Most classes are more engaged. Some are actually distracted because they want to argue about the phone policy. Many pretend that they do not have a phone. I'm not sure what to do in this case.
100% BETTER!
Positively!
The policy limits the inappropriate use of cell phones (taking photos of classmates etc.) which will positively impact the overall school climate.
Students appear more engaged
I see more collaboration and less talking about something unrelated to topic.

Students seem to go along with the new policy, but mostly are just circumventing it.

Students have been able to engage with each other with out distractions.

- stronger peer to peer relationships
- More students listening to each other

Overall it has had a positive impact!

I was skeptical about the new policy, however I am now the first one to put my phone in the holder with the students. The student were reluctant and upset at first, now they are not fazed by it. Some students I suspect put them in backpacks and I never see the phone. I have noticed that others are sneaking their phones again. I gave final warnings to my AC classes today and my BD classes tomorrow. After Tuesday, I will have a zero tolerance for violators of the policy

A much more pleasant atmosphere. Students do not need to hear me repeatedly asking them to put their phones away, etc.

Other than a few students who need to be reminded at the beginning of class, there have not been any issues associated with the cell phone policy.

I feel there is more engagement and interaction with other students.

Additional comments/concerns?

Best policy ever

THIS IS GREAT!

Headphones are still an issue. So are apple watches.

Let's keep this going. It was LONG overdue!

Having to put their cell phones into the holder at the beginning of class has been a benefit this year.

Nope. It's awesome. I usually put my phone in there too to set an example, that helps.

Although I remind students at the beginning of each class to put their phones into the phone hotel, it seems fewer are being put in. I have not seen a phone on a student, so maybe they are understanding that no phones are allowed out.

I think they will try to find other ways around the system

I do have some students who tell me they have no phone. I have no ran into anyone pulling it out yet. I made sure to let them know that I would need to ask them to leave.

So happy we are finally doing this.

I think at the faculty meeting, it would be a good idea to reiterate the expectation/check in that everyone is still on board. My seniors in particular claim a lot of teachers are not collecting the phones, which undermines what other staff are trying to do. We are shooting ourselves in the foot by not being consistent.

The only reason I selected 76-90% instead of 91-100% is that some students are not putting phones in the pockets. They are probably keeping them in their backpack, but are not taking them out.

This is a GREAT policy!

This is been wonderful - thank you!

This is been wonderful - thank you!

Overall I believe the cell phone policy is working well for my class.

Thank-you for the support!

Please continue the policy

No.

Today is the first day I noticed less phones in the bins and more students saying they didnt have their phone on them. I stressed that if they are caught with it its an instant removal from class. (this was in my level 2 class)

It is the BEST policy we have implemented. One concern is teacher consistency and persistence with the policy as the year progresses. We need to sure we are on the same team with this.

Overall, I am so impressed with my students! I have a group of juniors who come in each day and without being prompted, place their phones in the shoe holder and are ready to begin class :)

It is a game changer.

I feel like I can teach again. Overall, I think teachers are going to be happier b/c they do not have to be constantly telling kids to be off their phones. I would get very frustrated when I would tell a student to get off a phone and they were back on it a couple seconds later. They also sometimes ignored the directive and did not put the phone away. I am very pleased and relieved with the decision to not allow the kids are on phones this year. They all seem really receptive and are not using them during class.

I put my phone away too. It's nice to take a break from it.

n/a

Let's never go back!

I've noticed less and less students have been putting their phones in their assigned bag in the beginning of class. However, I have not seen cell phones on students. I believe most students are keeping their phones in their backpacks. I have made it clear that security will be called if I see a cell phone, and that threat seems to be enough.

I am looking for advice on how to get more students to consistently put their cell phone in the assigned bag. I'm worried that as the year progresses, more students will keep their phones in their backpacks and then phones will begin to become an issue. Also, if students are keeping phones in their backpacks, then I do not know if they are leaving the room with their devices.

I think it is working very well and, as long as ALL staff continue to follow the protocol it will work. I have had very little student pushback, if any. My one concern is that I have heard about certain students getting special accommodations - which will not work out well in the long run.

Let hope that this trend continues.

There needs to be uniformity with this policy. Phone breaks in the middle of class should not occur and should be addressed to the staff that these cannot take place.

There are some student needs/supports that may require the use of a cell phone, ie. ESL students & Google Translate. Yes, it is on the Chromebook, but if I am providing one to one instruction, the cell phone offers the easiest and most comfortable solution.

Please continue policy and be sure all are following guidelines.

I believe that Seniors should have the privilege of having it on them as long as they are not using it. Seniors work and sometimes leave school early to go to their jobs and I think they should have the ability to reach out to a boss at some point during the day if need.

I did not have large concerns with cell phones in the past. I was very specific with my policy and students responded fairly well to it. I am having and have in the past had more issues with headphones, which are not specifically prohibited in this policy, than cell phones.

It's the best thing we've done at EHHA in years! Better than all the PD days x 100. There is a new sense of order. There is now A CHANCE to learn without distraction.

I have not experienced personally during my time in classrooms, I have not faced much pushback from students and most have reported increased ability to focus (even though they want phones back!)

A few mention that their parent is against policy and do not want phone in organizer.

Students wear ear-buds and are listening to videos. It's challenging to see them or keep track of who puts them in when you're looking at your computer...

Do we have a plan / strategy in place as the honeymoon phase ends and students begin to test the boundaries more? Stopping mid lesson and calling security is not always feasible.

I'd like to know if the online chatter about the legality of the cell phone rule is true? Thanks

Appreciate the school wide policy more than I can say!!!

There are those few though that try to get away with not handing in their phones, but to be expected. They think we do not see them.

Take Away Their Cellphones

... So we can rewire schools for belonging and achievement



Doug Lemov



TIMBUKUS / GETTY IMAGES

After successive school years disrupted by shutdowns, isolation, and mass experiments in remote teaching, educators returned to school in Fall 2021 to find that our classrooms and students had changed.

In the first days of the return, perhaps, we didn't see the full scope of the changes. Yes, most of us knew that there would be yawning academic gaps. Most of us understood then what the data have since clearly borne out: despite often heroic efforts by teachers to deliver remote instruction, the pandemic had caused a **massive setback in learning and academic progress**. The costs had been levied most heavily on those who could least afford it, and **it would take months, if not years, to make up the lost time**.

But at least we were all together again, even if we were all wearing masks. We were on the road back to regular life.

As the days passed, though, a troubling reality emerged.

The students who came back to us had spent long periods away from peers, activities, and social interactions. For many young people—and their teachers—the weeks and months of isolation had been difficult emotionally and psychologically. Some had lost

loved ones. Many more had endured months in a house or apartment with nearly everything they valued—sports or drama or music, not to mention moments of sitting informally among friends and laughing—having suddenly evaporated from their lives. Even students who had escaped the worst of the pandemic were out of practice when it came to the expectations, courtesies, and give-and-take of everyday life. Perhaps as a result of this, their social skills had declined.

Our students looked the same—or at least we presumed they did behind the masks—but some seemed troubled and distant. Some struggled to concentrate and follow directions. They were easily frustrated and quick to give up. Many students simply didn't know how to get along. The media was suddenly full of stories of **discipline problems**, chronic disruptions due to **student distractibility, lack of interest, and misbehavior in the classroom**, and **historic levels of student absences**. In schools where no one had ever had to think about how to deal with a fight, they burst into the open like brush fires after a drought. It didn't help that many schools were short-staffed, with leaders struggling just to get classes covered and buses on the road.

The first post-pandemic year may well have been harder than the radically disrupted 18 months of rolling lockdowns and remote learning that preceded it. The jarring disruptions related to Covid-19 aren't the whole story, however. What has happened to our students isn't just the impact of a protracted, once-in-a-generation adverse event, but the combined effects of several large-scale, ground-shifting trends that predate the pandemic and have reshaped the fabric of young people's lives. As we look forward, their combined effects should cause us to think beyond short-term recovery and to reconsider how we design schools and schooling.

Researcher Jean Twenge has documented the negative effects of screens and social media on young people, including greater rates of depression, anxiety, and isolation.

An Internet Epidemic

The pandemic occurred amid a broader *epidemic*. Long before Covid-19, the psychologist Jean Twenge had found spiraling levels of depression, anxiety, and isolation among teens. “I had been studying mental health and social behavior for decades and I had never seen anything like it,” Twenge wrote in her 2017 book *iGen*.

This historic downturn in the well-being of young people coincided almost exactly with the dramatic rise of the smartphone and social media. More specifically, it coincided with the moment when they both became universal and being disconnected or an infrequent user was no longer viable.

As a parent, I experienced this firsthand. Even before the pandemic, I was desperately trying to manage my own children’s device usage, wary of how the time they spent on their phones was increasing while the time they spent reading and doing, well, almost everything else was decreasing. We wanted to limit social media as much as possible. But when friends plan where to meet up via Instagram messenger or some other platform, and when the key information for every soccer game—where, when, which uniform—is communicated via group chat, there is no choice but to join.

Research by **Twenge and others** found that teenagers’ media use roughly doubled between 2006 and 2016 across gender, race, and class. In competition against the smartphone, the book, the idea of reading, lost significant ground. By 2016, just **16 percent** of 12th-grade students read a book or magazine daily. As recently as 1995, **41 percent** did. Meanwhile, social media was on the rise. By 2016, about three-quarters of teenagers reported using social media almost every day (see Figure 1).

Those trends have only accelerated. A [2019 study](#) by Common Sense Media reported that 84 percent of American teenagers own a smartphone. Parents are raising a generation that is both more connected and more disconnected than any before.

“The smartphone brought about a planetary rewiring of human interaction. As smartphones became common, they transformed peer relationships, family relationships and the texture of daily life for everyone—even those who don’t own a phone or don’t have an Instagram account,” Twenge and co-author Jonathan Haidt [wrote in the *New York Times*](#) in 2021. “It’s harder to strike up a casual conversation in the cafeteria or after class when everyone is staring down at a phone. It’s harder to have a deep conversation when each party is interrupted randomly by buzzing, vibrating notifications.” They quote the psychologist Sherry Turkle who notes that we are now “forever elsewhere.”

The average 12th grader in 2016, Twenge pointed out in *iGen*, went out with friends less often than the average 8th grader 10 years before. American teenagers were also less likely to date, drive a car, or have a job. “The roller rink, the basketball court, the town pool, the local necking spot—they’ve all been replaced by virtual spaces accessed through apps and the web,” Twenge [wrote in *The Atlantic*](#). These virtual meetups are universally associated with less happiness for young people. “Those who spend an above-average amount of time with their friends in person are 20 percent less likely to

say they're unhappy than those who hang out for a below-average amount of time," she wrote.

And that was long before Tik Tok and the latest round of social media platforms carefully designed to ensure obsession and the lingering anxiety that you really ought to be checking your phone; before the optimization of apps like Snapchat, with posts designed to disappear as soon as they are seen and therefore undiscoverable to an adult coming to a young person's room to see what is amiss.

Pandemic Effects

Then in March 2020, virtually everything that might have competed with smartphones suddenly disappeared. A recent [Common Sense Media study](#) found that children's daily entertainment usage of screens grew by 17 percent between 2019 and 2021—more than

it had grown during the four years prior (see Figure 2). Overall, daily entertainment screen use in 2021 increased to 5.5 hours among tweens ages 8 to 12 and to more than 8.5 hours among teens ages 13 to 18, on average. These trends were even more pronounced for students from low-income families, whose parents were most likely to have to work in person and have fewer resources to spend on alternatives to screens.

At the levels of use that are now common, smartphones are catastrophic to the well-being of young people. As Twenge wrote, “The more time teenagers spend looking at screens, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression. . . It’s not an exaggeration to describe [this generation] as being on the brink of the worst mental-health crisis in decades.”

Indeed, the data also show spikes in teenagers’ mental-health problems during the pandemic, when just 47 percent of students reported feeling connected to the adults and peers in their schools. Some 44 percent of high-school students reported feeling sad or persistently hopeless in 2021, according to the Centers for Disease Control. School factors had a significant effect on this data. Students who said they felt “connected to adults and peers” at school were almost 60 percent less likely to report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness than those who did not—some 35 percent of connected students felt that way, compared with 55 percent who did not feel connected to school. The socioemotional distress students are experiencing is as much a product of the cellphone epidemic as it is a product of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, all of that time on screens—even without social media—degrades attention and concentration skills, making it harder to focus fully on any task and to maintain that focus. This is not a small thing. Attention is central to every learning task and the quality of attention paid by learners shapes the outcome of learning endeavors. The more rigorous the task, the more it requires what experts call selective or directed attention. To learn well, you must be able to maintain self-discipline about where you direct your attention.

“Directed attention is the ability to inhibit distractions and sustain attention and to shift attention appropriately,” Michael Manos, clinical director of the Center for Attention and Learning at Cleveland Clinic, recently told the *Wall Street Journal*. “If kids’ brains become accustomed to constant changes, the brain finds it difficult to adapt to a nondigital activity where things don’t move quite as fast.”

The Trouble with Task Switching

The problem with cellphones is that young people using them switch tasks every few seconds. Better put, young people *practice* switching tasks every few seconds, so they become more accustomed to states of half-attention, where they are ever more expectant of a new stimulus every few seconds. When students encounter a sentence or an idea that requires slow, focused analysis, their minds are already glancing around for something new and more entertaining.

Though all of us are at risk of this type of restlessness, young people are especially susceptible. The region of the brain that exerts impulse control and self-discipline, the prefrontal cortex, isn’t fully developed until age 25. Any time young people are on a screen, they are in an environment where they are habituated to states of low attention and constant task switching. In 2017, a study found that undergraduates, who are more

cerebrally mature than K–12 students and therefore have stronger impulse control, “switched to a new task on average every 19 seconds when they were online.”

In addition, the brain rewires itself constantly based on to how it functions. This idea is known as neuroplasticity. The more time young people spend in constant half-attentive task switching, the harder it becomes for them to maintain the capacity for sustained periods of intense concentration. A brain habituated to being bombarded by constant stimuli rewires accordingly, losing impulse control. The mere presence of our phones socializes us to fracture our own attention. After a time, the distractedness is within us.

“If you want kids to pay attention, they need to practice paying attention,” is how Dr. John S. Hutton, a pediatrician and director of the Reading and Literacy Discovery Center at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, put it in a [recent *Wall Street Journal* article](#).

There is, in other words, a clear post-pandemic imperative for schools. The first step in responding to the dual crisis of learning and well-being is to set and enforce cell-phone restrictions. An institution with the dual purpose of fostering students’ learning and well-being cannot ignore an intruder that actively erodes a young mind’s ability to focus and sustain attention and also magnifies anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Cellphones must be turned off and put away when students walk through school doors. Period.

But cellphone restrictions are only part of the equation. Schools themselves will also require rewiring.

How do we do that? The answer isn’t simple. My colleagues at Uncommon Schools Denarius Frazier, Hilary Lewis, and Darryl Williams, and I have written a book describing actions we think schools should consider. Here’s a road map of some of the things we think will be necessary.

Rewiring Classrooms for Connectedness

Extracurricular activities and social and emotional learning programs can be significant factors in shaping students’ experiences. But we should also recognize that the classroom is the single most important space when it comes to shaping students’ sense of connectedness to school. Out of a typical school day, at least five or six hours will be spent in classrooms—the overwhelming majority of students’ time. If classroom practices do little to instill a sense of belonging, students will feel a weak connection to the primary purpose of school.

But just as important, building classrooms to maximize belonging cannot come at the expense of academic achievement. We are in the midst of a learning crisis of historic proportions too. Students’ lack of progress in science, math, and reading, their reduced knowledge of history, their lessened exposure to the arts—these will have lifelong costs. Teaching needs to be better, not diluted. Classrooms need to maximize belonging *and* learning. It can’t be one or the other.

Happily, we think this is eminently possible. I’m thinking of a math class taught by my co-author Denarius Frazier, the principal of Uncommon Collegiate Charter High School in Brooklyn, N.Y. During a discussion about trigonometry, two dozen students engaged vigorously and energetically with one another. That is, until the beautiful moment when a student named Vanessa, who had been speaking authoritatively about her solution to

the problem, suddenly realized that she had confused reciprocal and inverse functions—and that her solution is dead wrong.

Vanessa paused and glanced at her notes. “Um, I’d like to change my answer,” she said playfully, without a trace of self-consciousness. Then she laughed, and her classmates laughed with her. The moment was beautiful because it was lit by the warm glow of belonging. And that was not accidental.

Consider the image below: Vanessa is speaking as her classmates listen and offer affirming gazes. Their eyes are turned to Vanessa to show encouragement and support. Their expressions communicate psychological safety, reassurance, and belonging. In fact, it’s hard to put into words just how much their glances are communicating—and each one is a little different—but these wordless expressions are as critical to shaping the moment as Vanessa’s own character and humility. This interaction fosters and protects a space in which her bravery, humor, and openness can emerge. A space where she feels important.

At Uncommon Collegiate Charter High School in Brooklyn, N.Y., students learn to use body language and positive nonverbal cues called “Habits of Attention” to support one another. A [video](#) of the classroom scene is available [here](#).

How someone acts in a group setting is shaped as much by the audience and the social norms that the speaker perceives as it is by internal factors. And here those perceptions are not accidental. Frazier has socialized his students to “track”—or actively look at—the speaker and to endeavor to keep their body language and nonverbal cues positive. In *Teach Like a Champion 3.0*, I call that technique Habits of Attention. It is a small but critical aspect of how classrooms can maximize belonging and achievement.

Students also validated each other in other ways throughout the lesson. When a young woman named Folusho joined the discussion, she started by saying, “Ok, I agree with Vanessa...” So often, after a student speaks in class, no one other than the teacher

responds or communicates that the statement was important. But when a peer's comment begins, "I agree with..." it says implicitly that what my classmate just said is important. Such validation makes it more likely that students feel supported and successful, and that the speaker will contribute to the discussion again.

Again, this is not a coincidence. Frazier has taught his students to use phrases like that and weave their comments together, so their ideas are connected and those who have contributed feel the importance of their contributions. That technique is called Habits of Discussion. Along with Habits of Attention, it helps connect and validate students as they learn.

In addition, as Folusho was talking, her classmates began snapping their fingers. In Frazier's classroom, that means "I agree" or "I support you." It was a powerful dose of positive feedback at the precise moment when she, like almost anyone speaking aloud to a group of people, was most likely to momentarily wonder, "Am I making sense at all? Do I sound stupid?" Folusho suddenly got a supportive response—the snapping told her, "You're doing great! You're family. Let's go!"

Again, that was deliberately woven into the fabric of the classroom. The technique, called Props, establishes procedures for students to recognize when their classmates are doing well and send affirming signals without disrupting class.

All three techniques show how a teacher like Frazier can intentionally establish a culture that reinforces both academic endeavor and a much stronger sense of belonging. And though it looks organic, there's nothing natural about it. It's a deliberate rewiring of social norms to maximize positive outcomes. Some skeptics label these sorts of techniques coercive or controlling, but it's hard to watch Frazier and his students and hold on to those suspicions. Engineering the classroom to ensure positive peer-to-peer norms is about honoring young people and creating an environment that not only maximizes their learning but also their belonging—the pervading senses that *school is for me* and *I am successful here*. It's a rewiring of the classroom that requires hard work and doggedness on the part of the teacher. But it is nothing less than students deserve.

Schools can foster student connections by providing open-ended opportunities for young people to engage. Activities might include playing games, such as chess, between classes.

Rewiring Schools for Belonging

Rewiring a school for belonging involves rethinking many of the things we do, such as extracurricular activities. Nashville Classical Charter School provides an example of how schools might do this. In 2021, school leaders were reconsidering how its programs could intentionally build a sense of connectedness and belonging among students. Head of School Charlie Friedman and his colleagues decided to dramatically expand after-school sports programs, to allow students to explore their identities, build relationships with trusted adults, and perform in front of a crowd.

Nashville Classical extended tryout periods, to maximize students' opportunities feel like part of a team. Leaders also offered stipends for coaching and encouraged their best community builders to coach, by explicitly valuing expertise at culture building alongside expertise at the sport. The school engaged audiences by inviting families to vote on a mascot and created an engaging game-day experience with a cheerleading squad, songs, and chants. This attracted a substantial audience, so student-athletes could compete in front of more people and fans could build community through gathering and cheering together.

It's important to have high-quality extracurriculars that aren't based on years of prior experience. It's hard for a student to decide in grade 8 that they would really like to be a part of the basketball team if they haven't already spent years playing. But that's not true of the debate team or the Spanish club. Those activities should be as well run as any others, rather than a lonely space with obligatory supervision where the connections are peripheral at best.

Schoolwide rituals are also important to fostering a sense of belonging. For example, Frazier's school has a regular meeting circle where the entire school is present. Students are publicly honored for their academic excellence or for being positive members of the school community.

Character education and social and emotional learning programs can also play a role. But my advice is to build a few priorities into the fabric of the school rather than buy a program to use in an isolated manner. Positive character traits should be "caught, sought, and taught," according to my co-author Hilary Lewis. Gratitude is a great example. When students make a habit of concretely expressing gratitude to other people in the school community, it confers mutual benefits. Expressions of gratitude make the recipients feel more connected while also conferring status on the giver, because their appreciation is a thing worthy of sharing deliberately.

And, as Shawn Achor explains in his book *The Happiness Advantage*, expressing gratitude regularly has the effect of calling students' attention to its presence. Repetitive thinking causes a "cognitive afterimage" where we continue to see whatever it is we're thinking about, even when we've shifted focus. In other words, if you continually share and expect to be sharing examples of things you are grateful for, you start looking for them. You begin scanning the world for examples of good things to appreciate and notice more of the good that surrounds you. Gratitude is a well-being builder.

Open-ended opportunities to relax and connect outside of the classroom also foster connectedness and belonging. At Cardiff High School in Wales, for example, school leaders filled a common area with games that are easy to join. They added chess boards, card tables with decks of cards, and even a ping pong table to create opportunities for engaging, positive social interaction in between classes.

In Gerry Padilla's Spanish classes at Marlborough High School in Massachusetts, students leave devices in a "cell phone hotel." Restricting phone access doesn't have to mean a ban.

Saying No to Cellphones

These innovations can be powerful—but not on their own. The pull of smartphones and social media apps designed to distract is bound to undermine any expression of support, after-school sport, or card table. The single most important thing schools can do is to restrict cellphone access for large parts of the school day. This doesn't mean banning phones, it just means setting rules. These can take different forms, like setting up cellphone lockers at the main entrance, requiring students to use cellphone-collection baskets at the classroom door, or limiting use to cellphone-approved zones in the school building. My personal preference is a simple policy: You can have your cellphone in your bag, but it must be turned off and cannot be visible during the school day. Not during lunch, not in the hall, not anywhere until after the last bell rings. If there's an emergency and you need to contact your parents, you may use it in the main office. That's it.

Schools must create blocks of time when students can work in a manner that allows them to rebuild their attentional skills and experience the full value of connected social interaction. They must also protect students' opportunities to socialize with one another. Allowing students to use their phones as classroom tools (for quick research or as calculators, for example), or to leave them turned on (but with silent haptic notifications that distract nonetheless), or to turn them on during lunch or other learning breaks keeps them connected to their devices and disconnected from one another.

It won't be easy, but it can be done. **France** has done it. The **state of Victoria** in Australia has done it. Some American public schools and districts have done it, in **Missouri**, **Pennsylvania**, **Maine**, and **New York**.

These bans are often followed by remarkable and instantaneous change. "It has transformed the school. Social time is spent talking to friends," a teacher from Australia told my colleagues and me. "It is so nice walking around the yard seeing students actually interacting with each other, and no distractions during class," said another.

The change, teachers told us, was quick—so long as you could get the adults to follow through. That is, if the rule was consistent and enforced, then students adapted quickly and were happy, even if they fought it at first. If the ban didn't work, the problem was usually that some of the adults didn't follow through. "Consistent enforcement from all = key," one teacher explained in a note. "Can't be 'the cool teacher'." The problem, of course, is that there's a strong incentive to be "the cool teacher," so schools must spend time making sure teachers understand the reasons for the rule and holding them accountable for supporting it.

School and district leaders should be prepared for doubts, skepticism, and pushback. We've seen this at the state level already. In 2019, lawmakers in four states proposed legislation to ban cellphones in school. But the bills, in Arizona, Maine, Maryland, and Utah, failed to advance. A rule that barred students from bringing cellphones into New York City public schools was ended in 2015, because then-Mayor Bill DeBlasio said "parents should be able to call or text their kids," though individual schools may choose to limit phone access.

Two comments I often hear: "it's an infringement on young people's freedom" and "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 first response makes two assumptions: first, that there is no difference between young people and adults, and second, that there is no difference between the people who run a school—and therefore are responsible to stakeholders for outcomes—and the young people who attend the school. Both are mistaken. The purpose of a school is to give young people the knowledge and skills they require to lead successful lives. This always involves an exercise of social contract. We collectively give up something small as individuals and receive something valuable and rare in return as a group. It is impossible to run a school without this sort of give-and-take. Suggesting that we give students "freedom" to use cell phones whenever they want is trading valuable and enduring freedom that accrues later for a self-destructive indulgence in the present.

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.

Doug Lemov is founder of Teach Like a Champion and author of the Teach Like a Champion books. He is a co-author of the forthcoming book Reconnect, from which this essay is adapted. He was a managing director of Uncommon Schools, designing and implementing teacher training based on the study of high-performing teachers.

Last updated August 2, 2022

License this Content

Doug Lemov

AUTHOR BIO ▾

PREVIOUS ARTICLE

NEXT ARTICLE

We Recommend You Read

A Survival Guide for Distance Teaching

Lessons in “fighting the
tide of passivity”

by Kathleen Porter-Magee

EdNext Podcast: Teaching in the Online Classroom

Overcoming the
presumption of passivity

by Education Next

How a Lady Editor Turned Teaching into a Majority-Female Profession

Not only did women make
better teachers than men,
but they cost less, argued
Sarah Josepha Hale

by Melanie Kirkpatrick

THE JOURNAL

Summer 2022

Vol. 22, No. 3

Education Next is a journal of opinion and research about education policy.

SUBSCRIBE
TODAY

NOT CONVINCED?



**Get a Sample copy of
The Journal**

Sign Up Today

NEWSLETTER

Notify Me When Education Next Posts a Big Story

Your Email

SUBSCRIBE