



# Cell Phone Model Policy Development: Pre-Reading

**Overview:** This document provides an overview of the current research and opinions regarding the impact of cell phones on student performance and well-being. As you review the materials, consider the following questions:

- What specific implementation aspects should the policy address?
- How should the model policy achieve the intent of the proviso while allowing for local variation?
- How should the policy be communicated to parents, students, and the wider community?

## Digital Distractions Linked to Lower Academic Performance

A majority of teenagers in the United States [reported](#) becoming distracted when using digital devices in class, which correlates with their academic performance, according to results from the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The PISA questionnaire, administered by the OECD, asked 15-year-olds how often they were distracted by using digital devices (such as smartphones, websites, or apps) during their math lessons and by other students using those devices. Approximately two-thirds of U.S. students reported that they get distracted by using digital devices, and about 54% said they get distracted by other students using those resources. These figures are similar to global averages, where 65% of students reported being distracted by their own device use and 59% by others.

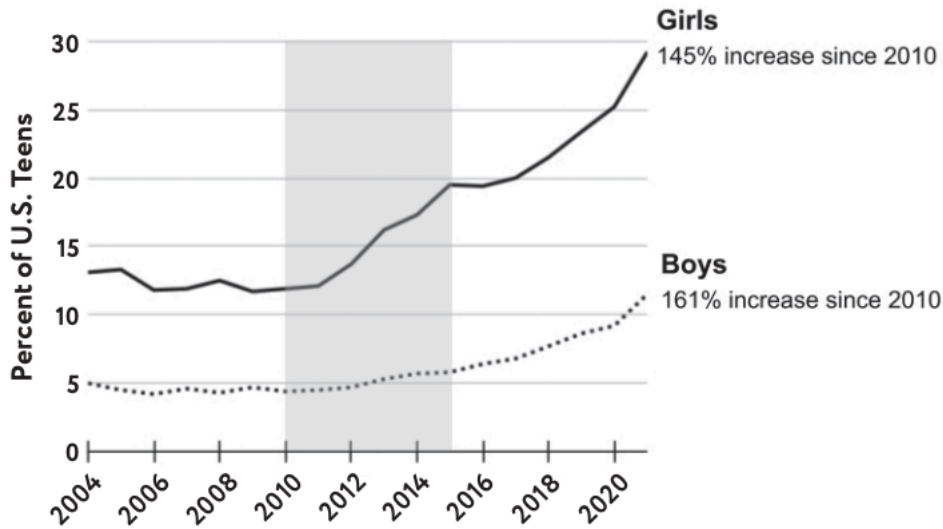
These distractions are strongly correlated with lower academic performance. On average, students who reported being distracted by others using digital devices in class scored 15 points lower in mathematics than those who reported minimal distractions.

## Beyond Grades: The Mental Health Impact of Smartphones

Jonathan Haidt, an American social psychologist, has extensively discussed the need for phone-free environments in schools. He emphasizes that due to the underdeveloped frontal cortex in teenagers, they are highly susceptible to distractions from smartphones, which negatively impacts their academic performance. Additionally, Haidt notes a significant increase in feelings of loneliness among teens since 2012, coinciding with the rise of smartphone and social media use, which has exacerbated focus issues, anxiety, and irritability.

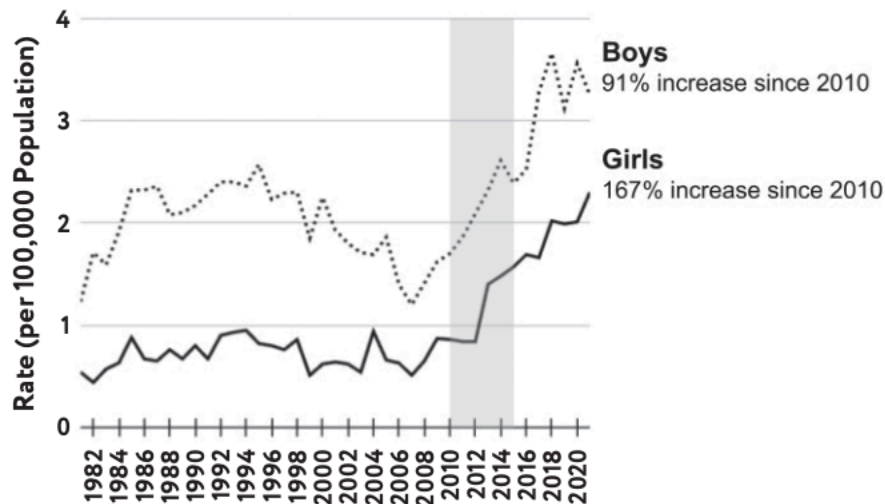
For further insight, please see Jonathan Haidt's book [The Anxious Generation](#) as well as this [video lecture](#) and [podcast interview](#). The following are some [alarming charts](#) from Haidt's research:

## Major Depression Among Teens



**Figure 1.1.** Percent of U.S. teens (ages 12–17) who had at least one major depressive episode in the past year, by self-report based on a symptom checklist. This was figure 7.1 in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, now updated with data beyond 2016. (Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)<sup>3</sup>

## Suicide Rates for Younger Adolescents



**Figure 1.5.** Suicide rates for U.S. adolescents, ages 10–14. (Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.)<sup>22</sup>

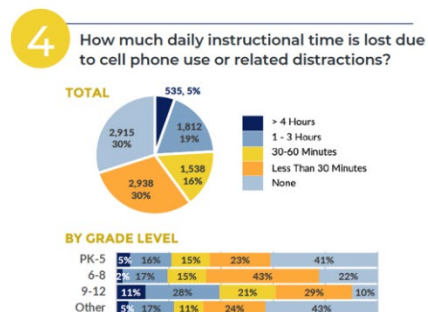
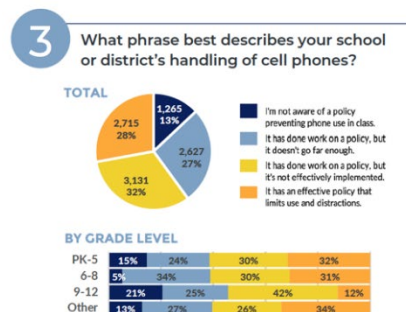
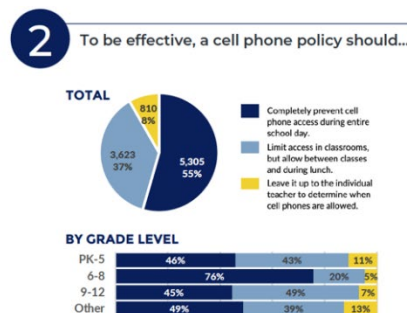
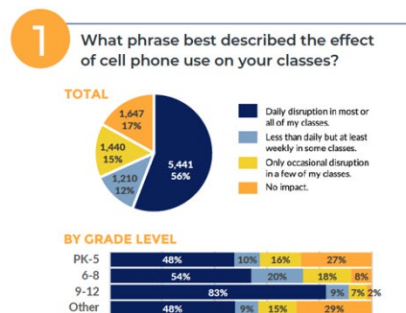
## South Carolina Teacher Survey on Cell Phone Use

The South Carolina Department of Education surveyed educators in South Carolina to gather insights on the impact of student cell phone use in classrooms. The 9,738 respondents included teachers from various grade levels. The [survey results](#) highlight the pressing need for comprehensive cell phone policies in schools.

### Key Findings:

- **Behavioral and Social Issues:** A significant number of teachers reported that cell phones contribute to behavioral issues and social problems among students. This includes distractions from learning, cheating, and cyberbullying.
- **Distraction from Learning:** Many teachers noted that cell phones are a major source of distraction during instructional time, leading to lost instructional minutes and reduced academic performance.
- **Support for a Complete Ban:** There was notable support among teachers for a complete ban on cell phones during the school day to mitigate these issues.
- **Inconsistent Enforcement:** Teachers highlighted challenges with enforcing existing cell phone policies consistently, indicating a need for clearer, statewide guidelines as well as essential support from administrators and parents.
- **Impact on Classroom Management:** The presence of cell phones has negatively affected classroom management and teacher morale, as managing cell phone use often disrupts the flow of teaching.
- **Need for Professional Development:** Educators expressed the need for more professional development and training on effective strategies to manage and integrate technology in the classroom.

### What Did They Say:



## How Other States and Districts Are Thinking About Cell Phone Policies

### Recent Developments:

- Florida, Ohio, Indiana, Alabama, and Virginia: These [states](#) have passed statewide bans on cell phones in classrooms to reduce distractions and improve student outcomes.
- California: The Los Angeles school board recently banned cell phone and social media use during the school day, while the California Governor has called for a statewide ban.
- Minnesota: Lawmakers approved a bill requiring schools to implement cell phone policies by March 2025. This move aims to address student mental health and behavior issues linked to smartphone use.
- New York City: The nation's largest school district announced plans to prohibit cell phone use during the school day, a major policy shift aimed at addressing the negative impact of social media on youth mental health. The policy is expected to be implemented by January 2025.

Case Study – Richardson ISD, Texas: In the 2022-2023 school year, Richardson ISD implemented a cell-phone free policy in several schools and utilized YONDR pouches in one school. The district collected behavior data and feedback from students, teachers, and parents, which can be viewed in a board meeting presentation available [online](#) (starting at 2:56:23 and lasting about a half hour from that point).

### South Carolina Proviso 1.103

To receive state funds allocated for State Aid to Classrooms, a school district shall implement a policy adopted by the State Board of Education that prohibits access to personal electronic communication devices by students during the school day. For purposes of this provision, a personal electronic communication device is considered to be a device not authorized for classroom use by a student, utilized to access the Internet, wi-fi, or cellular telephone signals.

### Conclusion

The widespread use of cell phones in schools poses significant challenges to maintaining a focused and productive learning environment. Research from the 2022 PISA assessment and feedback from South Carolina educators underscore the negative impacts of digital distractions on academic performance and student behavior.

Implementing robust cell phone policies can mitigate these issues by reducing distractions, supporting mental health, and fostering a positive school climate. Effective policies should balance statewide guidelines with local flexibility, ensure consistent enforcement, and include comprehensive communication strategies for parents, students, and the community.

Developing and enforcing thoughtful cell phone policies is essential for creating an environment conducive to learning. By addressing both academic and mental health concerns, schools can enhance student focus and well-being, ultimately supporting the success of all students.