
SENATOR FOR A DAY PROGRAM

SENATE BILL

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REFERRED TO SENATE COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Cell Phones in Public Schools

All public schools shall adopt policies and procedures to effectuate cell phone free campuses. School officials, administrators, and faculty are permitted to have cellular devices on campus.

The Department of Education shall conduct random yearly audits to determine if students are in possession of their cellular devices during school hours. If the Department finds a school out of compliance, they shall receive a deduction in their annual budget appropriation of \$1,000 per cell phone found in student possession.

This bill shall take effect immediately.

Schools are banning smartphones. Here's an argument for why they shouldn't — and what they should do instead.

By

Valerie Strauss

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This fall, when French students returned to school for the 2018-2019 academic year, many could not take their smartphones to class. The French Parliament over the summer passed legislation that banned students up to age 15 from taking the devices to school — or, at the very least, requiring that they be turned off in class. The goal, according to the [Agence France-Presse](#), was to try to break phone addiction and ensure that students were focusing on their schoolwork in class.

Such bans are increasingly being reported in schools around the world. In this post, a world-renowned educator takes a counterintuitive look at these actions and offers a different approach. He is Pasi Sahlberg, former director general at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and now a professor of education policy at the Gonski Institute for Education at Australia's University of New South Wales in Sydney.

Sahlberg has lived and worked in the United States, including several years teaching at Harvard University and leading education work at the World Bank. A former math and science teacher in junior high and high school, he is the author of the best-selling books, "[Finnish Lessons 2.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland](#)" and this year's "[FinnishED Leadership: Four big, inexpensive ideas to transform education.](#)"

These were the headlines of two op-eds published in Canadian daily newspapers in early September. This debate has already reached an international scale: Since 2012, most teenagers in rich countries have had access to smartphones.

In Kerry, Ireland, one school has restricted children's use of smartphones and social media, not only in school but also outside school hours, with the full support of parents. In Scotland, the Parliament has considered putting limits on student's cellphone use in schools. In July 2018, the French government banned all students under the age of 15 from using smartphones during school hours. The New South Wales Department of Education in Australia is carrying out a [review](#) into noneducational use of mobile devices in schools to see if they should follow France's lead.

Why is this issue being raised now? One reason is this: Smartphones are everywhere. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), 95 percent of teens in the United States have

access to smartphones, and half of them say they are online practically all the time, including at nights. The [Center for Media and Child Health](#) at Harvard Medical School estimates that teens spend more than nine hours every day consuming media through their mobile devices. Half of American teenagers say they are “addicted” to their smartphones.

Second, many teachers and parents believe that smartphones disturb children and harm their learning in school. In the Canadian province of Alberta, for example, 3 in 4 teachers believe that students’ ability to focus on educational tasks has decreased in the past five years. Finland’s slippage in international student assessments has happened at the same time as teenagers’ increased screen time. Similar trends of stagnated or declining student achievement have been noted in [many developed nations recently](#). Third, children’s rapidly declining mental health has led many parents and teachers to wonder what is going on in their lives. If you have any doubts that these concerns couldn’t be real, consider these alarming findings:

- San Diego State University professor Jean Twenge found that the number of American teenagers who feel joyless or useless jumped [33 percent between 2010 and 2015](#). In that same period, there was also a 50 percent increase in depressive symptoms among teens.
- Australian psychologist [Michael Carr-Gregg](#) stated that in Australia, 1 in 7 primary school and 1 in 4 secondary school children suffer mental-health issues.
- [The National Institute for Health and Welfare](#) in Finland estimates that 20 to 25 percent of youths suffered mental health problems in 2017, an all-time high.
- An [Alberta Teachers Association’s survey](#) showed that 85 to 90 percent of teachers think that the number of children with emotional, social and behavioral problems in their schools has increased in the past five years.
- Evidence from around the world suggests that children do not sleep enough, do not eat enough healthful food and do not engage in enough daily outdoor physical activity.

Though it isn’t clear that smartphones are the cause, it isn’t clear they aren’t. So out of an abundance of caution, should they be altogether banned in schools?

Not so fast, some would say. Although many researchers believe that children’s rapidly growing use of smartphones may contribute to declining mental health and inability to learn well in school, it is difficult to prove that screen time alone is the main cause. Blanket bans are rarely the most effective ways to fix human behavioral problems. Today’s children were born in a world where technology and digital gadgets were already a normal part of life. From an educational perspective, banning smartphones in schools would be an easy solution but not necessarily the smartest one.

Instead, we should teach children to live safe, responsible and healthful lives with and without their smartphones and other mobile devices. Education can be a powerful tool to teach children to exercise self-control and to live better lives. But schools can’t do this alone. “It takes a village to raise a child,” as the old African adage goes.

Here is how to get started:

1. Sleep more

More children than ever suffer from insufficient daily sleep. According to most pediatricians, school-age children (6 to 13 years old) need nine to 11 hours of sleep every night, and teenagers should sleep eight to 10 hours every night to function best. However, most teens do not get that much sleep. An American study recently found that in 2015, one-fourth of American [adolescents slept less than seven hours a night](#). The [National Sleep Foundation](#) says that only 15 percent of teens sleep at least 8.5 hours a night during school week. It is common for teens to [sleep with their smartphone](#) and check what has happened during the night before saying “Good morning” to their parents.

Solution: Teach children the importance of sleep. Work with parents to agree on the rules that shut mobile devices down two hours before bedtime and keep them away from bedrooms. Assign children an hour’s extra sleep as homework. Keep a log about how children sleep, and monitor the effects of sleep on their well-being.

2. Play more outside

Children play less than ever. The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) concluded that because parents spend less time with their children outdoors, children are more engaged with technology, and because schools expects students to do more and faster, children’s opportunities to play have decreased. In many schools, children don’t play anymore. In 2016, just 13 U.S. states had legislation mandating recess for all children during school days. Research that author William Doyle and I used in writing [“Let the Children Play”](#) led us to conclude that play is a dying human activity in many education systems around the world.

Solution: Make 15-minute hourly recess a basic right for all children in school. Use schoolyard and nature for recess, play and physical activity as often as possible. Teach parents about the power of free outdoor play and encourage them to spend more time with their children outdoors. Assign homework that includes playing with one another or with parents. Keep a record of how more play and physical activity affects children’s learning and well-being.

3. Spend less time with digital media

Children spend much more time daily with digital devices than before. Many of them sleep less than they watch digital screens. Children often learn these habits from their parents. A [recent British study](#) found that about 51 percent of infants 6 to 11 months old use a touch screen daily. According to [the Common Sense Media](#) 2015 survey, U.S. teenagers’ average daily media use excluding time spent for school or for homework in 2015 was nearly nine hours.

Solution: Teach children responsible and safe use of technology. Talk about technology with children and help them to find the best ways to limit smartphone use in school and at home. As a parent or teacher, be a role model of regular media diets to children and

keep smartphones away when they are not needed. Make technology a tool, not a treat for children in school and at home.

4. Read more books

Children read less than before, and so do adults. Half of children in the United States today [love or like reading books for fun](#), compared with 60 percent in 2010.

International reading literacy survey [PIRLS 2016](#) indicated a decline in recreational reading among Finnish children: 35 percent of fourth-graders read for pleasure. Boys read so little in Finland that 1 in 8 are functionally illiterate.

Solution: Make reading a habit. Advise parents to buy books and read them with their children. Read regularly and discuss what you read in school and at home. Let children choose what they want to read. Visit libraries and bookstores and meet with book authors. Read books you hold in your hands more than those you read on a screen.

5. Write letters to ones you love

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that [3 in 4 of 12th- and 8th-graders lack proficiency in writing](#). Snapchat cyber slang uses shortcuts, alternative words and symbols to convey thoughts in an electronic communication and writing. Ask any high school teacher or college professor for more evidence for the state of teenagers' writing skills.

Solution: Make writing a habit in school. Coach students in good writing and give them regular feedback. Use pen and paper alongside electronic tools. Write a letter by hand to your grandmother or someone you love once a week.

The key to success in life is self-control. Longitudinal research studies, like the Dunedin Study in New Zealand, have shown that learned self-control in childhood is the best predictor of success in adulthood. The main purpose of the five steps above is to help children to regulate their own behaviors. Thoughtful reading and productive writing require the ability to focus, concentrate and pay attention to these activities long enough.

Sufficient daily sleep and more outdoor play help children to do better. They could therefore be more important keys to improving student learning and well-being in school than haphazard education policies and innovation that have been common mandates in schools around the world.

5 Reasons to Ban Smartphones in School

Kevin Mathews

It's hard to separate a teenager from his or her phone, but it might be for his or her good — particularly during the school day. Here are five thought-provoking reasons schools should consider banning the devices from their classrooms:

1. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

According to a study conducted by researchers at the University of Texas and Louisiana State University, when schools forbid students from bringing their smartphones into the classroom, their grades quickly improve on the whole. Because students were subsequently more attentive in class, their test scores increased by an average of 6 percent.

We're not talking about younger kids, either. The results were most pronounced for high school students over 16 who — not coincidentally — are the teenagers most addicted to their cellphones. Taking away phones for students under 14 had less of an academic impact, seemingly because they spend less time using their phones during class anyway.

2. IT'S EVEN BETTER FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

While most students seemed to get an educational bump when they were without their cellphones in class, the difference was most pronounced among at-risk students. Students who live in poverty or attend special education classes or have subpar grades benefited approximately twice as much as their peers after ditching the technological distraction. Considering that at-risk kids need every advantage they can get, why not go for it?

By removing their phones from the classroom, it was the equivalent of adding an extra hour of class per week, a perk that most teachers could only dream of. Altogether, students lose almost a full week of school interacting with their phones rather than engaging in class.

3. CUTS DOWN ON SCREEN TIME

Scientists continue to warn about the dangers of kids spending so much time in front of a screen. It's normal for kids to spend about six hours per day in front of a screen — be it a computer, phone or television — and that's not even including any screen time that occurs at school.

One key way to ensure that students' eyes and minds receive a much-needed reprieve from so much screen staring is to minimize the amount that occurs at school. That starts with explicitly keeping smartphones from entering the classroom.

4. REDUCES CYBERBULLYING

Teens can be vicious with their online messages. While it's difficult enough to police that sort of mean behavior at night, at least some of that behavior can be reduced by preventing kids from using Twitter or Facebook during the school day. Kids should feel safe at school and not have to continually check their social media accounts to ensure that a peer isn't posting cruel or harassing messages.

While bullying is easier for teachers to spot — and subsequently intervene — when it plays out in real life, it's impossible to tell what students are communicating to each other silently on their phones.

5. THE EMERGENCY DEBATE

The main reason that parents advocate for their kids having phones in the classroom is that they want to be able to reach them in case of an emergency. In order for them to be able to receive that emergency message, however, they'd have to not only leave their phones on, but also check their phones constantly to ensure that they'd receive this message. Most likely, they'd be wading through a lot of distracting, non-emergency messages throughout the school day on the chance that something important might get sent.

The good thing about schools is that they have secretaries to facilitate emergency calls, so parents can call the school rather than the student. School schedules make it easy to locate a student at any point throughout the day, so an important message can be passed along with little effort.