

Daryn Weiner

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Term Paper: The Cellphone Ban in Schools

Among children and adolescents, the increased use of technology, particularly the increasing use of smartphones, has led to concerns about the effects on adolescents' cognitive, physical, and socioemotional development (Abrahamsson, 2024). Specifically, data from the U.S. shows that the percentage of eight-year-old children who own a smartphone increased from 11 percent to 31 percent between 2015 and 2021 (Gath et al., 2024). As more children gain access to their own smartphones, the more likely they are to bring their phones to school which poses challenges for teachers and school administrators. In a 2023 Pew Research Center survey, they found that 72% of U.S. high school teachers and a third of middle school teachers report that students being distracted by cellphones is a huge problem in the classroom (Roush, 2024). There are many negative consequences of children using smartphones in school. For instance, students will become distracted which causes a negative impact on their academic performance, there will be an increase in cyberbullying, and students will have less time connecting/socializing with their peers in-person. Thus, it's essential for teachers, school administrators, and political decision-makers to find a way to regulate phone usage in schools.

One negative impact of phone usage in schools is a decrease in academic performance. When students have access to smartphones in the classroom, they are more likely to become distracted by their phones which leads to a reduction in learning performance and lower exam grades (Böttger & Zierer, 2024). A study in the November 2019 *Computers and Education* concluded that students' attention was diverted every three to four minutes for over a minute at a time due to cellphone distractions (Roush, 2024). Hence, it's evident that a phone ban can aid

teachers and school administrators in improving academic performance by reducing distractions caused by cellphones. In a study completed by Beland and Murphy, they found that after enacting a phone ban, there was an improvement in student academic performance among lower-achieving students (King et al., 2024). Therefore, a phone ban can improve the academic performance of students by ensuring students pay attention in school and retain the information taught to them.

In addition, another negative impact of phone usage in schools is an increase in cyberbullying. When students have access to smartphones, they will in turn have access to various social media platforms in which they can create anonymous posts— making it very easy to bully others. According to a September 2024 KFF report, 90 percent of public schools reported incidents of cyberbullying, and in 2023, 16 percent of high school students reported that they had experienced cyberbullying (Roush, 2024). Thus, it's clear that cyberbullying is a huge issue in schools. Also, it's important to note that cyberbullying can occur in a more secretive manner which makes it more difficult for schools to monitor and control in comparison to offline bullying (Gath et al., 2024). One way teachers and school administrators could decrease the amount of cyberbullying that takes place in schools is by enacting a cellphone ban. A cellphone ban in schools would decrease the amount of time that students have access to their phones which will in turn help decrease the amount of cyberbullying that takes place.

Furthermore, cyberbullying has many negative effects on students' wellbeing overall. High smartphone usage is associated with increased loneliness, depression, social isolation, and an increased risk of suicide (Böttger & Zierer, 2024). Also, many studies have found a negative correlation between screen time and mental health issues (Abrahamsson, 2024). This means that an increase in the usage of smartphones among adolescents has a negative impact on

adolescents' mental health. Therefore, a cellphone ban would not only improve the academic performance among students, but also improve students' mental health and wellbeing.

Additionally, another negative impact of phone usage in schools is the decrease of connectedness among students. When students are able to utilize their smartphones in school, they are more likely to sit on their phones rather than communicate with their peers around them. According to a KFF report, students who excessively use cellphones often spend less time engaging with other individuals (Roush, 2024). In order to increase peer-to-peer interactions in schools, teachers and school administrators can implement a smartphone ban. One benefit of a smartphone ban in schools is that students would communicate and socially interact directly with their peers more often (Böttger & Zierer, 2024). Hence, a cellphone ban would increase students' connectedness with other students as well as with teachers.

However, there are positive effects of using smartphones in the classroom. As time goes on, technology continues to advance which allows educators to utilize technology in the classroom in order to teach students specific concepts in various ways. Educational research supports the idea that smartphones can enhance learning experiences when they are properly integrated into the curriculum by providing students with access to information and allowing teachers to utilize innovative teaching methods (Böttger & Zierer, 2024). Smartphone usage in the classroom has been associated with many benefits for youth such as improving motivation, supporting pedagogical innovation, and improving interactivity in the classroom (Gath et al., 2024). Another reason why smartphones are necessary in the classroom is that they provide access so that *all* students are able to actively engage in classroom activities. For instance, disabled students are able to use smartphones in the classroom in order to assist their learning (Böttger & Zierer, 2024). Additionally, the integration of new tools that technology offers may

broaden student perspectives, expose them to new ideas, and expand their opportunities to learn more about the world around them (Robards et al., 2025). In terms of social media, social media can be used in the classroom to enhance learning experiences, promote collaboration, and facilitate information sharing within the school community. Through social media, adolescents can connect with other individuals who are similar to them which helps them build a sense of community as well as a sense of identity (Robards et al., 2025). In addition, in today's world, there are many risks that come with an increase in social media use. In school, educators will be able to teach students the risk factors that come with advancements in technology such as potential scams. Thus, by using technology in the classroom, students will develop critical skills and strategies that they can use in order to successfully live with access to smartphones (Gath et al., 2024). Therefore, although the use of smartphones in the classroom can cause negative effects, there are also many positive effects of allowing students to use smartphones in the classroom.

Moreover, school administrators and political decision-makers must determine whether or not a phone ban is necessary. As shown earlier, there are many consequences of allowing students to have access to their phones during the school day. For instance, students will be distracted by their phones, there will be an increase in cyberbullying, and there will be a decrease in students' connectedness with their peers and teachers. However, as shown above, there are also various reasons why smartphones are useful in the classroom. For example, smartphones allow educators to teach content in unique ways, smartphones promote collaboration, social media can be used in the classroom and school community to spread important information, and technology can provide students with disabilities access to the learning. Hence, it's up to the

school administrators and political decision-makers to decide whether or not a phone ban will be beneficial to school communities.

In terms of the negative outcomes of enacting a smartphone ban in schools, students may retaliate with negative behaviors, the ban may be hard for teachers to uphold, and there may be some parent pushback. When a smartphone ban is limited to taking away students' devices, they may start to break rules which will distract from learning and cause negative consequences overall (Böttger & Zierer, 2024). Oftentimes, adolescents enjoy spending time on their phones, especially when they get their first phone. Thus, when students are randomly informed about a phone ban, they often are frustrated and confused which causes them to seek ways they will be able to bend/break the rules and bring their phones to class. In addition, classroom teachers may have a difficult time keeping the ban in place. According to teachers who have implemented the phone ban in their classrooms, they found that implementing and upholding the ban was more challenging than they had initially thought it would be, and they often found themselves making exceptions to the rules (Gath et al., 2024). For instance, when students are seen with their phones in the classroom, the phone ban protocol often requires teachers to write-up the student which takes time away from the instructional period or the teachers' planning time. Also, when parents find out that the school will be banning smartphones, they may become frustrated since they won't be able to easily contact their child during the school day. A survey conducted by the National Parents Union in 2024 found that about 70 percent of parents argued that cell phones should be banned during class time, but allowed during other times such as lunch and recess (Roush, 2024). However, in schools that have a complete phone ban in place, students won't have access to their phones during lunch and recess which can lead to parent pushback. Therefore, although teachers, school administrators, and political decision-makers may believe

that enacting a phone ban will improve students' education, there are many consequences that come with completely banning cellphones.

One solution is for schools to regulate phone usage in the classroom rather than completely banning phones from the school. As shown above, there are both positives and negatives of implementing a phone ban in schools. Hence, the solution will need to be somewhere in the middle. It's important for teachers and school administrators to provide some level of regulation so that students don't spend the whole class period on their phones while also using phones purposefully in the classroom to advance students' understanding of the content (Gath et al., 2024). In terms of the students behavior, they will likely be more willing to comply with not utilizing phones in the classroom and being able to use their phones during non-class time rather than never being able to use their phones throughout the entire school day. Therefore, instead of completely banning smartphones from schools, teachers, school administrators, and political decision-makers can create a plan to regulate phone usage in the classroom in order to improve academic performance, increase connectedness, and decrease cyberbullying.

All in all, it's evident that smartphones create many challenges in terms of student learning, but they can also lead to purposeful learning. In terms of challenges, when students have access to smartphones during class time, they are often distracted, they are less likely to interact with their peers, and the instances of cyberbullying increase. On the other hand, there are many benefits of using smartphones in class such as the fact that students can learn the content in different ways and they can collaborate with their peers using technology. Therefore, teachers, school administrators, and political decision-makers should devise a plan to regulate smartphone usage in schools such that phones aren't a distraction for students, but are allowed to be used in order to advance learning through the use of technology.

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