



April 3, 2025

Testimony in Support of a Bell-to-Bell Device-Free School Day in Ohio

Chairperson, Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Vineis and I am CEO of Unite for Safe Social Media of Columbus. I am here today to urge the adoption of a **bell-to-bell device-free school day**—a policy that would ensure students can learn, engage, and thrive without the constant distraction of personal electronic devices, (including **cell phones, smartwatches, tablets, and other non-school-issued devices.**) Research from the **Phone-Free Schools Movement, Fairplay, the Anxious Generation and leading educational studies** overwhelmingly supports amending HB 96's EDUCD13 to incorporate a distraction-free school day across the State. Here's why:

- 1. Personal Devices Are a Major Distraction**

Teachers across the country report that **phones, smartwatches, and other personal devices** disrupt learning. **72% of high school teachers** say phones are a significant distraction in class¹, and studies show that just the presence of a smartphone reduces students' ability to focus². If we want students to succeed, we must remove the distractions that compete for their attention.

- 2. Academic Performance Suffers**

Research shows that students who have access to devices during school score **a full letter grade lower** on exams³. Additionally, **35% of students admit to using devices to cheat**⁴. To foster academic integrity and achievement, we must create an environment where students can concentrate and retain information.

- 3. Social Media and Digital Platforms Are Designed to Be Addictive**

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are engineered to hijack students' attention, exploiting their developing brains. Expecting young people to self-regulate against billion-dollar algorithms is unrealistic. A **comprehensive device-free policy** ensures that school remains a place for learning—not for endless scrolling, texting, or gaming⁵.

- 4. Devices Undermine Social-Emotional Learning**

Schools aren't just for academics; they are where students learn essential life skills. Without devices, students **engage more with peers, develop communication skills, and build meaningful relationships**. When personal electronics are allowed—even outside of class—these opportunities are lost to screens⁶.

5. **Mental Health Is Declining Due to Excessive Device Use**

Research links high social media and screen use to **increased rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness**—especially among adolescents. **Students who spend more than three hours a day on social media are twice as likely to experience mental health issues**⁷. Removing personal devices from the school day allows students to be present, reducing stress and improving well-being.

6. **Devices Interfere with Executive Functioning**

Young people need to develop problem-solving, decision-making, and self-regulation skills. Constant access to devices **prevents them from learning independence** and resilience. By eliminating non-essential device use during the school day, we give students space to grow into capable, confident adults⁸.

7. **Devices Interfere with Executive Functioning**

Young people need to develop problem-solving, decision-making, and self-regulation skills. Constant access to devices **inhibits learning independence** and resilience. By eliminating non-essential device use during the school day, we give students space to grow into capable, confident adults⁸.

Employers are already struggling to recruit young people who lack essential cognitive and academic skills—an issue exacerbated by how this generation has grown up passively consuming information rather than actively engaging with it. With young people receiving **up to 300 notifications per day**, their ability to sustain focus, think critically, and manage complex tasks is being undermined. Schools must prioritize policies that strengthen, rather than weaken, these crucial life skills.

8. **Personal Devices Pose Serious Safety Risks**

In emergencies, **device use can create chaos—spreading misinformation, overwhelming emergency communication lines, and distracting students from critical safety instructions**. Additionally, cyberbullying, privacy violations, and exposure to harmful content all increase when students have unrestricted access to personal devices⁹. A bell-to-bell **device-free** policy enhances both physical and emotional safety.

9. **A Complete Device-Free Policy Supports the Whole Child**

Limiting device use only during class is **not enough**. Students still experience distractions, social withdrawal, and increased anxiety during breaks. A **full-day policy covering all personal electronic devices** allows them to be fully present in their education, friendships, and personal development—setting them up for success¹⁰.

Ohio has the opportunity to lead by ensuring that schools are environments of **focus, learning, and well-being**. Implementing a **bell-to-bell device-free policy** is a proven, research-backed solution that will **improve academic outcomes, strengthen social skills, and protect student mental health**. This policy must apply not just to cell phones but to **all personal electronic devices** to ensure a truly distraction-free learning environment except where devices are needed for medical or IEP reasons.

Many Ohio school systems have already made this healthy move. I urge you to take action and put students' best interests first by making all Ohio's schools **device-free from the first bell to the last**.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Footnotes

1. Pew Research: "72% of U.S. High School Teachers Say Cellphone Distraction is a Major Problem in the Classroom."
 2. "Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity."
 3. "Dividing Attention in the Classroom Reduces Exam Performance."
 4. "35% of Teens Admit to Using Cell Phones to Cheat."
 5. Common Sense Media: "Constant Companion: A Week in the Life of a Young Person's Smartphone Use."
 6. "Social Media and Youth Mental Health."
 7. "Children who spend more than three hours per day on social media are at double the risk of experiencing depression and anxiety."
 8. "Children's Developing Executive Function."
 9. National School Safety and Security Services: "Emergency Response Risks Related to Student Smartphone Use."
 10. Phone-Free Schools Movement & Fairplay Toolkit, 2024.
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