

Proponent Testimony of Dr. John Marschhausen, Superintendent of Dublin City Schools, Before the Ohio Senate Education Committee on Senate Bill 158.

Good afternoon, Chairman Brenner and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Dr. John Marschhausen. I am honored to submit written testimony as the Superintendent of the Dublin City Schools to offer my strong support for Senate Bill 158, which proposes a ban on cell phones in Ohio's K-12 schools.

As a district that has already implemented significant restrictions on cell phone usage, we have witnessed firsthand the positive impact of such policies on our students' learning environment, focus, and well-being. Our experience in Dublin City Schools provides compelling evidence that a statewide ban, as proposed in Senate Bill 158, would benefit all students across Ohio.

In Dublin, we have successfully implemented a complete ban on cell phone usage for students in grades K-8 throughout the school day. Furthermore, at the high school level, we have a policy prohibiting cell phone use in classrooms unless permitted explicitly by the teacher for instructional purposes. The results of these policies have been overwhelmingly positive.

Since implementing these restrictions, our elementary and middle school teachers have reported a significant decrease in classroom disruptions related to cell phones. Students are more engaged in lessons, participate more actively in discussions, and demonstrate improved focus on academic tasks. We have also observed a notable increase in positive social interactions among students during non-instructional time, such as recess and lunch, as they are less engrossed in their devices and more likely to interact with their peers face-to-face.

The classroom ban has fostered a more focused learning environment at the high school level. Teachers are no longer competing with the allure of social media notifications and text messages for their students' attention, allowing for deeper engagement with the curriculum and more productive class time.

Our experiences in Dublin City Schools align with a growing body of research highlighting the detrimental effects of cell phones on the learning environment. Studies have consistently shown that the mere presence of cell phones can be a significant distraction, even when not in active use. The constant temptation to check notifications and engage with social media fragments students' attention spans and hinders their ability to concentrate on academic material. This is particularly concerning given the critical developmental stages of K-12 students.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the significant mental health challenges posed by excessive social media use among school-aged children. Research indicates a strong correlation between heavy social media consumption and increased rates of anxiety, depression, and body image issues in adolescents. The constant exposure to curated online personas and the pressure to maintain a certain online image can be particularly damaging during these formative years. Limiting cell phone access during the school day can create a space where students are less exposed to these pressures and can focus on their academic and social-emotional growth in a more supportive and less digitally mediated environment.

Senate Bill 158 is not about depriving students of technology altogether. Instead, it is about strategically limiting a pervasive source of distraction and potential harm during the crucial hours dedicated to learning and development. Schools should be places where students can fully immerse themselves in their education, build meaningful in-person relationships, and develop the skills necessary to thrive in a technology-driven world without being constantly tethered to their personal devices.

The positive outcomes we have witnessed in Dublin City Schools and the compelling research on the negative impacts of cell phones and social media underscore the urgent need for a statewide policy. Passing Senate Bill 158 would send a clear message that Ohio prioritizes its students' academic success, mental well-being, and overall development.

Thank you for your time and consideration.