

SMARTPHONES IN SCHOOLS

Expert advice to develop and implement smartphone restriction policies



Research & Design

Understand and explain the need. Observe and gather feedback about phones on campus. How are phones being used? How do phones affect learning and socialization? What are the benefits of going phone-free? Stakeholders are more likely to support a policy they understand.

Be inclusive and address concerns. Co-designing the policy with parents and students is key. Provide opportunities to share opinions and ask questions. Give them a meaningful role in deciding how the policy will work.

Decide if/when students can use their phones. This could be in class for classwork; during breaks, recess, and lunch; before and after school; and not at all.

Determine how to handle other devices. It may be impractical to restrict all devices, especially laptops used for classwork. Smartwatches are particularly challenging. Some options include blocking social media, messaging platforms, and problematic websites on school wi-fi.

Designate a place for phones to be stored. Backpacks, designated places in the classroom, lockable pouches, and phone lockers are all options. Costs and effectiveness vary.

Create an enforcement plan and define consequences. Teachers, administrators, and ideally parents should agree on how to enforce the policy. Experts recommend avoiding consequences that interfere with learning or increase absenteeism.

Implement & Evaluate

Communicate and be prepared. Communicate the policy and expectations clearly and frequently. Students and parents may push back on rules and consequences or find ways to circumvent them.

Be consistent. Studies show that school-wide policies are better accepted and more effective. Enforcement shouldn't vary between classrooms or fall only to teachers. Follow through on consequences.

Monitor and adjust over time. Regularly collect feedback and evaluate the policy's cost, effectiveness, and impact. Use this information to iterate on the policy and make improvements. Identify supporters who can help champion the policy.

Supplement & Model

Prepare students to navigate the digital world. Digital citizenship and media literacy are essential skills for helping students critically evaluate information, practice responsible tech use, and build resilience against harms encountered online.

Be digital role models. Parents, caregivers, and educators can help students balance their tech use by modeling healthy digital boundaries. Adults have more influence than they might think!

Delay, delay, delay. Carefully consider if a child really needs or is ready for a smartphone. Delaying can be a challenge, so some parents are pledging to wait together.

RESOURCES FOR A DEEPER DIVE

Phone Use Policy Resources

[Toolkit for school administrators](#) to design phone-free policies from FairPlay and the PhoneFreeSchoolsMovement

[A guide for parents](#) who want to advocate for phone-free schools from Protect Young Eyes

[Tools for Action](#) for students, parents, teachers, and administrators from Away for the Day

[School Phone Policy and Education Program](#) from the American Academy of Pediatrics

[Examples of policies and consequences](#) from real elementary, middle, and high schools

Five levels of [smartphone restriction policies](#) from the author of *The Anxious Generation*

[UK Guidance on Mobile Phones in Schools](#) explains how to develop, implement, and maintain a phone policy

Media Literacy Resources

[Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy](#) brief from the Digital Wellness Lab

[Resource Library](#) by Media Literacy Now

[K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum](#) from Common Sense Education

[Media and Information Literacy](#) resources from UNESCO

[Technological Literacy Resources](#) from PBS Learning Media

[Guide to Media Literacy Education](#) from MediaLit

[Media Literacy Resources](#) from the California Department of Education