

March 25th, 2025

Chairman Heinert, members of the House Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Dena Venneman, and I serve as a High School Science Teacher and Department Chair at Dickinson Public Schools. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB2354.

I have been teaching for sixteen years. Thirteen of those have been at Dickinson High School. Over the past few years, student cell phone usage in my classroom has increased dramatically. When students have the opportunity to have their phones in class, their level of engagement drops significantly. If given the chance, many would be on their phones for the entire class period. This has become a daily battle, and some teachers have given up the fight. Unfortunately, I believe this is negatively impacting our youth by inhibiting their ability to learn effectively.

Over the years, we have tried numerous strategies to combat cell phone usage in the classroom. One of these approaches was to teach proper use of phones. I believe I currently collect phones at the beginning of class, but students often bring burner phones to bypass this policy. When phones are not collected, students sneak them out into the hallways, where they engage in inappropriate behavior such as texting friends to meet up in the bathroom to vape, coordinating fights, and recording altercations to post on social media.

Concerns about how smartphone usage affects student well-being and learning are shared by educators, parents, and policymakers. Even when turned off or placed on airplane mode, cell phones still present a significant distraction, reducing student engagement and focus. These devices offer access to texting, games, social media, and the Internet, all of which can negatively impact learning outcomes.

Here are some reasons why I believe we should prohibit cell phones in our school.

1. **Reduce Classroom Distractions** – Eliminating phones from the classroom will help students focus on their lessons rather than social media or text messages.
2. **Increase Student Engagement** – Without the lure of their phones, students are more likely to participate in classroom discussions and activities.
3. **Increase Academic Achievement** – Reduced distractions can lead to better comprehension and improved performance.
4. **Increase Face-to-Face Social Interactions** – Encouraging real-life conversations fosters better communication and social skills. When their phones

are out, they don't visit with each other. Kids used to love down time to visit with their friends. Now, it's quiet and kids do not interact with each other.

5. **Reduce Cyberbullying During the School Day** – Without phones, students have less opportunity to engage in harmful online behavior while at school.
6. **Inappropriate Use of Cameras and Social Media** – Students often take unauthorized photos or videos of staff and peers, which can lead to privacy violations and legal concerns.
7. **Security and Safety Concerns** – In emergency situations, students may focus on recording events rather than following safety protocols, leading to increased risks.

In conclusion, to foster a focused, safe, and productive learning environment, schools should enforce strict policies that limit cell phone use during school hours. Doing so will help minimize distractions, allow staff to focus on education rather than discipline, and prevent inappropriate social media behavior. By prioritizing student engagement and academic success, we can better prepare our youth for the future.

Dena Venneman  
Science Teacher at Dickinson High School  
dvenneman@dpschools.org