



Southwest Area CTE Academy

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Chairman Heinert, members of the House Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Aaron Anderson, and I serve as the Career and Technical Education Director at Southwest Area CTE Academy and Dickinson Public Schools. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB2354.

Two years ago, our CTE Center, made a significant investment to install cellphone lockboxes in each of our classrooms. This decision was not made lightly. We implemented this policy to fully engage students in our technical skills programming and to replicate the professional expectations that many employers place on their employees. Feedback from industry partners consistently highlights the significant loss of productivity due to personal cellphone use on the job, and we recognized similar challenges within our own classrooms and labs. When our partners see the use of the lockboxes in our spaces, they are overwhelmingly positive and say we are doing the right thing for our students.

Our policy requires students to place their personal devices into these lockable boxes upon entering the classroom. Prior to this, many of our instructors attempted solutions such as shoe caddies, out of site, or collection boxes but these methods raised concerns from students, parents and teachers regarding security and safety of the devices, as they were easily accessible. The installation of secure lockboxes ensured that devices were safely stored while allowing students to focus entirely on their coursework.

The financial commitment for this initiative was not insignificant. We invested approximately \$150 per classroom, equipping 20 classrooms at a total cost of nearly \$3,000. Fortunately, we were able to utilize donor funding to support these purchases. However, many of our other CTE Centers and partner schools do not have access to these financial resources, making it difficult for them to implement similar policies. Dickinson High School, our largest partner school, has not adopted a similar structure due to the significant cost of equipping classrooms with lockboxes or cell phone pouches.

I appreciate the language in SB2354 that allows schools to establish policies that work best for their unique needs while acknowledging the necessity of complying with IEPs, 504 plans, and other medical accommodations, which we currently do for students that always require cellphones in their possession. Additionally, I support the potential amendment to provide funding to help offset the costs of these devices, making implementation feasible for more schools. While Southwest Area CTE has invested in the lockboxes as a solution, it was not our

first choice, but what we chose based on available resources. Many schools would struggle to implement similar measures without financial assistance from the state.

Another important consideration when discussing cellphone policies is access to technology that supports learning. Dickinson Public Schools is a one-to-one district, providing every student with a Chromebook to support their education. At SWCTE we rely on these school-provided devices, as the use of technology is a critical component of our instruction. However, many of our partner schools in Southwest North Dakota do not provide students with personal devices. Because of this, we have had to invest thousands of dollars to purchase additional devices to ensure all students have the necessary tools for learning and still enforcing our cell phone expectations. While cellphone restrictions can be beneficial, many schools and classrooms allow students to use their phones as a learning tool and to enhance instruction while saving costs for their districts. Granting local schools, the authority to determine what works best for their specific situation is essential.

The impact of cellphone use extends beyond academic distractions. Dickinson High School has seen an increase in bullying, inappropriate communication, and cellphone-related incidents leading to physical altercations this school year. We have not observed similar behaviors migrating to our campus at their level, and I believe our cellphone policy has played a critical role in maintaining a focused and respectful learning environment.

While these lockboxes have provided a practical solution, we also recognize the challenges associated with their use. Some students bring secondary "burner" phones to bypass the policy, the increase presence of smart watches and there are instances of staff inconsistency in enforcement. Additionally, some students have expressed heightened anxiety due to the inability to communicate with friends and family during the school day. These are real concerns, but they are far outweighed by the benefits of minimizing distractions and fostering an environment that prepares students for the expectations of the workforce.

I strongly support SB2354 and the proposed amendment, which provides schools with the flexibility to implement cellphone policies that align with their needs while also considering the resources available. The potential for financial support to help schools invest in these solutions would be a significant step forward. I urge you to consider the positive impact that structured cellphone policies can have on student focus, classroom behavior, and overall academic success. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I welcome any questions you may have.

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