

National School Debate: Banning Cell Phones on Public School Campuses in America

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ABSTRACT

School systems in America face many critical challenges pertaining to regulating cell phone use by students in today's schools. School executives and classroom teachers face challenges daily relative to how to effectively deal with student's using cell phones. There are many drawbacks and benefits for cell phone use by students. The authors stress that school administrators and teachers must work cooperatively with school patrons to solve emerging concerns.

Introduction

Education Week reported July 12, 2006 article on the issue that arose in New York City when enforcement of the city's 18-year-old ban on cell phones was stepped up. Parents cited safety issues such as the long commutes on public transportation that many students must make and the difficulties in coordinating the schedules of several children. In New York, the parents' concerns about being unable to reach their children in the event of another terrorist attack are not easy to dismiss, but the logistics of collecting thousands of cell phones each day and then returning them again seem terribly difficult to manage. School officials in New York have concerns about teachers having to confront students in the classroom when the phones go off, as well as the distractions from the

noise of the cell phone. The banning of cell phones on public school campuses across America has become a national debate and strained school-community relations (Anonymous, 2006).

Over the past decade, there has been discussion in the American public schools about the usage of cell phones. Banning cell phones from school, which once seemed like a no-brainer, is no longer a simple black-and-white issue. The events of Columbine and 9/11 are what changed the policies in some states and communities or created serious discussion about changing them.

Purpose of Article

The purpose of this article is to provide a brief analysis of the opportunities, problems, and challenges in the battle of the cell phone. Across the United States, school systems are faced daily with many critical issues specifically related to regulating the use of cell phones. The authors provide a glimpse of the seriousness of the problem.

Cell Phone – A Definition

The following terms are defined in the literature. “Cell Phone” – refers to a telecommunication’s device that emits an audible signal, vibrates, displays a message, or otherwise summons or delivers a communication to the possessor. A “cellular telephone” is a portable, cordless communication devise that receives and delivers communication (Aldine ISD, 2007).

Parents Want to Control Cell Phone Use – Want Schools to Stay Out-of-It

At least one issue parents and children are on the same wave length. Both think banning cell phones in the classroom is an extreme measure. A recent survey by ACE*COM global provider of network business intelligence and advanced OSS solutions reveals that 95% of Americans parents prefer to be in control of their children’s cell phone use instead of having schools set the rules on cell phone behavior. The online survey conducted last August by tracks, polled 1,000 parents of children between the ages of 12 and 17 from across the United States (Mullen, 2006).

Scheduling and Safety Are Reasons Parents Want Children to Have Cell Phones

Scheduling and safety are the main reasons parents want their children to have access to cell phones during school hours. Of the parents polled: 99% want to be able to contact their children and have their children contact them via cell phone in an emergency. Also, 99% want their children to be able to contact them by cell phone if an unsafe situation arises on the way home to or from school. Furthermore, 84% want cell phone contact between themselves and their children during school hours if there are changes in schedules. The survey points out that 71% say their children need cell phone at school because school administrators won't allow them to use the office phone except in cases of illness or emergency (Mullen, 2006).

Students Overuse Text Messaging and Use of Cell Phone

Still parents aren't blind to the distractions cell phones can create in the classroom. According to the survey, 66% are concerned their children will overuse text messaging or cell phone instead of focusing on school or homework. Parents are also worried about their kids using mobile access to inappropriate content such as pornography (Mullen, 2006).

Cell Phone Provider Offers Control Capabilities

Over 30% of parents believed their children will be exposed to mobile bullying or harassment. Children being exposed to sexual predators via text messaging was 44%. Seventy-eight percent think it is reasonable to give a child a cell phone at the age of 14 or younger. Fifty-nine percent would provide a cell phone to a child under age of 12 if their cell phone provider offered easy-to-use parental control capabilities (Mullen, 2006).

School Boards Should Explore Alternatives to Bans on Cell Phones

Parents agree that school boards should explore alternatives to bans on cell phones. Eighty-six percent of parents would like their schools or school boards to work with cell phone providers to give students school access to cell phones with predetermined limitations. Seventy-five percent also agree that their cell phone providers should offer features that allows them to limit their children's cell phone use at school. "Clearly parents want to have the option of sending their kids to school with cell phones. Whether it's to ensure they know about football practice being cancelled or an emergency

situation, they want to keep the lines of communication open,” said Chris Couch, chief marketing officer for ACE*COM (Mullen, 2006).

To address these concerns, ACE*COM is offering Parent Patrol to mobile service providers as a tool for parents who want to take charge of their children cell phone use. With Parent Patrol, parents can set boundaries on numbers called, time of day, number of minutes used, and services accessed (e.g., text messaging), all as part of their family service bundle. Parents can limit their children’s mobile usage to specific hours, such as between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. They can block messaging during school hours. They can program exceptions, however, such as calls to or from parents. Calls to emergency service are never blocked. Restrictions can be customized for each child on the plan, and changes are easy to make via password-protected web pages (Mullen, 2006).

Banning Cell Phones from School Is No Longer A Simple Issue

Banning cell phones from school, which once seemed like a no-brainer, is no longer a simple black-and-white issue. Even in places where cell phones are not banned from school grounds, there are usually limits that are set; phones must be turned off during school hours or set to voice mail only. Some teachers have resorted to collecting cell phones at the beginning of the class and returning them at the end. Some just collect the ones that ring during class. One teacher even discovered a student, Chinese restaurant menu in hand, ordering lunch during class. Both the menu and the cell phone were confiscated (Anonymous, 2006).

A Cell Phone Can Be a Learning Tool

Teachers are also concerned because cell phones have gotten so small that they are now easy to conceal. On the plus side, many of those new features are being used by teachers to supplement learning for their students. For a school with a limited number of digital cameras and limited internet access in classrooms, cell phones help fill in the gaps, serving as mobile computers. With a cell phone in the classroom, a career and technical education teacher might be able to supervise a student’s phone interview for a possible internship or apprenticeship. For a student interested in information technology or telecommunication, a cell phone can certainly be a learning tool (Anonymous, 2006).

Because they are so focused on life skills, there are almost certainly family and consumer sciences teachers who are already teaching their students about proper cell phone etiquette. It is so important lesson in personal responsibility that many adults still need to learn. Teachers have been known to forget to silence their cell phone during class (Anonymous, 2006).

School Systems Are Not Consistent in Managing Cell Phone Use

Local school districts manage the problems with cell phone differently. A local school district's cell phone policy is cited in the following passages. The policy reads: Students are prohibited from possessing a paging device or cellular telephone while on school property or while attending a school-sponsored or school-related event on or off school property. School district personnel will confiscate the device or cellular telephone and dispose of the paging device or cellular telephone after having provided the students' parents and the company whose name and address or telephone number appear on the device, 30 days prior notice of its intent to dispose of that device. The notice shall include the serial number of the device or cellular telephone and may be made by telephone, telegraph, or in writing. The owner of the device or cellular telephone or the student's parent may recover the device or cellular telephone within the 30 day notice period and will be assessed a \$15.00 fee for its release payable in advance. The device or cellular telephone will be held at the school upon payment of the fee. "Paging device" means a telecommunication's device that emits an audible signal, vibrates, displays a message, or otherwise summons or delivers a communication to the possessor. A "cellular telephone" is a portable, cordless communication device that receives and delivers communication (Aldine ISD, 2007). This concludes a policy that has been approved by the local school board and strictly enforced by the school administrators. The ban on cell phones will be the topic of conversation for many parents, administrators, and school board members. Research will analyze the true worth of the cell phone on public school campuses in America.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, allowing students to have communication with their parents while attending public school will be a top priority in all communities across America. Educators and community leaders must find the compromising solution. The battle of the cell phone has been waged for the past decade. Cell phones are going to continue to present teachers with many problems; and with the occasional teachable moment (Anonymous, 2006). Many parents want their kids to have cell phones, especially in light of events such as terrorist attacks and the school shootings in 2006-2007. Parents want to know that their kids are safe. Research will continue to monitor the school community relations in dealing with the cell phone. One thing seems clear; cell phones are not going away soon, and when they do, it will be because they have been replaced by some new technology with its own benefits and drawbacks. In the meantime, school districts will have to wrestle with the issues of regulating their presence, and teachers will have to decide how to deal with them in the classroom.

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