

Session: 2/14/24
Testimony: HB 2641

Honorable Members of the House K-12 Education Committee,

I am Lindsay Cravens, 9-12 Principal at Stockton High School and I am Mandi Dobson, Counselor at Stockton High School.

We are testifying in regards to HB 2641 (An act concerning education; relating to school districts; requiring boards of education of school districts to adopt policies and procedures to prohibit students' use of privately owned electronic communication devices during school hours). We testify as strong proponents of this bill.

Stockton High School is currently a phone free school and has been since the 21-22 school year. Our current policy states that students may use personal cell phone and/or electronic devices on school grounds before and after the school day. Their use is prohibited from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. All devices are turned off in the school buildings and placed in their assigned YONDR bag.

Each week there is a rotation of 3 staff members that set up a station at the front door with the YONDR bags organized by grade level. These staff members greet students and ensure that each phone is turned off and placed in the YONDR bag. If a student does not have a phone his/her name is checked off on a sheet. Students are allowed to keep their YONDR bag with the phone in their possession at all times. The same 3 staff members set up the station at the end of the day for the students to open their YONDR bags and place them in their grade level drawer. This has become a place where teachers gather each morning and afternoon to greet and send off the students.

Within the last 3 years we have seen more face-to-face interaction among our students. There has been a definite decrease in distractions in the classroom. The first year we implemented this policy we had 10 cell phone infractions. This year we have had 0 to date. School telephones are available in the office for urgent/necessary phone calls. In an emergency, the YONDR bag can be cut open with regular scissors. Implementing phone-free policies in schools presents an opportunity to mitigate negative issues, such as heightened levels of anxiety and stress, and create an environment conducive to learning and development. By establishing clear expectations we can empower educators to reclaim control over the classroom dynamics and facilitate meaningful engagement among students.

I am new to Stockton this year but served as an administrator in a neighboring school district the last 5 years. We did not have a very strict cell phone policy. Students were allowed to use their phones between classes and during lunch. Students were expected to put phones away during class time which left the teachers responsible for enforcing the policy. Teachers are already overloaded with responsibility. Phone free schools eliminate that extra task for teachers. Over the years, at least one third of the discipline issues I handled each year involved cell phone

infractions. In the short time I have been in Stockton, I have noticed the students seem more relaxed and less anxious than the students at my previous district.

A current teacher and former student of Stockton High School, stated that “ I couldn’t imagine phones being allowed now that I am in the teacher seat. When I was in high school they were allowed and we spent way too much time on them. I can’t imagine teaching and looking over to see a student scrolling through instagram.”

A parent said that she “saw a decrease in the usage of their Disney Plus account as my child was watching movies on her phone when she didn’t have anything to do in class. She did start reading more books and became a lover of books when phones were taken away. I can’t say enough that this was by far one of the greatest things that could have happened in our school.”

One of our former substitute teachers, now a current full time teacher, mentioned that, “it’s just a blessing and if the kids need something researched they have their computers. I also remember the internet was so slow and many had trouble not being able to get on the wifi due to an overload of devices trying to access the wifi.”

A few of our senior students that were allowed to have phones with them as freshman state that there is less drama and distractions at school now. They feel students are better focused during the school day and it helps them with self discipline.

In closing, we support HB 2641, as we have witnessed the positive effects a phone free school environment has on students and their learning. We urge you to consider the implementation of phone free policies in our schools. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide support for HB 2641.