

Testimony in SUPPORT of [House Bill No. 2641](#)

Gretchen Shanahan (816.807.8558)

- Overland Park resident
- Parent of 2 teenagers that attend Shawnee Mission South High School
- Volunteer advocate for [Screen Time Action Network](#) at [Fairplay](#) whose mission is to protect childhood from commercialization and big tech. For the last 2 years I've served as a volunteer for the Screens In Schools work group and the Mental Health work group. [Screen Time Action Network](#) at [Fairplay](#) mission is to protect childhood from commercialization and big tech.
- I provide digital wellness presentations to businesses and non-profits who are interested in creating healthier habits for themselves and their members. I've seen a lot of industry-funded so-called safety and well-being presentations that are merely industry marketing campaigns. I do not receive any industry funding for my work. I am a do-gooder as you might say, because I want to help those who want to be their best selves.
- Last spring I provided public comment to the Kansas Board of Education to raise awareness of the BigTech industries manipulative, exploitive and harmful business model and their encroachment of using EdTech in schools as yet another profit pipeline.

I'd like to do some myth-busting regarding the idea that students should have all-day use of phones while in an educational setting....

1. I need to be able to reach my student.

Parents and guardians who need to contact their student during the school day may do so by calling the office administration number. The staff will deliver the message to your student. If it is not an emergency, they will wait until their current class is finished to pass along the message in order to not interrupt the student's learning and focus. It may sound old school, but it is an effective way to reduce the heavy distraction from giving educators the attention they deserve as well as respectfulness to peers.

Parents may need to alter a pick up time with their child. They can do this through the office just as parents did in previous times. Systems have changed but students developmental needs have not. Contacting your child during the school day distracts them from opportunities to engage with their peers and optimize time in person with their teachers and other support staff.

The school day is when students need to be able to focus and have opportunities to learn to interact with each other, build in person community, and engage teachers and trusted adult mentors. Study data shows that having a cellphone, even turned off in their backpack, decreases student test scores. A phone & social media free school gives students back joyful face to face opportunities.

## 2. I want my student to have the ability to use their phone in an emergency

Security experts from the police and military consistently say mobile phones and portable digital devices make children less safe. Phones can alert perpetrators/assailants of children's locations. The devices also distract children from listening to the security instructions by their teacher/staff member. Using digital devices during an emergency can also interfere with first responders' ability to conduct essential communications.

We had far less incidences of school threats when phones were in their proper place — away for the day

## 3. My child feels anxious without their phone and I need them to have access, like myself, for them to feel secure.

If a child feels anxious without their phone the school counselor will work with the student on strategies to manage their anxiety through supportive tools. If more support is needed the school team will speak with them about accessing more support outside of school with a physician, nurse practitioner, or licensed mental health specialist to help manage their anxiety. Multiple studies (independent, not commercial industry funded research) show that phones make anxiety and depression worse in children. See <https://screenstrong.org/phoneaddiction/> for more information.

Another good reason I do not send my own middle school kids to school with phones is that I know very well in the learning and development of teens it is of great importance that they are not tethered to parents (or anyone else for that

matter) throughout their day. Ask any pediatric mental health professional if they are seeing young adults (early 20s) failing to thrive and launch. This is something that has been on the rise pre-covid. By the time kids are in high school they need opportunity to make some mistakes and spread their wings just a little while still under parents roofs. School is a safe place for them to be free of worrisome or disorganized parents. The practice of being without ones phone is a great practice for reducing dependency, anxiety and disorganization. This is how we begin to create better habits for ourselves.

4. My child has a medical condition where the electronic device is needed such as for diabetes and seizure monitoring.

A licensed physician/nurse practitioner can write a note for accommodations when there is a medical need to carry a device for health concerns such as diabetes or seizure monitoring. Please note the device may not be used for communication/internet access during the school day for reasons beyond the medical need. The school nurse can work with your child to make sure they are supported.

5. This is a big burden for schools to take on, what about the role of parents?

There is a significantly larger burden schools dealing with behaviors and keeping students focused on learning than what is required in the front office relaying messages to students. Every change has a learning curve. Changes should be made in the best interest of our kids not our systems. Other things eventually fall into place when we do what is best for kids. Once this policy is in place a lot of burdens that are currently on schools are significantly decreased. There is less fighting, less in school bullying and a more overall positive atmosphere that is conducive for students to learn and thrive.

Schools have a huge microphone for the community in terms of health messaging and product endorsement. What schools endorse or do not endorse in terms of health practices is heard and seen by the community. If schools stop endorsing phones and harmful online products such as social media, video games and access to pornography, parents and the community will take this cue from schools.

Given the weight of the risks of significant harms vs the benefits of using a phone for classroom purposes, it has been demonstrated numerous times that the harms significantly outweigh the benefits. There are other ways of delivering instruction that do not pose risks for cyber-bullying, stress, anxiety, distraction and other harms.

A child that is shy and still developing social skills is more harmed by having a portable phone. If these are concerns you have please work with the school counselor who is a licensed professional and can support your child to help navigate socially in school. Phones and social media detract from opportunities to learn social skills.

6. Why can't teachers just be in charge of the class and collect the phones?

We know that all children need consistency. One policy for the entire school benefits all students. Additionally, it should not be the teacher's job to monitor phones. This takes away from their most important job of teaching and supporting students. Teachers today have had to take on far more than they should and making teachers responsible has not been effective.

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If you would like a presentation on how enormously profitable companies have resourced scientific research on persuasive design and psychologist in the design of their products. I'd love to share more info with you on this as well as the outrageous lobbying and deceptive marketing practices our kids have been subjected to due to societies failure to look behind the curtain and see this disregard for kids. I would be happy to offer my time to this cause.