



Should Schools Lock Away Students' Cell Phones?

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I'm probably about to date myself as an educator, but I remember when cell phones weren't an issue in school. I didn't have to worry about social media drama, fights being planned, TikTok dances recorded in the bathroom, or looking up answers on a cellular device. As more social media platforms entered the arena and more parents began purchasing cell phones for their children, cell phones became an issue school leaders had to tackle. I received my first cell phone summer of 2001, which was the summer before I started college at Purdue. Now, students are receiving cell phones in elementary school. Unlike the flip phone I had, where I

had to push a button on my phone multiple times to type a character to write words to text, phones today are like mini computers in kids' pockets. Those mini computers can cause issues.

As both a teacher and school administrator, I have seen firsthand the havoc they can cause. Some examples that pop to mind are students sharing a nude photo of another student, students arranging fights, students recording and posting fights online, and students cheating on tests. Each action had consequences for students and had ripple impacts on the school community.

However, a Texas school district has decided to lock phones away. Thorndale ISD will use Yondr, a program that has students put their phones in a pouch with magnetic locks. The students will keep possession of the pouch during the day, and students will be able to unlock the phones by waving them in front of a device at the end of the school day. The district countered that there are phones in classrooms for parents who complained their children need to be able to contact them during an emergency.

Believe it or not, 2015 was the first year I started carrying my cell phone in my pocket. Prior to 2015, I kept my phone in my purse. In 2015, I was a literacy coach, and my principal wanted to be able to reach me no matter where I was in the building. After realizing that he had texted my landline (because that is the number I give my employer), he asked if he could have my cell phone number. Over time, even I have been way too engaged in my cell phone. My lunch break ends, and I haven't even eaten lunch!

How this program goes in Texas might determine if other school districts across the country implement a similar cell phone plan. Even if students are not making poor choices on their cell phones, they can distract the most studious students. Some students do use their cell phones to take pictures of notes; however, those same students might never ever look back at those pictures to study. Even with this benefit or the usage of a phone calculator, the trouble phones have caused in the school setting has outweighed the benefits. With cyberbullying on the rise, school leaders must take action. Sometimes that action must be locking up students' phones.