



CELL PHONE-FREE EDUCATION CASE STUDY

HOPEWELL CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SUPERINTENDENT REGION 1

5	3,946	300	56
SCHOOLS	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	ADMINS

POLICY TYPE:

Hopewell City Public Schools has used a “pouch system” in its secondary schools since the start of the 2022-2023 school year to ensure its students are engaged and free to learn. Students who bring a cell phone to school are required to place their phone in a magnetically locked pouch at the start of the school day after going through the school’s security system. At the end of the day, the pouches are unlocked and phones become accessible at the end of the day. Each student is assigned a pouch for which they are responsible. If the pouch is lost or damaged, that student is responsible for replacing the pouch.

Students with medical conditions are assigned a specialized pouch that can be accessed throughout the day. Students are expected to use their phone to address any medical needs and place the phone in the pouch once finished.

ENFORCEMENT:

Hopewell City Public Schools focused on creating a plan for how to address students who bring phones into the school without a pouch. When a student is found with a cell phone unpouched, the device is immediately removed. The student is required to retrieve their phone from the office at the end of the school day. If a student is again found with a cell phone, the phone is immediately removed, and the student’s parent or guardian must pick up the device from the school. The third time a student is found with a phone, they are no longer permitted to bring their phone to school.

Early conversations during the initial planning period made it clear that parents were deeply concerned about being able to get in contact with their child during an emergency. Division leaders identified and implemented emergency procedures for unlocking the pouches should an emergency occur to necessitate immediate communication between students and their families, while also striving to balance the needs of law enforcement in such situations. All administrators, teachers, and staff are trained on this emergency procedure.



COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT:

The formal planning period for the division's cell phone policy began in the fall of 2021. The division brought its community together in a town hall to share ideas on restricting cell phone use in schools. The division researched options and investigated a locking cell phone pouch provider, Yondr, in the spring of 2022. Several virtual townhalls were held to give teachers, parents, and other stakeholders the opportunity to understand the importance of removing cell phones during the school day, what it meant for the upcoming school year, and to speak with representatives from Yondr. Hopewell's superintendent also held monthly conversations with her student advisory groups to understand students' perspectives on the matter, and more importantly to help them understand why it is critical to put a stop to phone use in schools and in the classroom.

Hopewell teachers were closely involved from the very beginning. There was an overwhelming amount of support amongst teachers, who have struggled for years with the endless problems that arise from unrestricted cell phone use in schools. The division took steps to ensure that they had early buy-in from all secondary educators.

To maintain the integrity of the learning environment, teachers understand that they are also expected to remain off their cell phones throughout the school day, ensuring there are no double standards.

In addition to town halls, meetings with students and families, and discussions with teachers, Hopewell also took steps to inform the community via its digital channels, sharing articles and information on its website and social platforms. Yondr also provides content, templated policies, and other materials offering valuable information for various audiences (parents, teachers, students).

TEACHER, PARENT, AND STUDENT RESPONSE

Teachers have long felt the frustration and endured the daily battles that cell phones cause in our schools and are extremely grateful for the policy that's in place today. Parents are also supportive of the policy.

TAKEAWAYS

Hopewell City Public Schools is an example of a community coming together to deliberately change the cell phone-addicted culture they were seeing within their own schools and embedded in schools across the nation. By using a pouch system, students are beginning to recognize their dependency and addiction to cell phones and the toll they are having on their mental health and education experience.

DIVISION LEADERS ADVISE OTHER SCHOOL DIVISIONS FOCUS ON:

Tracking and Measuring Results

At the beginning of the school year, benchmark important data points and assess the impact restricting cell phone use has had. For example, measuring discipline data has supported considerable reductions in bullying, fighting, and classroom disruptions since the implementation of the policy.

Understand That It's Not a One-Stop Solution

The pouches are a powerful step in the right direction, but they aren't foolproof. Students can figure out ways to damage the pouches and access their devices if they are determined to do so. What really makes a difference is the culture you create around cell phone use in schools and the **extent your administration and staff are willing to enforce and implement the guidelines.**