
Important Announcement Regarding Cell Phones

1 message

Isaac SeEVERS <contactlebanon@lebanonschools.org>
Reply-To: contactlebanon@lebanonschools.org

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Dear Lebanon City Schools Parents and Caregivers,

As we prepare for the much-anticipated return of our students, I wanted to take the opportunity to address a recent Board of Education decision regarding the use of cell phones in our buildings. First and foremost, I am a parent of two teenagers and a pre-teen who attend our schools. I know the struggle of parenting in the age of social media and cell phone dependency. Leadership and parenting often requires us to make difficult, and sometimes unpopular, decisions when we know that the decision is made in the best interest of our children. Just as we know that "because I said so" is not typically sufficient reasoning in parenting, this letter seeks to explain the rationale for our district's stance on cell phones and their use in our buildings.

Why is this Decision Being Made?

Last school year, Lebanon Junior High implemented a ban on cell phone use during school hours based on the request of staff and administration. As we reviewed student engagement and discipline from the previous year, it was clear that cell phone and social media use during school hours was contributing to a large percentage of student disciplinary issues and a decrease in student engagement inside the classroom. As a result of the change last school year, teachers noted students were more attentive and engaged during classes and less instructional time was lost. Student disciplinary cases related to cell phone misuse, such as recording altercations, cheating during tests, and cyber bullying, decreased as a result of the changes. The cell phone ban resulted in a cultural shift in the building as it helped create a more respectful environment.

This past May, a group of Lebanon High School staff members visited other schools in the region to learn from their colleagues in other high schools. An important takeaway from that visit was that one school building had significantly better student engagement and culture, and their staff pointed out that the change happened when they removed cell phones from the building. Our staff is on the front line of the daily interaction with students and they have noted that student engagement and attentiveness has decreased as cell phones have become more commonplace. This is particularly the case following the pandemic where students became more isolated and spent more time alone on their cell phones. At the request of a large percentage of our staff, we began to research policies and the impact of cell phones on school environments.

As these discussions were taking place internally last spring, the Ohio Legislature passed a law in June requiring all school districts to have a policy concerning cell phones prior to July 2025. Governor DeWine and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce released a model policy that is more stringent than our Lebanon High School policy. Their recommendations were made based on current research and they specifically stated, "cell phones distract students from classroom instruction, resulting in smaller learning gains and lower test scores. Increased cell phone use has led to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders in children."

When research confirms what we already know instinctively, we must act to align our policies and practices with the research. As the District administration considered this change, we decided that if this is the right decision to make, we should not put it off until July 2025. After careful consideration, we decided to restrict the use of cell phones during instructional time at LHS and at all times in all other buildings. The full board policy can be found [here](#).

This decision aligns with our district's mission of building a reflective, responsible, and respectful community, and it has been made with the best interests of our students at heart. The following reasons guided our decision-making process:

- **Responsibility to Reduce Distractions:** *We seek to remove distractions and reinforce our responsibility to create environments conducive for student learning.*

- Cell phones divert students' attention away from learning and meaningful interactions with peers and staff. By reducing the use of cell phones, we are working to create an environment where students can focus more effectively on learning.
- Research is clear that multitasking makes it harder for students to focus on important tasks. Attempting to multitask with cell phones threatens students' executive functioning, which is their ability to shift between situations, control their impulses, and stay organized.
- **Reflect on the Mental Health Impact:** *We support our mission of fostering reflection and self-awareness in our students.*
 - We are encouraging our students to develop responsible habits around technology, helping them manage its impact on their mental and emotional well-being.
 - The effects of constant notifications and prolonged social media engagement is well-documented, with clear connections to increased stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.
- **Respectful Social Interaction:** *We affirm our district's purposes to promote academic learning AND the development of strong, respectful relationships.*
 - We desire for our students to build stronger, face-to-face connections with their peers. This not only enhances their academic performance but also reinforces the importance of respect in their interactions with others.
 - As our society has become increasingly more connected virtually, research suggests that smartphones contribute to loneliness and less physical interaction due to increased screen time.

We understand that this adjustment may take time, but we believe it is a necessary step in ensuring our students' success and well-being. We are asking families to partner with us to support this important change in your homes. This policy shift will only be possible if parents and caregivers partner with the district. I have been asked how parents can help prepare their students for this change, and I have offered the following suggestions:

- We typically have students begin to get on the school schedule by going to bed earlier and waking up earlier to ease the transition. In the same way, we encourage you to establish 3-hour device-free times in the next week to help your children adjust.
- Review your child's screen time reports with them in a non-judgemental manner. Discuss the amount of time they are spending on social media, gaming, or YouTube. Work with them to establish reasonable goals for reducing their screen time.
- Adjust notification settings to reduce the stress and anxiety that comes from their fear of missing out or not responding immediately. Turning off notifications is an easy way to work toward untethering from the device.
- If you are looking for other resources, I would encourage you to check out [Common Sense Media Parent Tools](#), [A Wired Family](#), [The Anxious Generation](#), and [Wait Until 8th](#).

We will continue to engage in open dialogue on this important topic and share relevant research and resources with our community in an effort to support families and partner with you to positively impact our school and community culture. We welcome your thoughts and feedback as we move forward.

Onward Lebanon!



Isaac W. Seevers, Superintendent