MEMORANDUM

TO: Arlington School Board

FROM: School Health Advisory Board

DATE: January 4, 2023

SUBJECT: Draft report and recommendations

COMMITTEE CHAIR: Desiree Jaworski

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Dr. Laura Newton, APS Director of Student Services

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Amy Maclosky, Director of Food and Nutrition Services

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Supervisor, Health, Physical and Driver Education & Athletics

RECOMMENDATIONS:

**1. Background:** The School Health Advisory Board (SHAB) assists with the development of health policy in the school division and the evaluation of the status of school health, health education, the school environment, and health services.

The committee attendees unanimously decided this year that the students would greatly benefit socially, emotionally and have increased focus in the classroom if there was a written APS policy that mandates “off and away” for all personal electronic devices during school in every school. The committee has made this recommendation before and feels strongly that this would help our students with their mental health, physical well-being and classroom learning. Multiple studies have found that excessive screen use is associated with anxiety and depression. In addition, it makes the students less physically active. Eyes, necks, backs and hands have all been shown to be negatively impacted by excessive screen use. During class time there would be less distractions if there were no cell phones or other personal devices to look at.

**2. Recommendation:** System-wide implementation of the “Away for the Day” policy for student personal electronic devices as proposed in SHAB’s 2021 year-end report, appendix A.

* **Rationale for consideration:** The “Away for the Day” strategy has been applied with success at APS middle and elementary schools and generally has been well-received by parents and teachers. Many public schools have implemented this type of policy and have seen it create a more socially interactive student body. The students were happier and more focused during the day as well. [CBS news](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/school-cellphone-bans/) just recently reported that according to the Department of Education 77% of public schools now have this type of policy. It also quoted a teacher from Forest Hills School District in Michigan, which has banned phones since 2019 for its 9,000 students — even at lunch. Their high school social studies teacher Rick Kelbel said he believes every district can ban phones. "No one has to worry about missing out on what's going on in their cellphone because everyone's off of it," he said. "I think all schools need a guideline in place to make that happen."

The students spend a large amount of time at school learning by way of school issued devices. During breaks It would be healthier for the student emotionally and physically to not use a personal device. School should be a place where the students learn how to interact with each other face-to-face with eye contact and converse with each other without a device in their hand to distract them. They will be more inclined to move about during breaks if they are not drawn mentally into looking at their device. They will have an opportunity to make new friends if they don’t have their phone as their electronic “best friend”. School systems that have implemented a similar policy have had very positive results for the students and teachers and have found the student body to be very happy with the change in a very short time frame.

* **Proposed methods**: The administration would create the policy using the SHAB “Away for the Day” policy as it was created. The administration would then support principals and classroom teachers in implementing this school wide policy.
* **Budgetary Implications:** None additional. A system-wide policy will establish student and community expectations, thus reducing staff time needed to apply unique and individual strategies as well as reduce time spent redirecting students from their devices for teaching and learning.
* **Strategic Plan Alignment:** Supports core values of Integrity and Inclusivity (fostering direct person to person visual and verbal communication and participation that is available to persons of all means and backgrounds, and promoting a welcoming school environment) and Stewardship (by maximizing the unique benefits of in-person education and preparing students to be engaged citizens.) It also supports the strategic plan Student Well-Being goal – “Create an environment that fosters the growth of the whole child. APS will nurture all students’ intellectual, physical, mental, and social-emotional growth in healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments”. The “Away for the Day” policy gives the students the opportunity for the social-emotional growth that they are lacking due to the personal devices they currently use at school. It will help to establish a culture of physical, social, emotional, and mental health wellness.

**3. Appendix**

1. **Appendix A –** Away for the Day Personal Electronic Device Policy (Draft)

**Appendix A**

**Away for the Day Personal Electronic Device Policy (Draft)**

Prepared by APS School Health Advisory Board, Screen Use Subcommittee, December 2019

The Screen Use Subcommittee (SUS) of the School Health Advisory Board (SHAB) is recommending that Arlington Public Schools implement a personal electronic device “off and away for the day” policy for all students to minimize distractions and increase focus on academics. This policy would include cell phones, smart watches, non-school issued tablets and air pods. Headphones may only be used when requested and/or approved by a teacher for instructional purposes. Students receive school issued iPads or laptops to complete class assignments and homework, so there is no need for other devices at school for students to succeed.

Cell phone use during school hours is negatively affecting children both academically and emotionally according to current research[[1]](#footnote-1). Many studies link cell phone use among school-aged kids to depression, anxiety, lowered executive function, shortened attention span, lower academic scores,[[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3),[[4]](#footnote-4) and even suicide[[5]](#footnote-5).

School is a time to learn how to interact with each other and to develop good communication skills and interpersonal connections. Experts in childhood behavior believe it is very important for children to have eye-to-eye contact when talking to each other. This helps to create healthy social relationships. The constant distraction of playing games, being in chat groups, texting, photo taking, internet searches, and social media check-ins on cell phones is detrimental to the social dynamic of the school community[[6]](#footnote-6),[[7]](#footnote-7).

This policy will enable students to be more mindful and engaged in class. Cell phones, even when not in use, distract students and teachers alike in the classroom when they buzz or ring. Studies have shown that it can take the brain up to 10 minutes after this distraction to refocus on the subject that is being taught[[8]](#footnote-8). Eliminating cell phones and other personal electronic devices during the school day will ensure that students are learning to their fullest potential. Schools across the country are implementing similar policies and have found the results to be very positive. Testing scores have improved, and students are happier and more engaged.

The “off and away for the day” policy will also mean that students will not be allowed to use cell phones on school buses during field trips or in extended day. Extended day will have a phone available for student use when necessary.

Cell phone use will be permitted on school buses after school with earbuds so they do not disturb other children. Children should not access or share inappropriate content. If a student does go to sites that contain content that is offensive and shows it to others on the bus the student and the parents/guardians will be notified.

Parents and students will still be able to contact each other during the day when needed. There are phones in every classroom so that the main office can contact the student if a parent calls, and the student can call the parent when they need to. The office and classroom phones will be available if other phone calls need to be made or received because of work, childcare, or other emergencies.

Exemptions to the policy will be made by the school administration for students with special circumstances. Students in this case must keep the cell phone out of sight and may not bring it out for any reason during the school day except to send or receive a text message or phone call, or use an approved app.

**The recommended “off and away for the day” policy will be as follows:**

There is to be no use of personal electronic devices once students enter school. All electronic devices brought to school must be turned off and stored in the student’s locker. In the event a locker is not available, the device must be turned off and stored in a backpack. The student is responsible for making sure no one else is able to open the locker. Arlington Public School administration is not responsible for the loss of any device brought to school by the student. It is important for students to never share their locker combination with another student. Students with special needs who cannot properly lock their locker may store their cell phone in an approved alternate location.

If a student chooses to use an electronic device, staff members will confiscate the device and bring it to the main office to be secured until the end of the school day. Consequences for unauthorized use of electronic devices are as follows:

* 1st time:  Student may retrieve his/her device at the end of the school day from the main office with a reminder of this policy.
* 2nd time:  Student may retrieve his/her device at the end of the school day from the main office with a reminder of this policy.  An email will be sent home to the student’s parent/guardian as a courtesy notification.
* 3rd time:  The student’s parent/guardian will need to pick up the device from the main office.  Please note that after the second infraction, the device will only be released to the student’s parent/guardian.
* Subsequent infractions:  The student’s parent/guardian will need to pick up the device from the main office, as well as have a conference with the student’s administrator.  A consequence will be assigned.

1. <https://www.awayfortheday.org/research#research-emotional> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ### THE IMPACT OF MOBILE PHONE USAGE ON STUDENT LEARNING

   Ref: Kuznekoff et al. (2013) Communication Education v. 62, 233-252 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03634523.2013.767917> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. NON-ACADEMIC INTERNET USE IN THE CLASSROOM IS NEGATIVELY RELATED TO CLASSROOM LEARNING REGARDLESS OF INTELLECTUAL ABILITY

   Ref: Ravizza et al (2014), Computers & Education v.78, 109-114 <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131514001298> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF OFF-TASK MULTI-TASKING WITH TECHNOLOGY ON REAL-TIME CLASSROOM LEARNING. Ref: Wood et al.  (2012) Computers & Education, 58(1), 365–374 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131511002077> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Jean M. Twenge, PhD. *iGen*. New York: Atria Books (an imprint of Simon & Schuster), 2017.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Decreases in Psychological Well-Being Among American Adolescents After 2012 and Links to Screen Time During the Rise of Smartphone Technology

   Ref: Jean Twenge et al (2018) Emotion <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2018-02758-001> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. R. Dwyer, K. Kushlev, E. Dunn Smartphone use undermines enjoyment of face-to-face social interactions [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. J. Exp. Soc. Psychol., 78 (2018), pp. 233-239 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103117301737>

   The Distracting Effects of a Ringing Cell Phone: An Investigation of the Laboratory and the Classroom Setting

   [Jill T. Shelton](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Shelton%20JT%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=21234286), [Emily M. Elliott](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Elliott%20EM%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=21234286), [Sharon D. Lynn](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Lynn%20SD%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=21234286), and [Amanda L. Exner](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Exner%20AL%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=21234286)

   <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3018855/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)