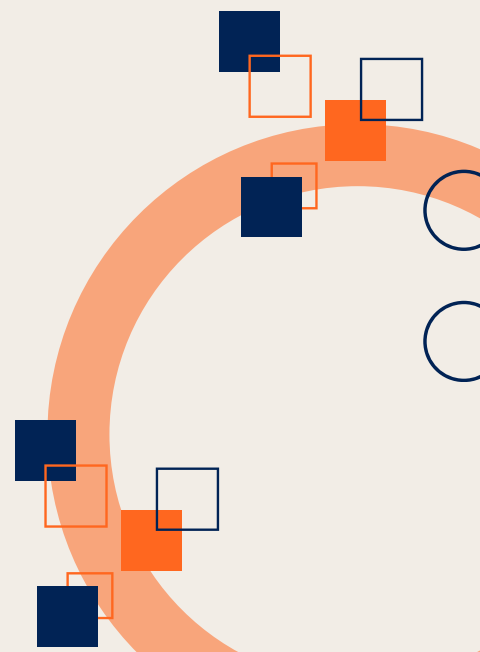


WHAT STUDENTS REALLY WANT FROM PHONE POLICIES

**Student perspectives on
phone bans**



STUDENTS DESERVE MORE TRUST WITH THEIR PHONES

Phone ban policies have spread like wildfire across the country, becoming one of the fastest-adopted mandates in recent education history. But student voices have not been included in this policy making process, and as a result, phone bans are punitive and start with mistrust.

Most schools have resorted to two main approaches: magnetic locking pouches or good-old-fashioned confiscation. But both approaches put a lot of pressure on teachers to police phone use and stress on students who want healthy boundaries that also keep them safe. And for the most part, students are not involved in the policy making process.

We spoke with several students in California, one of many states in the heat of this [conversation](#). When we asked students about the bans, their responses were not what you might expect. They didn't demand the right to scroll TikTok during class. Instead, they showed a surprising amount of maturity, a deep concern for safety, and a desire for a "middle ground" solution that schools seem to be ignoring.



STUDENTS ACTUALLY LIKE DISTRACTION-FREE CLASS TIME

The most surprising takeaway from my conversations was that every student I spoke to supported the idea of phone restrictions during class. They didn't view school as a place for social media; they viewed it as a place to focus.

"At first it sucked, but then you don't even think about it during class," said Nelson, a high school senior. He admitted that while transitioning to a phone-free class environment was initially challenging, it quickly became a habit and boosted his productivity.

Rosario, another student, shared that her classmates are generally nonchalant about putting their devices away. "For the most part, everyone puts their phone up because it's not that big of a deal," she said. Julie, a freshman, shared that she mostly likes her school's no-phone policy because "it allows us to have full attention in class."

The students I spoke with possess a level of self-awareness that adults often fail to credit them with, and this feedback made it clear that students are happy to meet schools halfway. They know reducing screen time is good for them. They just want a little help making that happen.





Safety is Non-negotiable

While students are on board with focusing during class, their opinions shifted when it came to physical locking systems like magnetic phone pouches. Here, the students' primary concern was their safety.

In the wake of school shootings and ICE raids, students view their phones as a lifeline. And the anxiety of being physically separated from that lifeline is real.

"When a [weapon-related] lockdown happened in my middle school, I started crying and I called my dad and my mom," Julie recalled. "I was like, 'I'm going to die.' If I didn't have my phone, I would have been so frustrated if I couldn't talk to my family before something bad happens."



From the student perspective, policies that require phones to be locked in inaccessible pouches don't account for the scary realities of American schooling.

"I don't want to hyper-fixate on the 'what ifs,' but those 'what ifs' are very real situations that students have gone through," Rosario explained. "You have to put them into serious consideration."

Students are all for focused class time, but want the ability to communicate in case of an emergency.

THE PROBLEM

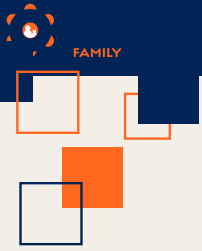
with all day lock-ups

Students also expressed wanting access to their phones during passing periods and lunch instead of having to lock it away all day. They view these times as their own: moments for social coordination and decompression.



Rosario made a fair point about bell-to-bell phone bans: “I feel like that’s a little bit unreasonable because if you’re going to work, during break and lunch, it’s up to you what you do during your free time.”

Bell-to-bell lockup policies don’t actually teach students how to use their phones in a healthy way. And when schools don’t trust students to handle a device during their breaks, they miss a critical educational opportunity. We should be teaching students how to coexist with technology responsibly, not just how to exist without it.



A Technological Middle Ground?

If pouches are too extreme, but unrestricted phone access is too distracting, what should schools do?

I asked the students if they would be open to a technology-based solution, like software that limits access to distracting apps (e.g. social media) during class hours but keeps the phone physically with the student and leaves communication lines open for emergencies.

The response was overwhelmingly positive.



Christina, a middle school student who has to lock up her phone in a magnetic pouch for the whole school day said, "That's a really good idea. Being 100% honest here, it would be a good way to go to school and feel more calm but not see TikTok."

Julie agreed, noting that such a system would "take away all the distractions but still give you the opportunity to communicate and feel safe if bad things happen."

A software-based approach represented a healthy compromise: it enforces the boundary schools need for learning while maintaining student safety and trust at the center.





Trusting Students

As schools across the country implement phone bans, we must ask ourselves what message we are sending our students. Are we telling them that we think they are incapable of self control? Or are we showing them that we trust them and will provide the scaffolding they need to manage their digital lives effectively?

Students want distraction-free schools and want help focusing. But they also want to be trusted and to feel safe. Perhaps technology, the very thing we are trying to limit, can be the solution to give them both.

Want to join our movement? Let's talk.

