

SCREENTIME IN SCHOOLS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,
ELEMENTARY, AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
WORKFORCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FIRST SESSION

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SCREENTIME IN SCHOOLS

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

House of Representatives,

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY,
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:18 a.m., in Room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Kevin Kiley (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Kiley, Owens, Moylan, Mackenzie, Harris, Messmer, Walberg, Bonamici, Lee, Adams, Ansari, Stefanik, and Scott.

Staff present: Vlad Cerga, Director of Information Technology; Dara Gardner, Einstein Fellow; Wilson; Amy Raaf Jones, Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Libby Kearns, Press Assistant; Isaiah Knox, Legislative Assistant; Campbell Ladd, Clerk; R.J. Laukitis, Staff Director; Danny Marca, Director of Information Technology; R.J. Martin, Professional Staff Member; Audra McGeorge, Communications Director; Eli Mitchell, Legislative Assistant; Alexis Morgan, Intern; Ethan Pann, Deputy Press Secretary and Digital Director; Ellison Powell, Intern; Kane Riddell, Staff Assistant; Carl Rifino, Intern; Sara Robertson, Press Secretary; Brad Thomas, Deputy Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Tierney Ambrose, Intern; Anders Vendt, Legislative Assistant; Ann Vogel, Director of Operations; Ali Watson, Director of Member Services; James Whittaker, General Counsel; Samantha Wright, Intern; Ellie Berenson, Minority Press Assistant; Sayda Bir, Minority Intern; Nichole Dumlao, Minority APAICS Intern; Rashage Green, Minority Director of Education Policy & Counsel; Caroline Guo, Minority Intern; Andres Hernandez, Minority CHCI Fellow; Christian Haines, Minority General Counsel; Patrick Jo, Minority Intern; Emanuel Kimble, Minority Professional Staff; Samantha Wilkerson, Minority Professional Staff; Raiyana Malone, Minority Press Secretary; Marie McGrew, Minority Press Assistant; Eleazar Padilla, Minority Staff Assistant; Veronique Pluviose, Minority Staff Director; Banyon Vassar, Minority Director of IT.

Chairman KILEY. The Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education will come to order. I note that a quorum is present. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to call a recess at any time. I am actually going to follow the Ranking Member's example here and surrender both of my devices, set maybe the sort of example that we want to set for our students.

Good morning and welcome to the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education. This Committee has several Members who have been classroom teachers ourselves, myself included, but what a teacher faces today is in many ways unrecognizable from the classrooms that we all sat in, or even the ones that we taught in.

Screens are now pervasive, mostly in the form of student's cell phones drawing attention away from interactive discussion and instruction. Too often students spend most of their days with their heads down, thumbs scrolling, and only a fraction interacting with increasingly discouraged teachers. Students spend lunch sitting side by side, but interacting with their phones, rather than their peers.

We know that thoughtful, focused use of education technology can be tremendously beneficial for students. For example, students can use sensors and apps to gather evidence for investigations and do research faster than ever. This very Subcommittee, just a couple months ago, examined the use of AI and its really unlimited potential to increase student achievement.

I have been a huge advocate for the potential that AI offers in our classrooms. We talked about this to some extent at that hearing, research shows that there are down sides here when it comes to fixating and excessive use of specific devices.

Research shows that students are spending an average of 90 minutes per school day on their own devices, during instructional time. This contributes to the 8 and a half hours a day the average high schooler spends on his or her cell phone. I mean think about that, 8 and a half hours per day on their phone. These are devices, and we are thinking about smart phones here that did not exist 20 years ago, and so you have that number going from zero to 8 and a half hours within the span of a generation.

Teachers report that students hurry very sloppily through assignments, so they can go back to their social media posts, or YouTube channels, not engaging in the learning process. Students starting in elementary school huddle around phones where students share videos with their friends who do not have phones, sometimes exposing children to inappropriate content.

Cyber bullying, originating in schools, is contributing to mental health issues among our youth, and cheating has become rampant. We must ask ourselves why student achievement has declined in our country, and why, for example, only 28 percent of our eighth graders are proficient in math, and only 30 percent are proficient in reading. We have been asking ourselves these questions, I think there are many causes, but this is certainly one of them.

It is not just personal cell phones that can cause problems in our classrooms. School issued devices are over utilized, with middle schoolers spending almost two and a half hours a day on school issued screens, creating eerily quiet classrooms with little student-to-student or teacher-to-student interaction.

Parents in my district agree that screen time needs to be limited. A recent survey revealed that 40 percent of parents believed that screen time should be limited to academic use only, used strictly for academic work, and personal devices should stay off. Another

34 percent of parents surveyed said there should be structured device periods where students can use any device during a set time.

The rest of the day being screen free. Less than 3 percent of the parents we surveyed said students should have full access to devices throughout the school day, so this is an issue where parents, I think, are really moving toward the view that we need to have some limitations at least in place.

How can we balance helpful time on screens with strategies that have been proven through brain research to increase comprehension? Strategies like reading from paper and writing notes by hand could help, and rich, Socratic conversations that allows students to hear a variety of perspectives, not just a feed based on algorithms can also help. We need to listen to what the science is telling us about how screens affect brain development.

Not only does too much screen time affect students but having to continually compete with cell phones for students' attention contributes heavily to teacher stress and burnout. Studies show that almost half the cell phone policies that do exist are not enforced by school leaders, leading to struggles between teachers and non-compliant students.

The No. 1 issue causing teacher dissatisfaction is student behavior and discipline, 55 percent of teachers are thinking of leaving the profession earlier than they had planned. If we want to keep good teachers in the classroom, we should start by supporting efforts to increase classroom engagement.

Today we want to hear about the status of State and district-based restrictions and limitations on phones, and how effective those restrictions are. We also want to highlight research-based practices of schools that have struck a balance between technology and interactive teaching in the interest of advancing student learning to create curious learners and productive citizens.

Teachers and parents believe this is a community problem that can be solved by having a culture that balances the use of technology in the classroom with proven methods of instruction that encourage active student engagement, good mental health, good relationships and quality instruction.

We on the Committee agree, and we look forward to hearing what steps are being taken to stem the tide of screens overtaking our classrooms. With that, I will yield to the Ranking Member for an opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Kiley follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. KEVIN KILEY, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY, AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Good morning, and welcome to the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education.

This Committee has several Members who have been classroom educators, myself included. What a teacher faces today is unrecognizable from the classrooms that we sat in or even taught in. Screens are pervasive, mostly in the form of student cell phones, drawing attention away from interactive discussion and instruction. Too often, students spend most of their days with their heads down, thumbs scrolling, and only a fraction interacting with increasingly discouraged teachers. Students spend lunch sitting side-by-side but interacting with their phones rather than their peers.

We know that thoughtful, focused use of educational technology can be beneficial for students. For example, students can use sensors and apps to gather evidence for investigations and do research faster than ever.

This very Subcommittee has examined the use of AI as a targeted tool to increase student achievement. Research shows that students are spending an average of 90 minutes per school day on their own devices during instructional time. This contributes to the eight and a half hours a day the average high schooler spends on his or her cell phone.

Teachers report that students hurry sloppily through assignments so they can go back to their social media posts or YouTube channel, not engaging in the learning process. Students, starting in elementary school, huddle around phones where students share videos with their friends who do not have cell phones, sometimes exposing children to inappropriate content. Cyberbullying originating at school is contributing to mental health issues among our youth. Cheating has become rampant. We ask ourselves why student achievement has declined in our country, and why, for example, only 28 percent of our eighth graders are proficient in math and only 30 percent are proficient in reading. I think we have found one of the reasons.

It is not just personal cell phones that can cause problems in our classrooms. School issued devices are overutilized, with middle schoolers spending almost two and a half hours a day on school issued screens, creating eerily quiet classrooms with little student-to-student or teacher-to-student interaction.

Parents in my district agree that screen time should be monitored. A recent survey revealed that 40 percent of parents believe that screen time should be limited to academic use only, used strictly for academic work, and personal devices stay off. Thirty-four percent of parents surveyed said there should be structured device periods, where students can use any device during a set time. The rest of the day would be screen-free. Less than 3 percent of parents said students should have full access to devices during the school day.

How can we balance helpful time on screens with strategies that have been proven through brain research to increase comprehension?

Strategies like reading from paper and writing notes by hand can help. Rich Socratic conversation that allows students to hear a variety of perspectives, not just a feed based on their algorithms, would also help. We need to listen to what science tells us about how screens affect brain development.

Not only does too much screen time affect students, but having to continually compete with cell phones for students' attention contributes heavily to teacher stress and burnout. Studies show that almost half the cell phone policies that do exist are not enforced by school leaders, leading to power struggles between teachers and non-compliant students. The number one issue causing teacher dissatisfaction is student behavior and discipline. Fifty-five percent are thinking about leaving the profession earlier than had planned. If we want to keep good teachers in the classroom, we should start by supporting efforts to increase classroom engagement.

Today we want to hear about the status of state and district-based restrictions on cell phones and those restrictions' effectiveness. We also want to highlight research-based practices of schools that have struck a balance between technology and interactive teaching in the interest of advancing student learning to create curious learners and productive citizens.

Teachers and parents believe this is a community problem that can be solved by having a culture that balances the use of technology in the classroom with proven methods of instruction that encourage active student engagement, good mental health, good relationships, and good instruction. We on the Committee agree, and we look forward to hearing what steps are being taken to stem the tide of screens overtaking our classrooms.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate your time and your expertise. We all want students to grow up and learn in a safe and healthy environment, where they are protected from harm and equipped with the tools and knowledge they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Now that cell phones, laptops and tablets have become an integral part of our everyday lives, schools need to be equipped with the latest technology and high-speed internet. Being fluent in technology is a necessity, not a luxury, especially when students will be entering the workforce in a modern, global economy.

Access to, and use of technology must come with guardrails. Research shows that unrestricted or unmonitored screen time is likely

to have a negative consequence on student's mental health, as well as their learning and development.

I noted the part in the testimony, in the written testimony, where there was a study of students studying on their laptops, and it took them 6 minutes to go from studying to scrolling.

I told that to my son who is a high school teacher, and he said I am surprised it is that much. Most states, including my home State of Oregon, are working at the State and district level to implement comprehensive policies on this issue.

For example, Portland Public Schools recently adopted a district-wide policy requiring all students to have their phones off, and other personal electronics off during school hours.

They made exceptions of course for students with disabilities and approved academic activities. Although I acknowledge the importance of this topic, and it is important, I also note that many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and officials in the administration often say that the Federal Government should not be making decisions for local schools.

As with curriculum decisions, technology policy should be managed by State and local officials. In our role as Federal officials, we can, and should be supporting that important research, which the Chairman mentioned, research-based decisions.

The guidance, the partnerships, professional development on this topic, which is especially important to small and rural school districts that might not have the staff or the resources, or the research they need to draft effective policies.

Again, this is an important topic, but I hope we do not lose sight of the other many issues that are clearly within our committee's control and jurisdiction, and how they affect students as well.

For example, the Trump administration's actions, coupled with several harmful proposals in the congressional Republicans, I call the "Big Bad Ugly Bill," opposed significant and urgent threat to students' well-being and academic achievement.

The testimony we are going to hear today explains that as we have seen an increase in screen time, we have also seen an increase in need for behavioral healthcare. Earlier this year, and without warning, the Trump administration canceled more than 1 billion dollars in funding for student mental health services that were funded through the bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

These programs ended without notice to states, and without recourse to help students who depend on them. The grants provided funding for mental health professionals, for support services, for suicide prevention resources, for schools and districts that desperately need them.

Portland Public Schools use these grants to fund 21 school psychologists. They provided more than 8,000 mental health services to students during the 23–24 school year. Moreover, the administration's plans to eliminate the Department of Education will have significant consequences for schools and public education as we know it.

It will deepen the inequity and instability we are already seeing across our public education system. Also, the Department recently have reportedly dismissed all of the employees in the Office of Education Technology, among other things, this office assisted districts

and states in implementing best practices for technology, such as how to effectively use screens and other devices in schools.

Last, but perhaps most urgently, this Big Bad Ugly Bill that my colleagues across the aisle championed, will gut programs that helps kids show up to school ready to learn. Programs that provide food, healthcare, stability to millions of families, and now they are being squeezed to pay for massive tax cuts for billionaires.

Well, let me say it plainly, students cannot focus on their schoolwork if they are hungry. Students cannot reach their full potential if they are unable to access medical care, so yes, although we are concerned about students' screen time, we should also focus on what we can control by asserting our role as Members of this Committee who were elected by our constituents to engage in oversight of the administration.

By restoring the bipartisan mental health funding that many of us voted to authorize, protecting the Department of Education's ability to do that important research, and offer guidance to states and local schools about technology, and supporting programs that provide children with food, healthcare, and a safe supportive school environment.

I expect we will all agree that states have control over screen time, and I appreciate again the expertise and time of these witnesses, but I hope we can also work on the urgent challenges that are within our power and jurisdiction, so we get to the point where every student has the opportunity to learn and thrive. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ranking Member Bonamici follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. SUZANNE BONAMICI, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY, AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate your time and your expertise. We all want students to grow up and learn in a safe and healthy environment where they are protected from harm and equipped with the tools and knowledge they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Now that cellphones, laptops, and tablets have become an integral part of our everyday lives, schools need to be equipped with the latest technology and high-speed internet. Being fluent in technology is a necessity, not a luxury, especially when students will be entering the workforce in a modern, global economy.

Access to and use of technology must come with guardrails. Research shows that unrestricted and unmonitored screen time is likely to have negative consequences on students' mental health, as well as their learning and development. I noted the part in the written testimony where there was a study of students studying on their laptops, and it took them six minutes to go from studying to scrolling. I told that to my son, who was a high school teacher, and he said, "I am surprised it is that much."

Most states, including my home state of Oregon, are working at the state and district level to implement comprehensive policies on this issue. For example, Portland Public Schools recently adopted a districtwide policy requiring all students to have their phones off and other personal electronic devices off during school hours. They made exceptions, of course, for students with disabilities and approved academic activities.

Although I acknowledge the importance of this topic—and it is important—I also note that many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and officials in the Administration often say that the federal government should not be making decisions for local schools. As with curriculum decisions, technology policies should be managed by state and local officials. In our role as federal officials, we can and should be supporting that important research, which the Chairman mentioned research-based decisions, the guidance, the partnerships, and the professional development on this topic, which is especially important to small and rural school districts

that might not have the staff or resources or research needed to draft effective policies.

Again, this is an important topic, but I hope we do not lose sight of the many other issues that are clearly within our committee's control and jurisdiction and how they affect students as well. For example, the Trump Administration's actions, coupled with harmful proposals in the Congressional Republicans' "Big Bad Ugly Bill," pose a significant and urgent threat to students' well-being and academic achievement.

The testimony we are going to hear today explains that as we have seen an increase in screen time, we have also seen an increase in need for behavioral health care. Earlier this year, and without warning, the Trump Administration cancelled more than \$1 billion in funding for student mental health services that were funded through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. These programs ended without notice to states and without recourse to help the students who depend on them.

The grants provided funding for mental health professionals, for support services, and for suicide prevention resources for schools and districts that desperately need them. Portland Public Schools used these grants to fund 21 school psychologists—they provided nearly 8,000 mental health services to students during the 2023–2024 school year.

Moreover, the Administration's plans to eliminate the Department of Education will have significant consequences for schools and public education as we know it. It will deepen the inequity and instability we are already seeing across our public education system.

Also, the Department recently reportedly dismissed all of the employees in the Office of Education Technology. Among other things, this office assisted districts and states in implementing best practices for technology—such as how to effectively use screens and other devices—in schools.

Lastly, but perhaps most urgently, this "Big Bad Ugly Bill" that my colleagues across the aisle championed will gut the programs that help kids show up to school ready to learn. Programs that provide food, health care, and stability to millions of families, are now being squeezed to pay for tax cuts for billionaires.

Let me say it plainly: Students cannot focus on their schoolwork if they are hungry. Students cannot reach their full potential if they are unable to access medical care.

Yes, although we are concerned about students' screen time, we should also focus on what we can control by asserting our role as Members of this Committee who were elected by our constituents to engage in oversight of the Administration. By restoring the bipartisan mental health funding that many of us voted to authorize, protecting the Department of Education's ability to do that important research and offer guidance to states and local schools about technology, and supporting programs that provide children with food, health care, and a safe, supportive school environment.

I expect that we will all agree that states have control over screen time, and I appreciate again the expertise and time of these witnesses. But I hope we can also work on the urgent challenges that are within our power and jurisdiction, so we get to the point where every student has the opportunity to learn and thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. Pursuant to Committee Rule 8(c), all Members who wish to insert written statements into the record may do so by submitting them to the Committee Clerk electronically in Microsoft Word format by 5 p.m., 14 days after this hearing. Without objection, the hearing record will remain open for 14 days to allow such statements and other extraneous material noted during the hearing to be submitted for the official hearing record.

I note for the Subcommittee that some of our Members, who are not permanent Members of the Subcommittee, may be waiving on for the purpose of today's hearing.

We will now move on to the introduction of our witnesses. To introduce our first witness, I would like to recognize the gentleman from Utah, Representative Owens.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you. I would like to introduce Dr. Rich Nye, Special Advisor of Education, to Governor Spencer Cox of Utah, in Salt Lake City.

We both represent a remarkable State, No. 2 as best State in education, we are going to be No. 1 soon, and No. 1 in child online safety, so thank you so much, Dr. Nye, and I look forward to your testimony for sure.

Chairman KILEY. Thanks very much. Our second witness is Dr. Matthew Gibbins, the Assistant Superintendent for the Richardson Independent School District in Richardson, Texas.

Our third witness is Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, the President and Chief Executive Officer for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education here in Washington, DC.

Our fourth witness is Dr. Jean Twenge, a Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University in San Diego, California. We thank the witnesses for being here today and look forward to your testimony.

Pursuant to Committee rules I would ask that you each limit your oral presentation to a 3-minute summary of your written statement, as Committee Members have many questions for you. The clock will count down for 3 minutes. However, pursuant to Committee Rule 8(d) and Committee practice, we will not cutoff your testimony until you reach the 5-minute mark.

I would also like to remind the witnesses to be aware of your responsibility to provide accurate information to the Subcommittee. I will first recognize Dr. Nye for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF DR. RICH NYE, SENIOR ADVISOR OF EDUCATION TO GOVERNOR SPENCER COX OF UTAH, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Mr. NYE. Thank you. Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today, and thank you for tackling such an important topic. As stated, my name is Rich Nye, and I serve as the Senior Advisor for Education Policy to Governor Spencer J. Cox.

In my previous life I was a superintendent of the Granite School District, one of the largest school districts in the State of Utah, serving over 60,000 students across 87 schools. On one hand, we acknowledge that smart phones offer unperilled access to information and can be a valuable learning school. However, the overwhelming evidence, as has been noted, points to serious downsides.

Primarily, relentless distraction and detrimental impacts, not only in academics, but as well as mental and behavioral health. There is overwhelming national data that cannot be ignored. Nearly 97 percent of students report using their device during the school day. Adolescents, as has been noted, spend an average of 8 and a half hours daily on screen-based media.

Some researchers have reported that an average student receives 237 daily notifications, and some students, those same adolescents, will receive an astounding 498 notifications or times that they pick up their phone in a single day. This barrage of notifications severely hinders learning, causing students to lose classroom focus within moments of even arriving to the classroom.

Our teachers confirm this. It is a major disruption to teaching and learning. Beyond distractions, smart phones are contributing to serious mental health challenges. They provide a pervasive platform for cyber bullying with intensifying harassment through anonymity.

Furthermore, excessive smart phone use and associated screen times hinders the development of essential interpersonal skills and limits face to face interactions. This can lead to social isolation, impaired communication abilities, and heightened anxiety. Experts even compare cell phone usage to other process addictions, demonstrating how over-use compromises academic and general well-being.

This is why I emphasize that taking phones out of classrooms is not enough. If students are allowed to bury their heads in phones in the hallways or in the lunchroom, rather than engaging with each other, we are missing an opportunity for them to develop the interpersonal skills so critical to growth and success.

Recognizing these urgent concerns, Utah has taken decisive action. On January 4, 2024, Governor Spencer J. Cox urged every school and district leader to remove cell phones from classrooms as a first step. We have already seen positive impacts in schools that have proactively implemented these restrictions. Reporting improved learning, decreased bullying, and more meaningful student connections.

Additional statewide momentum culminated in a followup bill this year, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, and which prohibits students from using cell phones, smart watches, or emerging technology during classroom hours. It also allows for exemptions due to exigent circumstances when required by a student's individual education program, the familiar IEP, Section 504 plan, or upon a medical necessity.

My primary message today is that smart phones are an enormously destructive force in education, and states should do everything they can to support policies that keep them away from students, not just in the classroom, but from being used at all during the school day. As we say in Utah, from bell to bell. We are proud of Utah's leadership in working toward this goal.

As such, Utah has taken a stand, and at the very least, students will not have unfettered access to smart phones while they are under the care of an educator.

This new statewide expectation is a collaborative effort to re-center student attention on learning, foster healthier, interpersonal interactions, and mitigate the documented negative consequences of smart phone overuse.

By addressing this critical issue, we are creating a more conducive and supportive setting for all students, ensuring their focus remains squarely on their learning and development.

Furthermore, schools and districts are also analyzing the amount of screen time students experience on school provided devices, with one district already limiting the amount of screen time to an average 30 minutes a day.

There is a clear commitment to establishing a better balance for the use of technology and screen time in Utah's classrooms. Again,

I thank you for elevating this important conversation, and I am happy to answer questions.
[The prepared statement of Dr. Nye follows:]

Smartphones & Screentime in Utah Schools

Rich K. Nye, PhD

Senior Advisor for Education

Office of the Governor: Utah

Smartphone & Screentime in Utah Schools

Introduction

Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today, and thank you for tackling such an important topic. My name is Rich Nye. I serve as the Senior Advisor for Education Policy to Utah Governor Spencer J. Cox. Prior to this position, I served as the superintendent of Granite School District, one of the largest districts in the State of Utah, serving 60,000 students across 87 schools.

In schools across the country, cell phones are a pervasive reality for K-12 students. What started as a simple communication device has become a powerful, multi-functional tool, integrating social interaction, information access, and entertainment. This constant presence of smartphones in daily life inevitably extends into schools, significantly impacting student behavior, learning, and overall well-being. The introduction, prevalence, and appropriateness of these devices in the hands of children have generated extensive interest among educators, parents, and policymakers regarding their intended and unintended consequences.

The complexity of the smartphone issue in schools is evident in its potential impacts on children. On one hand, smartphones offer unparalleled access to information, multifaceted communication, engaging educational applications, and technologically enhanced learning opportunities. On the other hand, they present significant challenges related to relentless distraction, academic integrity, cyberbullying, sextortion, and isolation, leading to overwhelming evidence of mental and behavioral health implications.

Education stakeholders across Utah have recognized the effects of smartphones in schools and have engaged in the policymaking process. This process aims to establish a course of action that addresses the negative impacts associated with smartphone use among students, while also acknowledging the reality of living in the information era.

Smartphones and Distraction

The widespread use of smartphones among students poses a significant challenge in educational settings. [Nearly 97%](#) of students with smartphones report using their devices during the school day, with adolescents spending an average of [8.5 hours daily](#) on screen based media. The constant stream of distractions is clear: an average student receives [237 daily notifications](#), with some checking their phones an astounding [498 times a day](#). This habitual engagement severely hinders learning, causing students to [lose classroom focus](#) almost immediately upon arriving to the classroom—a problem most [teachers identify](#) as a major disruption to teaching and learning.

Smartphones and Mental Health

One of the most insidious negative social consequences is [cyberbullying](#). Smartphones provide a pervasive platform for harassment and intimidation through social media and messaging apps. The anonymity and wide reach of these platforms can intensify the severity and persistence of bullying, making it more damaging than traditional forms. This, coupled with the potential for overuse on various social media platforms, highlights the serious safety concerns posed by the inappropriate and prevalent use of smartphones.

Furthermore, excessive smartphone use can hinder the development of essential interpersonal skills by reducing face-to-face interactions. When student attention is fixated on smartphones, opportunities for genuine communication are limited. This can lead to:

- [Social isolation](#)
- Impaired [communication](#) abilities
- Formation of exclusive cliques based on online interactions, potentially exacerbating peer pressure and anxiety.

The addictive nature of cell phones is a critical concern. [Experts](#) compare cell phone usage to other process addictions, where brain mechanisms associated with pleasure and reward are exploited, leading to compulsive use. Students may experience "screen addiction," characterized by withdrawal symptoms and difficulty disengaging from their devices. All of this collectively demonstrates that the overuse of smartphones compromises students' academic and general well-being. Educational stakeholders, including parents, educators, lawmakers, and students themselves, have acknowledged these negative implications and sought a better path forward—one that ensures student attention at school is focused squarely on learning and developing durable skills.

Utah Takes Action

On January 4, 2024, Governor Spencer J. Cox sent a letter to every school and district leader urging them to "remove cell phones from classrooms by creating a collaborative and cohesive LEA-wide policy framework that reaches every classroom." Many schools and districts had antiquated "appropriate use policies" for school devices, but these policies generally did not address smartphones and smartwatches in classrooms.

Fortunately, a few schools and districts had proactively acknowledged these concerns and began implementing cell phone restrictions earlier, already observing positive impacts on students. One junior high school that implemented a "bell-to-bell" restriction on smartphones reported that "learning has improved...bullying and fighting have decreased...[and] students connect with each other in a more meaningful way." While this proof of concept was being realized across a handful of schools and districts, other schools throughout the state were grappling with the negative effects of smartphones in the classroom.

Educational stakeholders continued to observe that more needed to be done to implement a statewide expectation regarding smartphone use in schools. As such, Governor Cox and legislators began working together to identify potential legislative solutions. During the 2025 General Legislative Session, Senator Lincoln Fillmore introduced Senate Bill 178, "Devices in Public Schools," representing a collaborative effort to define statewide expectations for the appropriate use of smartphones in schools.

Senate Bill 178 passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. The bill prohibits students from using cellphones, smartwatches, or emerging technology during classroom hours. Local education agencies (LEAs) may create policies for exemptions to the prohibition for educational purposes. The bill also allows LEAs to determine if more restrictions are warranted in local contexts.

The new statute recognizes instances where a smartphone may be necessary. For example, a student would still be allowed to use their smartphone in exigent circumstances, such as responding to an imminent threat, a school-wide emergency, or using the Safe UT Crisis Line. The bill also allows student access to their device when required by their Individualized Education Program (IEP), Section 504 Plans, or a medical necessity.

Additionally, local education agencies have begun to prioritize restricting smartphones in schools, and they are also evaluating the amount of screentime students spend on district-provided devices during instruction. The overuse of screentime on district-provided devices (laptops, tablets, etc.) is also a concern. One LEA has reported that their elementary students will now only spend an average of 30 minutes a day on district-provided devices. While the flood of technology has largely benefited the learning and teaching process, great care should be taken to find a better balance.

Conclusion

My primary message today is that smartphones are an enormously destructive force in education and states should do everything they can to support policies that keep them away from students, not just in the classroom but from being used at all during the school day, as we say from "bell to bell". We're proud of Utah's leadership in working towards this goal.

The integration of smartphones into the daily lives of K-12 students has presented both opportunities and significant challenges within school environments. While offering unparalleled access to information and educational tools, the pervasive use of these devices has demonstrably led to distractions, compromised academic integrity, and exacerbated mental health concerns such as cyberbullying and social isolation.

Recognizing these profound impacts, Utah stakeholders, led by Governor Spencer J. Cox and the passage of Senate Bill 178, have taken decisive action to implement statewide restrictions on smartphone use during classroom hours. This approach aims to re-center student attention on learning, foster healthier interpersonal interactions, and mitigate the documented negative

consequences, ultimately creating a more conducive and supportive educational setting for all students.

Chairman KILEY. Thank you very much. Dr. Gibbins, you are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF DR. MATTHEW GIBBINS, ASSISTANT SUPER-INTENDENT, RICHARDSON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, RICHARDSON, TEXAS

Mr. GIBBINS. Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Committee it is an honor to speak with you and your colleagues this morning. My name is Dr. Matthew Gibbins. I serve as Assistant Superintendent in the Richardson Independent School District located in Dallas County, Texas.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today about a pressing issue affecting schools nationwide, student cell phone use, and how our district has taken steps to reclaim instruction time, improve school safety, and strengthen student well-being through a phone-free learning environment.

Richardson ISD serves approximately 37,000 students across 50 campuses, with a student population that is racially and economically diverse. In recent years we saw first-hand how smart phones were disrupting learning and increasing challenges like cyber bullying, classroom distractions and student conflict, echoing concerns we know are shared across the country.

In fact, our teachers' surveys identified phone use as the No. 1 concern impacting classroom instruction. In response, our Superintendent, Ms. Tabitha Branum asked our team to revise and update a local policy. Based on these changes, we also introduced a practical tool, the Yondr pouch to selected campuses. This secure, magnetic pouch stores student's phones, smart watches and ear buds during the school day, keeping them accessible after school, but out of sight during instruction.

At our first pilot at a Junior High School the results were immediate and profound. 98 percent of teachers reported fewer disciplinary issues, and 100 percent reported more instructional time. Following that success we expanded to several campuses including a high school with nearly 3,000 students.

We proactively addressed parents' safety concerns through community meetings and clear emergency protocols. The feedback and outcomes were encouraging. For example, this year's preliminary data shows suspensions at certain campuses dropped between 15 percent and 54 percent.

Classroom engagement improved, and teacher retention at one of our Yondr campuses climbed to 94 percent, with many citing the phone free environment as a primary reason for staying in the profession. Perhaps most importantly, teachers across all campuses reported regaining more than 10 minutes of instruction per class period, that is over an hour per week per class.

That is now focused on student learning and connection. Here is what our educators say, "It's not just about phones, it's about restoring focus, improving relationships, and reclaiming the joy of teaching." One principal told us we have gone from fights being filmed and shared on social media to students talking, reading and laughing together during lunch. While there is no one size fits all

solution, our experience demonstrates that with consistent policy, strong communication and the right tools, schools can meaningfully reduce distractions and improve the learning climate.

As this Committee considers issues related to student mental health, digital safety and education outcomes, we hope our model offers a practical data informed example of how our particular district policy changes and focus on instructional time in the classroom can support national goals.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to America's students.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Gibbins follows:]



RICHARDSON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Administrative Services

Matthew Gibbins Ed.D.

Written Testimony

K-12 Subcommittee, U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce

June 10, 2025

My name is Dr. Matthew Gibbins, and I serve as an Assistant Superintendent in the Richardson Independent School District (RISD). I'm honored to share the story of our district's journey to establish a phone-free learning environment for both students and teachers.

Located just north of Dallas in Dallas County, RISD serves approximately 37,000 students across 50 campuses, including 4 high schools, 8 junior high/middle schools, 37 elementary schools, and 1 alternative campus. Our district reflects the vibrant diversity of our broader community: 37% of our students identify as Hispanic/Latino, 30% as White, 22% as Black or African American, and over 55% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Over my 25 years in RISD, I've served in multiple roles including teacher, campus principal, Director of Special Education, and now Assistant Superintendent. In 2022, our Superintendent, Ms. Tabitha Branum, asked me to lead an initiative to address the increasing disruption caused by student cell phone use at the secondary level. While my role was one part of a broader team effort, the progress we've made is a direct result of exceptional collaboration among teachers, campus leaders, families, and our central support teams.

Over time, we heard mounting concerns from educators and staff that smartphones were interfering with instruction, reducing student engagement, and contributing to serious challenges including cyberbullying, physical altercations, academic dishonesty, and safety concerns linked to social media. These concerns were echoed by families and reinforced by our end-of-year teacher feedback survey, where cell phone use was identified as the number one concern.

In response, we revised Board Policy FNCE (Local) in August 2022 to clarify and strengthen expectations regarding student phone use. At the same time, we introduced a new tool: the magnetically sealed Yondr pouch, which allows students to secure their phones, smartwatches,

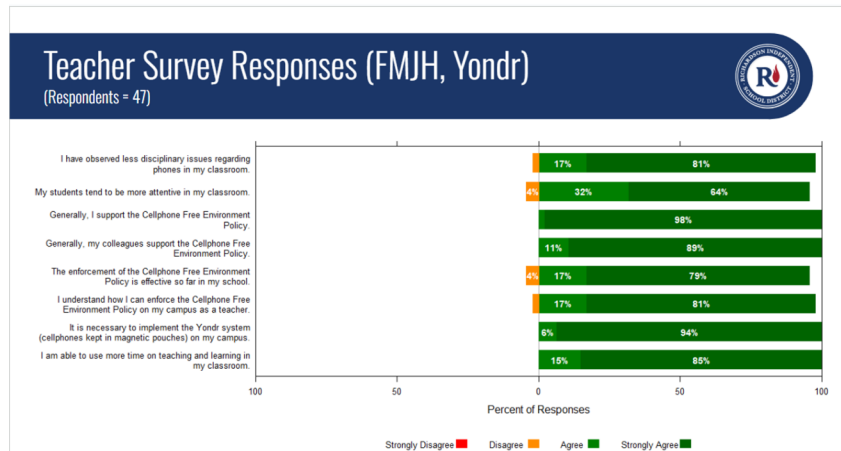


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Administrative Services

and earbuds during the school day. We piloted this solution at one junior high campus during the 2022–2023 school year. The district worked closely with the administration and staff and the end of the year survey results were compelling with 98% of teachers reporting fewer disciplinary issues, and 100% observed an increase in daily instructional time.



Encouraged by these outcomes, we expanded the program to three additional campuses for the 2023–2024 school year, including Lake Highlands High School—one of our largest secondary campuses with nearly 3,000 students. While this expansion raised some safety concerns from families, we addressed them proactively through community meetings, detailed FAQs, and clear communication about emergency procedures. We emphasized that in true emergencies, student safety depends on following school protocols not on personal devices.

Today, RISD enforces consistent cell phone expectations across all campuses. On designated Yondr campuses, students receive personal pouches that remain sealed throughout the school day, with devices powered off and stored before entering the building. Non-Yondr campuses follow a policy that requires devices to remain powered off and out of sight, enforced by staff monitoring rather than pouches. Policy violations result in escalating consequences, beginning with device confiscation and parent contact, and potentially leading to in-school suspension for repeat infractions.



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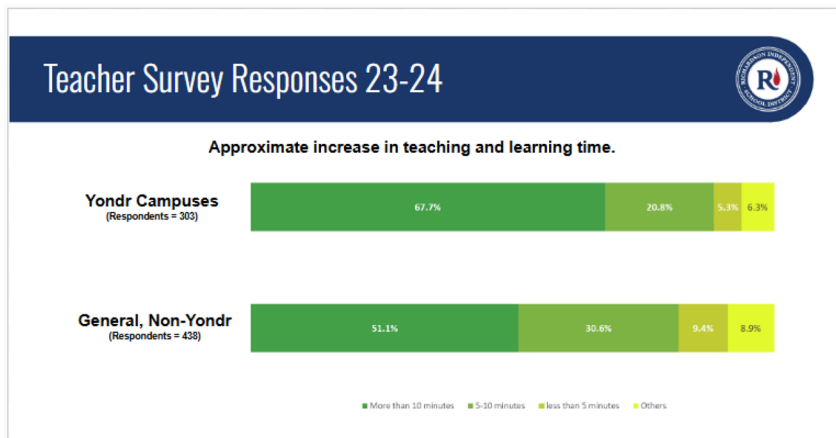
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To support communication, families are encouraged to contact students via their district email accounts (accessible through school-issued Chromebooks) or by calling the school directly.

Interest in our approach continues to grow. To date, more than 50 K–12 districts across Texas and beyond have contacted us to learn more about our phone-free model. For the 2024–2025 school year, all four RISD high schools have voluntarily adopted the Yondr program. Early data shows significant impact: some campuses have seen reductions in both in-school and out-of-school suspensions ranging from 15% to 54%. Teacher retention has also improved, with many citing the phone-free environment as a key reason for remaining in RISD. Retention rates on Yondr campuses ranged from 85% to 94%.

Survey data from the end of the 2023 - 2024 school year further shows that teachers across both Yondr and non-Yondr campuses are regaining instructional time on average, more than 10 minutes per class period.





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Principal and Teacher Testimonials

Carolyn Vincent, Math Teacher and Department Head, Lake Highlands High School

“Using Yondr pouches for our new cell phone policy enforcement has strengthened our classroom culture. Students are more engaged with each other and learning. Since I am not having to focus on student phones, I can focus on my students and their learning.”

Susan Burt, Principal, Forest Meadow Middle School

“Since implementing Yondr pouches, we’ve seen a transformational shift in campus culture. Students are more engaged in learning, more connected with peers, and more active in class discussions. After three years, teachers continue to report stronger focus, fewer disruptions, and improved classroom management. The pouches have significantly reduced bullying and eliminated cyberbullying during the school day. Hallways are once again filled with conversation and laughter. Yondr isn’t just about managing phones it’s about reclaiming our learning environment and creating a more connected, respectful, and emotionally safe school community.”

Chris Choat, Principal, Richardson High School

“Teachers overwhelmingly support the Yondr system, reporting fewer distractions and more instructional time. While students were initially unsure, many now say it’s not as difficult as they expected and they feel more present in class. Disciplinary issues tied to social media have decreased dramatically, contributing to a more focused and respectful school environment.”

Nick Rustin, Principal, Lake Highlands Middle School

“Yondr has been a game changer. Though Chromebooks still pose occasional distractions, removing phones has significantly reduced teacher-student conflicts. Our clear, district-wide policy removes the power struggle over phone use allowing teachers to focus on teaching and administrators to handle enforcement. This shift has helped build stronger teacher-student relationships and improved the classroom climate.”



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Kerri Jones, Principal, Lake Highlands High School

“After two years with Yondr, we’ve seen a dramatic change. Teachers no longer battle cell phones. Passing periods are filled with conversation. Fewer fights are recorded and shared. The cafeteria is lively students talk, play games, and even read. The calm we now experience on campus didn’t exist before. There’s no perfect system, but with clear expectations and strong support, we’ve built a better learning environment. Our teachers are grateful they’re finally free to do what they love: teach!”

While we know that student achievement and teacher retention are influenced by many variables, the early results from our phone-free initiative are both meaningful and measurable. When paired with clear policy and strong campus leadership, a phone-free environment can help schools become more focused, less distracted, and more student-centered.

With the passage of the **Texas House Bill 1481**, we believe districts across Texas and beyond are moving toward a future where learning environments are safer, calmer, and more conducive to both academic and emotional growth.

For more information about our cell phone policy, please visit:

 [RISD Cell Phone Guidelines](#)

Sincerely,

Matthew Gibbins, Ed. D.
Assistants Superintendent Administrative Services
Richardson ISD

Chairman KILEY. Thank you very much. Dr. Holcomb-McCoy, you are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF DR. CHERYL HOLCOMB-McCOY, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Ms. HOLCOMB-McCOY. Chair Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about such an important topic today. I am Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, President and CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education or better known as AACTE.

Our organization represents over 500 educator preparation programs across the Nation, and we graduate more than 120,000 new educators annually, encompassing teachers, school leaders, school counselors, special educators and other education specialists.

As a former kindergarten teacher myself, and school counselor, I am here to discuss really the increasingly urgent and complex issue of screen time, and its impact on children's academic and social and emotional development. While also highlighting the critical role of well-prepared educators and addressing this growing challenge.

You can please refer to my written testimony for a more detailed analysis. Technology overall can be a powerful tool for teaching and learning. It can personalize instruction, provide access to rich content, and support the learning needs of students with disabilities. As the mother of a daughter with special needs, I have witnessed firsthand how screen-based tools like tablets, and communication devices, can be positively life changing.

Excessive screen use, via smart phones, as mentioned by other panelists this morning, is harming children's development, their mental health and academic progress. Children as young as 8 now spend 4 to 6 hours daily on screens, teens average nearly 9, and while some screen time is instructional, much of it is not, and teachers are reporting rising distractions in class, anxiety and disengagement of students.

School mental health providers, counselors, are overwhelmed with cases of depression and behavioral challenges, often linked to social media, digital comparison, and disrupted sleep. Sadly, most educator and counselor preparation programs still do not include training in screen time science, digital wellness or media literacy, and this I believe is a serious gap in the preparation of future educators.

Today, I come to you to urge you to consider Federal leadership in four critical areas that will increase our understanding of children's screen time and to better equip the educators who interact with our children every day. First, investments in educator preparation are needed through Federal grant programs, such as TQP, SEED, TSL, Hawkins Centers for Excellence and IDEA personnel preparation.

These grant programs can prioritize outcomes, such as digital students, digital wellness, media literacy and tech use, but also the evaluation of programs that minimize or limit student usage of devices such as cell phones and other devices also in schools.

Second, restoring school based mental health grants is so important. These grants created under the bipartisan Safer Communities Act enable schools and districts to hire and retain counselors, psychologists and social workers.

Their termination has left districts and teachers and principals, and superintendents, without the critical support they need for students in crisis, particularly those affected by excessive screen time. These funds must be reinstated.

Third, funding of rigorous research through the Institute of Education Sciences, or IES, we need longitudinal term studies on the effects of screen time from cell phones versus other devices, as well as evidence on effective educator training and instructional strategies that result in healthy, digital practices.

As educators, we deserve and need to know what works. Finally, the issuing of national guidance through the Office of Educational Technology, or OET. OET, in my opinion, should lead the development of age-appropriate research informed recommendations on screen use. Its capacity has been severely diminished, and reinvestment is urgently needed.

At AACTE, we also support the guidance of ISTE, or the International Society for Technology and Education. ISTE's research-based standards emphasize digital citizenship, empowered learning and responsible media use. Overall, we must invest in the educators who prepare and support our children in this digital age, ensuring that they are equipped with the best research and practices to face the challenges of excessive screen time.

I thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your questions and partnership on behalf of all students. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Holcomb-McCoy follows:]

Testimony of Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy

President & CEO, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)

June 10, 2025

Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee

Chair Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, and I am the CEO and President of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). I am also a Distinguished Professor of Education at American University. I have dedicated over 20 years to being a counselor educator and trainer of teachers and school counselors at four universities: Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, the University of Maryland (College Park), Johns Hopkins University, and American University. Prior to becoming a professor, I worked as an elementary teacher, professional school counselor, and family therapist.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the critical issue of screen time and its impact on child development. As President and CEO of AACTE, which represents over 500 educator preparation programs (EPPs) nationwide, I am deeply concerned about the multifaceted effects of screen exposure on our country's students and the vital role of educators in tackling these challenges.

Over the past decade, children's screen time has escalated dramatically, reshaping daily routines and developmental experiences. According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, children ages 8-12 in the United States spend 4-6 hours a day watching or using screens, and teens spend up to 9 hours.¹ For high school students, the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals that 76% of students report using screens for at least three hours per school day, up from 68% in 2013. Even younger children are affected. While the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one hour of screen time daily for children aged 2 to 5, many exceed this guideline, often averaging 2 to 3 hours per day. Among adolescents, the rise is even more pronounced. Teens now spend an average of 7 hours and 22 minutes per day on screens, accounting for about 43% of their waking hours. Preteens, aged 8 to 12, spend around 5½ hours daily, which is an hour more than a decade ago. Notably, 49% of children aged 0 to 2 years engage with smartphones.²

The type of device and content also play roles in screen time habits. Screen time habits among children in the United States vary significantly by age and type of device. According to CDC QuickStats, younger children (ages 2 to 11) primarily engage with televisions and tablets, often using these devices for passive entertainment such as streaming videos. In contrast, adolescents aged 12 to 17 are increasingly turning to smartphones, computers, and gaming consoles, reflecting a shift toward more interactive and social screen use, including texting, gaming, video chatting, and social media engagement. In fact, older children are significantly more likely to exceed four hours of recreational screen time per day. In comparison, younger children tend to remain closer to the two-hour threshold recommended by pediatric guidelines. These patterns suggest that both the type of device and the nature of screen content evolve with age, requiring educators, parents, and policymakers to consider developmental needs when managing screen time.³

This surge in screen time has raised concerns among health professionals. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under 18 months (except for video chatting) and limited, high-quality programming for children aged 2 to 5 years, co-viewed with their parents. However, adherence to these guidelines is low; a meta-analysis revealed that only 24.7% of children under 2 and 35.6% of children aged 2 to 5 met the recommended screen time limits.⁴

Without question, technology can create high-impact learning experiences for all students. Education technology is a crucial tool for teaching and learning and has “the potential to empower students to expand their learning beyond the confines of the traditional classroom, support self-directed learning, help educators tailor learning experiences to individual student needs, and support students with disabilities.”⁵

It is crucial to acknowledge the role of technology, including emerging tools like artificial intelligence (AI), in ensuring that students with disabilities have meaningful access to the general curriculum. Assistive technologies such as speech-to-text software, screen readers, and AI-powered learning supports provide critical pathways for these students to attain equitable educational outcomes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), along with other civil rights laws, guarantees students with disabilities the right to use such tools to access a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. As we evaluate the impact of screen time on children, we must not ignore the civil rights of students with disabilities who rely on technology as a bridge to learning. At the same time, we must recognize that even beneficial screen use, when excessive or unbalanced, can contribute to broader concerns around mental health, attention, and development. Promoting healthy, intentional screen time is essential, particularly for students who may experience both the benefits and risks of digital tools more acutely.

Moreover, modern students must learn how to effectively leverage technology for success in a tech-centric world. Assisting students in utilizing technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), is crucial for enhancing our nation’s global competitiveness and ensuring national security. As the President noted in his Executive Order “*Advancing Artificial Intelligence Education for American Youth*,” we must “equip our students with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary to adapt to and thrive in an increasingly digital society.”⁶

Nevertheless, excessive screen time is linked to various adverse health outcomes. A study published in JAMA Network Open found that reducing leisure screen media use had a positive effect on psychological symptoms in children and adolescents, highlighting the benefits of moderate screen engagement⁷. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that teenagers with four or more hours of daily screen time were significantly more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression compared to their peers with less screen time.⁸

In conclusion, the significant increase in screen time among children and adolescents over the past decade highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to promote healthy digital habits. This includes investing in educator preparation programs to equip teachers and mental health professionals with the skills to integrate technology effectively and support students' holistic development.

A. Academic Implications of Excessive Screen Use

Research indicates that screen time, particularly when involving passive activities such as video streaming or scrolling through social media, can have a negative impact on literacy development. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has reported declining reading scores among U.S. students, with experts linking part of this trend to increased digital media use. While digital reading can expand access, it often promotes skimming over deep comprehension. A 2019 meta-analysis published in Educational Research Review found that students who read on screens scored significantly lower in reading comprehension compared to those who read print materials, largely due to increased distractions and reduced retention.⁹

Mathematics achievement has also been affected by increased screen time as well. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that students who spent more than six hours per day online performed worse in math than their peers who spent less time. Overreliance on technology for instruction, without proper scaffolding or teacher guidance, can limit conceptual understanding. Additionally, apps and games marketed as “educational” may lack the rigor necessary to reinforce mathematical thinking, leaving students with superficial skills but little depth in problem-solving or reasoning.¹⁰

The most immediate and widespread impact of screen time on school performance is its effect on students' attention spans. Multiple studies, including one from the University of Southern California, have shown that heavy screen use, particularly with rapid-fire content like TikTok or YouTube, can lead to shorter attention spans and increased impulsivity in young people.¹¹ Teachers report that students now struggle more with sustained concentration, transitioning between tasks, and engaging in deep, reflective work. This “attention fragmentation” undermines both independent learning and classroom engagement.

Screen-induced behavioral changes are also creating new challenges for classroom management. According to a 2022 report from Common Sense Media, children aged 8 to 12 now average nearly 5½ hours of screen time daily, much of it unmonitored. As a result, some students exhibit greater irritability, reduced frustration tolerance, and dependency on constant stimulation—behaviors that are disruptive in structured learning environments.¹² Educators frequently cite increased difficulty in redirecting students' attention, regulating emotional responses, and reestablishing in-person social norms after extended periods of online interaction.

The rise of screen time has also reshaped how educators teach—but not always for the better. While digital tools have the potential to enrich instruction, many teachers feel pressured to “digitize” learning without adequate training or pedagogical support. According to the Learning Policy Institute, teachers trained in evidence-based educational technology strategies are far more effective than those who are not. Yet, in many districts, especially those with limited funding, professional development in digital literacy remains limited. Without strong preparation, educators struggle to balance screen use with hands-on, inquiry-based learning, resulting in the overuse of passive technology rather than interactive, human-centered instruction.

Given these widespread academic implications—from lower reading scores and math proficiency to behavioral shifts and instructional fatigue—screen time is no longer a private or parental issue. It has become a systemic educational concern. Schools must be equipped not only with policies

on screen use but also with well-prepared teachers who understand how to use technology effectively. This includes incorporating child development, media literacy, and effective digital pedagogy into educator preparation programs. When educators are trained to make intentional, developmentally appropriate choices about technology, they can transform screen time from a liability into a learning asset.

B. Mental Health and Social-Emotional Development Implications

In recent years, educators and mental health professionals have observed a disturbing rise in anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges among school-aged children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the proportion of high school students reporting persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness rose to 42% in 2021, up from 28% a decade earlier.¹³ While multiple factors contribute to this trend, excessive screen time, particularly involving social media, has emerged as a significant risk factor. The American Academy of Pediatrics warns that high levels of digital media use are associated with poor sleep, decreased physical activity, and diminished face-to-face interaction—all of which contribute to emotional well-being.

Teachers are often the first to notice behavioral changes associated with excessive screen use. Symptoms may include increased irritability, social withdrawal, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, and trouble managing emotions, particularly among students who rely heavily on screens outside of school. Many educators report that students have shorter tempers, lower frustration tolerance, and reduced engagement in classroom activities. In younger children, educators are seeing delays in self-regulation and social skills. For adolescents, a 2023 study published in *Computers in Human Behavior* linked high social media use with increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, particularly among girls.

School counselors are sounding the alarm. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has reported sharp increases in mental health referrals, particularly for anxiety, self-harm, and depressive symptoms.¹⁴ Many of these professionals cite social media as a contributing factor; students feel pressure to curate their lives online, experience cyberbullying, or compare themselves unfavorably to others. Body image concerns—especially among girls—have been linked to platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which use algorithm-driven content that reinforces unrealistic beauty standards. These mental health providers are calling for more school-based resources, training, and time to address growing caseloads and complex needs.

Perhaps most distressing is the rise in youth suicide. According to the CDC, suicide is now the second leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 14 and adolescents aged 15 to 24. Between 2007 and 2021, suicide rates among 10- to 24-year-olds increased by more than 60%.¹⁵ While suicide is a complex issue with many contributing factors, screen time—especially exposure to harmful content, social comparison, and disrupted sleep—has been identified as a compounding influence. The U.S. Surgeon General issued advisories on youth mental health, explicitly citing the harms of unregulated social media use.¹⁶ These sobering statistics underscore the urgent need to address the role of screens in youth mental health crises.

Educators are doing their best to meet students' emotional needs, but they are not mental health professionals, and many report feeling overwhelmed and underprepared. Teachers describe feeling like “first responders” to mental health emergencies without adequate training, time, or

support. Meanwhile, school counselors, who often serve hundreds of students each, are stretched thin, and shortages of licensed school psychologists persist across the country. Without investment in school-based mental health staff and educator preparation programs that include social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practice, and digital literacy, our education system will remain ill-equipped to meet this moment. Addressing the mental health crisis requires a holistic, well-funded response, and it must begin with recognizing screen time as both a symptom and a driver of deeper systemic issues.

C. The Crucial Role of Educator Preparation and School-Based Mental Health Professionals

Addressing the rising challenges of excessive screen time requires a well-prepared and well-supported education workforce, comprising teachers, school counselors, psychologists, and school leaders. Yet, most educators are not adequately trained to address the social, emotional, and cognitive impacts of screen overuse. This is not due to a lack of interest or effort; it's a scarcity issue. Scarcity of time. Scarcity of training and professional development. Scarcity of research.

Most teacher and counselor preparation programs do not yet offer systematic training on digital wellness, screen time moderation, or how to manage technology-related mental health concerns in the classroom. According to the RAND Corporation, only 30% of teachers feel confident using digital tools in developmentally appropriate ways. Even fewer report feeling prepared to respond to screen-induced behavioral issues like inattention, sleep deprivation, or digital addiction. With screen time now a central force in children's lives, this knowledge gap has serious consequences.¹⁷

Teachers are increasingly the first to observe signs of screen-related challenges such as disrupted sleep, poor concentration, anxiety, and social withdrawal. Yet many say they lack the tools to intervene effectively. A 2023 Education Week survey found that 74% of teachers believe screen time is hurting student focus, but only 17% have received any training on managing it.¹⁸ Professional development focused on classroom strategies for screen balance, integrating movement and mindfulness, and recognizing mental health red flags is not optional—it's essential.

While school and district leaders establish instructional policies and allocate resources, few are prepared to lead on this issue. A 2022 report by the Consortium for School Networking found that 60% of school leaders cited "student mental health linked to digital use" as a top concern. Yet, less than 20% had received professional development on managing digital environments or regulating screen exposure during instructional time.¹⁹ Principals need training in change management, policy guidance, and support for teachers struggling with the effects of screen overuse.

Educator preparation programs must evolve to address this moment. High-quality EPPs are beginning to embed coursework and field experiences that help future educators balance the promise of technology with its developmental risks to children. These programs incorporate content on screen time science, digital ethics, and trauma-informed practices, while also teaching candidates to promote digital wellness and model healthy screen habits in the classroom. In some early childhood and elementary programs, for example, teacher candidates learn how to prioritize

hands-on, interactive learning over passive screen consumption. Others are integrating digital citizenship and media literacy standards to equip teacher candidates to guide students in evaluating online content, managing screen exposure, and understanding the social-emotional impact of tech use.

Federal teacher training grants, such as the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP), Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED), Hawkins Centers of Excellence, Teacher and School Leadership Incentives (TSL), and IDEA Personnel Preparation, are vital levers for closing this gap. As discussed further below, unfortunately, the President's budget would eliminate funding for some of these critical programs. These investments fund clinical practice, coaching, and embedded professional development for educators. Importantly, these programs serve as incubators of innovation in educator preparation and development, not only addressing the needs of their communities but also serving as models of best practice that are replicated by educator preparation programs nationwide. Prioritizing screen time literacy, digital citizenship, and youth mental health in these grants would enable institutions to build capacity in the exact areas where the need is most urgent.

Additionally, there is an urgent need to restore a robust federal commitment to education research. Federal support is crucial for conducting large-scale, cross-state research that can identify national trends, evaluate systemic interventions, and generate scalable solutions that individual states cannot fund or coordinate on their own. The current Administration's cuts to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) have significantly weakened the Department of Education's research capacity at a time when evidence-based solutions are desperately needed. Further, the Administration has gutted the Office of Educational Technology (OET), which provides critical guidance, strategies, and supported research on effective implementation of technology in schools.

We strongly recommend that the Department restore OET and reinstate and strengthen its research arm to support rigorous studies on the effects of screen time and to evaluate interventions and instructional strategies that promote student well-being and academic success. AACTE stands ready to facilitate the dissemination of evidence-based models and provide support to other education preparation programs to implement these models.

Moreover, as you know, President Trump recognizes the importance of "investing in our educators and equipping them with the tools and knowledge to not only train students about AI, but also to utilize AI in their classrooms to improve educational outcomes. Professional development programs focused on AI education will empower educators to confidently guide students through this complex and evolving field. Educators, industry leaders, and employers who rely on an AI-skilled workforce should partner to create educational programs that equip students with essential AI skills and competencies across all learning pathways."²⁰

Unfortunately, the Administration has canceled many of these teacher training grants and is proposing to eliminate some entirely, while others will be converted into block grants. These programs are crucial to advancing the President's AI objectives. Without these investments, we risk asking educators to solve 21st-century problems with 20th-century tools.

School counselors and psychologists, too, are overwhelmed by the surge in digital-related mental health concerns. The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-to-

counselor ratio of 250:1; however, the national average is 408:1. For psychologists, the ratio is even worse, with over 1,200 students per psychologist. Screen time isn't the only factor driving student distress. Still, it's a major one—and these professionals need intensive training, not just reactive triage, to manage the evolving landscape of digital risks and trauma.

The School-Based Mental Health Services grants are designed to meet the mental health needs of students. Additionally, these grants support the hiring and training of school-based mental health workers, such as counselors and social workers, to address the social and emotional needs of students. Sadly, the Administration has terminated the remaining funding for federal grants authorized and appropriated by Congress in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. School districts across the country have relied on these funds to hire mental health professionals; now, they face the challenge of securing financing for these professionals or operating without their support.

The cuts to teacher training and mental health grants threaten to undo progress as our needs become increasingly urgent, leaving our schools overwhelmed and our most vulnerable children unsupported. We must resist the false dichotomy that says we cannot afford these investments. In reality, we cannot afford not to make them. The digital divide is no longer just about access to devices; it's about ensuring access to high-quality, supportive instruction that empowers students to navigate those devices wisely. Students in under-resourced rural and urban schools frequently experience more passive screen time and fewer interactions with well-prepared educators.²¹ Federal investments in teacher training and school-based mental health professionals are crucial for bridging this equity gap.

It is important to note that the budget reconciliation bill under consideration would actually make it harder to ensure schools have qualified and effective educators, counselors, principals, and other essential school personnel. Significantly, the bill would eliminate access to the full Pell Grant for student teachers because they cannot take a 15-credit course load while working in schools. Eliminating GRAD Plus loan programs will make it difficult and more expensive for students to pursue specialty areas like special education, school counseling, and school leadership. And, rather than diverting federal funds into voucher programs, we need Congress to invest in all our children and make sure they are prepared to “adapt to and thrive in an increasingly digital society.”²²

The implications of excessive screen time extend beyond education; they are now a significant concern for public health. Just as we train teachers to recognize the signs of abuse or neglect, we must also equip them to identify the symptoms of digital overload. Similarly, as we deploy nurses and counselors to support physical and emotional well-being, we must invest in the preparation and professional development of educators who promote cognitive and social wellness in the digital age.

If we are serious about safeguarding the next generation, we must prepare the adults who guide them. Congress has the tools: TQP, SEED, Hawkins, TSL, IDEA Personnel Preparation, and school-based mental health programs. Our educators must be ready, and our policies must support that readiness.

Policy Recommendations

Despite mounting evidence of the profound and long-term effects of excessive screen time on children's development, recent actions by the Administration have failed to prioritize educator preparation as a core solution. While investments have been directed toward devices, broadband expansion, and digital infrastructure, the educators tasked with navigating this new reality often remain undertrained, under-resourced, and unsupported. This imbalance is short-sighted. Screen time is not merely a classroom distraction; it is a public health concern with implications for student attention, emotional regulation, academic success, and long-term workforce readiness.

Without intentional investments in preparation, professional development, and research to help educators identify and utilize evidence-based approaches, we are asking teachers, educators, and counselors to solve a crisis they were never prepared to face. These investments serve as incubators for innovation and can be scaled to support students across the country. However, left unaddressed, the unchecked rise in screen-induced challenges will erode our nation's future productivity, deepen achievement and mental health disparities, and weaken the very fabric of public education. If we fail to act now, we are not only neglecting today's students—we are compromising the future capacity of our workforce, our democracy, and our country.

While regulating screen time is best left to states and local school districts, the federal government has a role to play. **To mitigate the adverse effects of excessive screen time and bolster student development, I urge Congress to do the following:**

- **Invest in Teacher and Educator Preparation:** Allocate resources to improve Educator Preparation Programs that effectively integrate technology into their curricula while addressing students' social, emotional, and learning needs through rigorous research and evaluation. Use competitive priorities in the TQP, SEED, TSL, IDEA Personnel Preparation, and Hawkins programs to prioritize this issue.
 - **Restore Funding for School-Based Mental Health Programs.**
 - **Fund Research on the Impacts of Screen Time Through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES):** Support longitudinal studies to understand the long-term effects of screen exposure on various aspects of child development. Additionally, support research that examines the practices of educators and counselors that assist students facing challenges due to excessive screen time. We need to know what works!
 - **Support Ongoing Professional Development:** Offer continuous learning opportunities for educators to stay current with best practices in digital literacy and student engagement.
 - **Develop Recommendations on Screen Time:** The Office of Educational Technology could develop evidence-based recommendations and provide guidance on healthy screen use for children and adolescents, supporting schools and districts as they develop local policies related to screen time.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I welcome any questions and look forward to our continued collaboration in promoting the well-being and success of our nation's students.

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Chairman KILEY. Thank you very much and now, finally, Dr. Twenge, you are recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF DR. JEAN TWENGE, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY, SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Ms. TWENGE. Good morning, Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici and other esteemed Members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to speak before you today. My name is Jean Twenge, and I do research on generational differences and how they're caused by technology.

I also just wrote a book for parents called *Ten Rules for Raising Kids in a High-Tech World*. The first smart phone went on sale in 2007. By 2012, the majority of Americans owned one. The years since have resembled a vast experiment, especially on children and adolescents.

The results of that experiment have been a disaster. That is especially true in schools where most students can use their phones during the school day.

In a large international survey, twice as many students report that they feel lonely at school, as did in 2012. Loneliness at school has increased the most in countries where students spend more time using electronic devices for leisure purposes during the school day.

Academic performance has also suffered. After rising for two decades, U.S. student scores on standardized reading and math tests declined after 2012. Internationally, scores on math, reading and science also began to decline around 2012.

The declines in academic performance are significantly larger in countries where students spend more time using electronic devices for leisure purposes, like social media, during the school day.

The mere presence of a smart phone reduces attention capacity and cognitive performance. In one experiment, students who did not have access to their phones during a lecture scored 13 percentage points higher on a test than those who kept their phones.

A study of Norwegian middle schools found that smart phone bans led to improved academic performance, less bullying, and bet-

ter mental health, especially for girls, and we can put the slide down now, thank you.

Third, students are talking to each other less. When students have access to their phones during breaks and lunch they are occupied with their devices, instead of interacting face to face with each other.

This is on top of the sharp decline in teens getting together with their friends in person outside of school that has happened also at the same time that we have had major increases in depression, self-harm and suicide among our teens, that also began around 2012.

A commonsense media survey found that one out of four teens watched pornography during the school day. Half of those said they used a school issued device to do so. That also means other students are inadvertently exposed to adult content at school. My oldest daughter, who just graduated from high school and is now in the Navy, once sat behind a boy watching pornography on his phone in the middle of a high school class.

Fifth, access to phones often leads to bullying, fights and unauthorized filming. In a rural district in Colorado, more than half of student disciplinary issues were due to phones. When the North Adams School District in Massachusetts banned phones during the school day, discipline referrals dropped 75 percent.

Sixth, teachers find it difficult to teach when students are on their phones. Many are quitting in frustration. 72 percent of high school teachers say that students being distracted by their phones in the classroom is a major problem. 83 percent support banning student phone use during the entire school day. "Every day is a constant struggle against cell phone usage," said one teacher who quit.

"We're competing with Netflix, Face Time, texting, they're even watching March Madness," said another teacher. In conclusion, allowing smart phones in schools has been a disaster for our children. For their sake, this vast natural experiment must come to an end. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Twenge follows:]

The consequences of smartphones in schools**Testimony by Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D.****Professor of Psychology, San Diego State University****June 10, 2025**

The first smartphone, the iPhone, went on sale in 2007. By 2012, the majority of Americans owned a smartphone. The years since have resembled a vast experiment, especially on children and adolescents. The results of that experiment have been a disaster.

That is especially true in education, where most schools allow students to use their phones during the school day. These lax policies have had devastating consequences for students attending K-12 schools, including increases in loneliness, declines in academic performance, lack of social interaction, exposure to pornography during school hours, discipline referrals, and declines in teacher morale. Below, I detail these consequences with reference to my academic research as well as the research and reports of others. This evidence supports school policies banning student use of phones from the beginning to the end of the school day.

Increases in loneliness at school

The Programme for International School Assessment (PISA) dataset, administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), surveys large, nationally representative samples of 15-year-old students in countries around the world every three years. Since 2000, they have asked students if they agree or disagree with the statement “I feel lonely at school.” In the U.S. and other English-speaking countries such as Canada and the U.K., the number of students who felt lonely at school doubled or nearly doubled between 2012 and 2018 (Twenge et al., 2021; and see Figure 1).

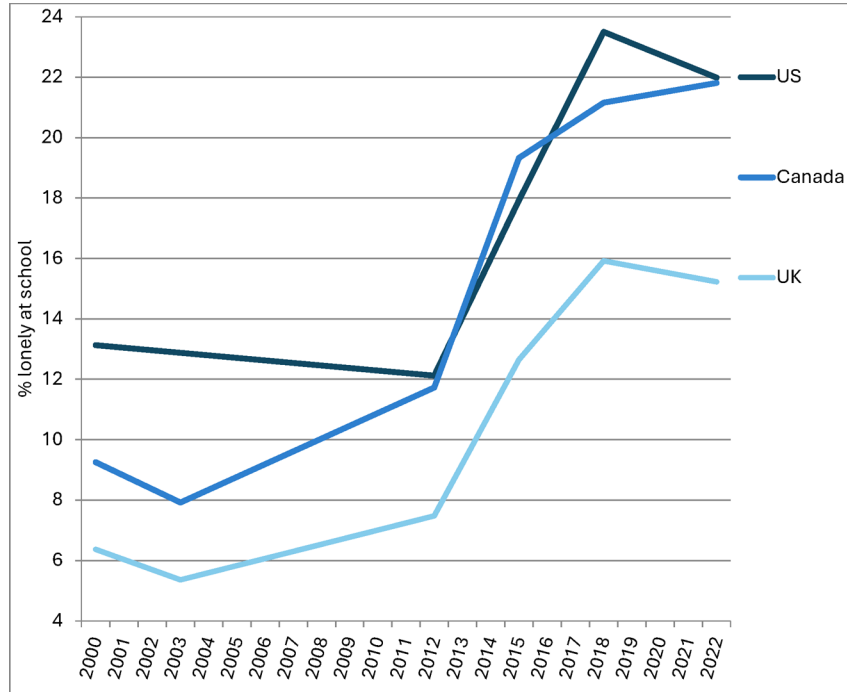


Figure 1: Percent of 15-year-old students who agree they feel lonely at school, U.S., Canada, and U.K., 2000-2022. Source: PISA; analyses in Twenge (2025a). Note: Data collection years were 2000, 2003, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2022. Question was not asked in the U.S. in 2003.

Worldwide, 84% more girls and 27% more boys in 2022 said they felt lonely at school compared to ten years earlier in 2012 (see Figure 2).

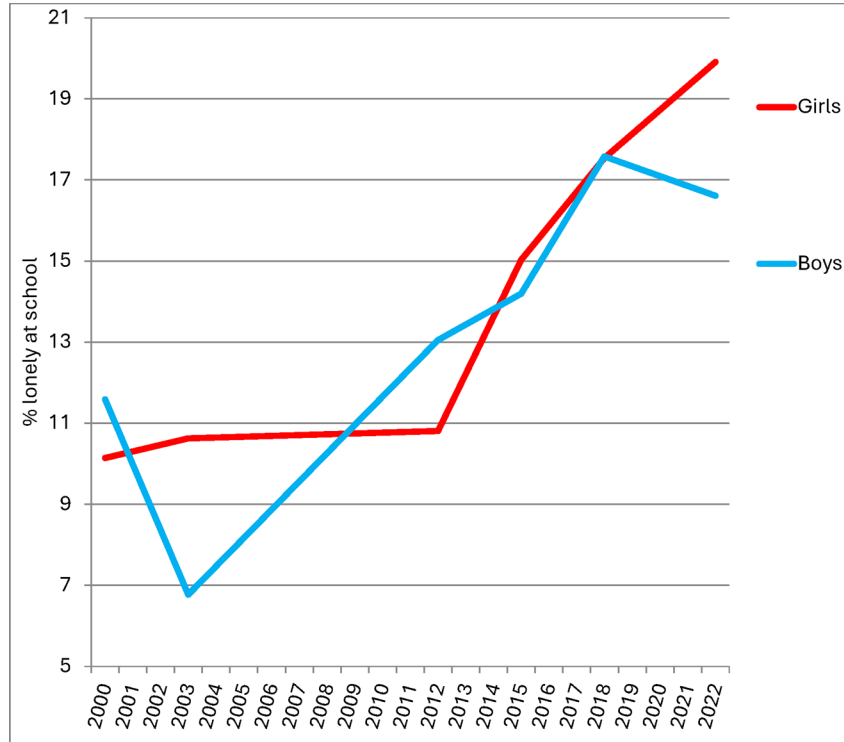


Figure 2: Percent of 15-year-old students who agree they feel lonely at school, worldwide, by sex, 2000–2022. Source: PISA; analyses from Twenge (2025a). Note: Data collection years were 2000, 2003, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2022.

These increases in school loneliness are directly associated with students using their phones during the school day. In 2022, the PISA survey asked students how much time they spent using electronic devices during the school day for leisure (non-educational) purposes. The increase in loneliness from 2012 to 2022 was twice as large in countries where students spent

more time using their devices for leisure purposes during the school day (see Figure 3). Thus, when students spent more time using their phones for leisure at school, more students felt lonely at school.

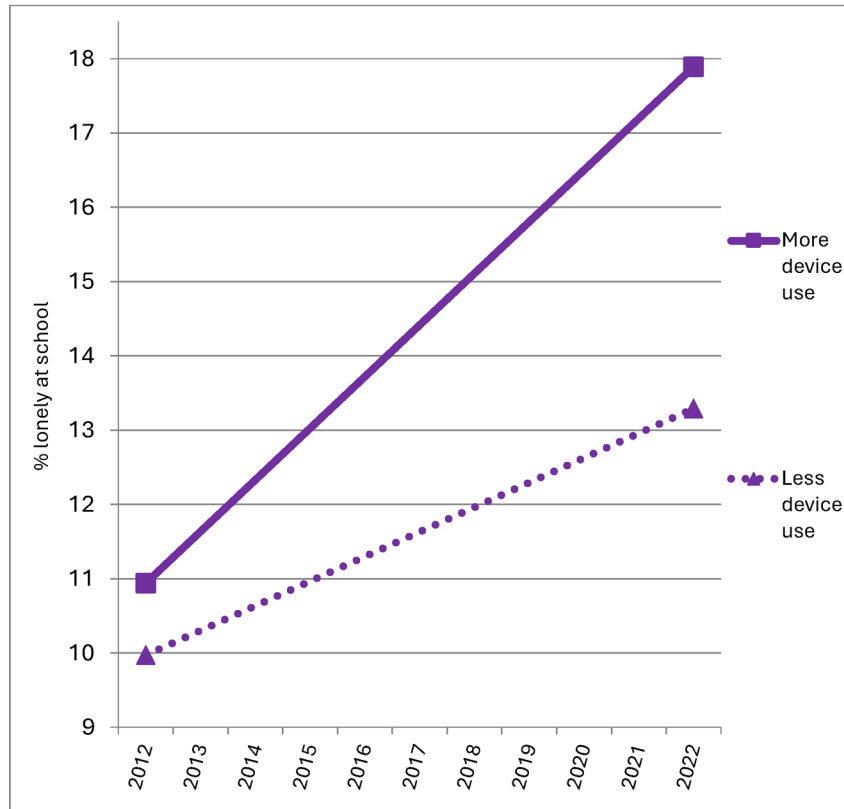


Figure 3: Percent of 15-year-old students who agree they are lonely at school, by more vs. less use of electronic devices for leisure purposes during the school day. Source: PISA; analyses in Twenge (2025a). Note: More device use = top 25% of countries for leisure use of devices in school. Less device use = lowest 25% of countries for leisure use of devices in school.

The surge in loneliness at school is only one example of the enormous increases in adolescent mental health issues since 2012. Clinical-level depression, self-harm, and suicide rates all skyrocketed among U.S. adolescents, especially girls, over the years that smartphones and social media increased in popularity (Twenge, 2020; see Figure 4). In contrast, the trends are completely misaligned with economic indicators such as unemployment.

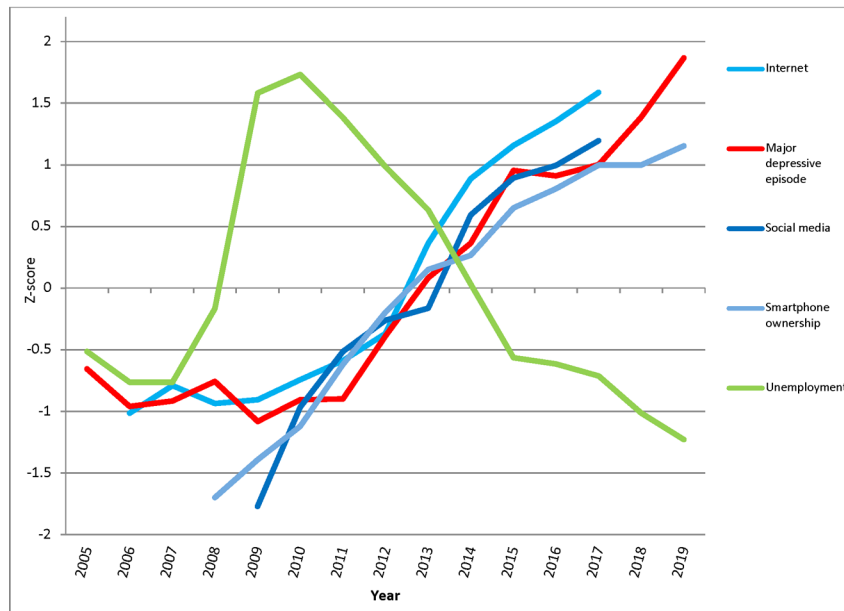


Figure 4: U.S. teen girls' rates of clinical-level depression, time spent on the internet, and social media use and U.S. adults' smartphone ownership and unemployment rate, 2005-2019. Sources: National Survey on Drug Use and Health; Monitoring the Future; Pew Research Center; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; analyses in Twenge (2025b), *Generations*. Notes: Depression was

assessed in a screening survey and thus does not rely on physician diagnoses or treatment seeking. Values are standardized.

Academic performance

Over the same years, the academic performance of K-12 students has also suffered. After rising for two decades, U.S. 8th graders' scores on standardized reading and math tests declined after 2012 (see Figure 5). Although some of the decline took place during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the decreases in academic performance began eight years before the pandemic's arrival.

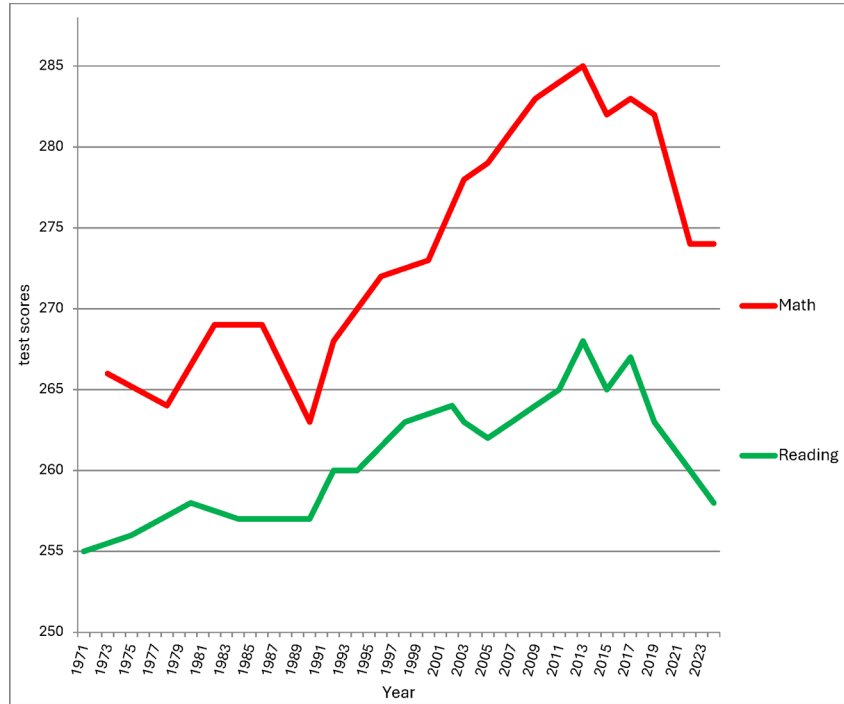


Figure 5: U.S. 8th graders' scores on standardized tests in math and reading, 1971-2024

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Declines in academic performance in math, reading, and science have also appeared worldwide in the PISA dataset (see Figure 6). These declines also began long before the pandemic, primarily after 2012.

OECD countries: Unprecedented performance drop

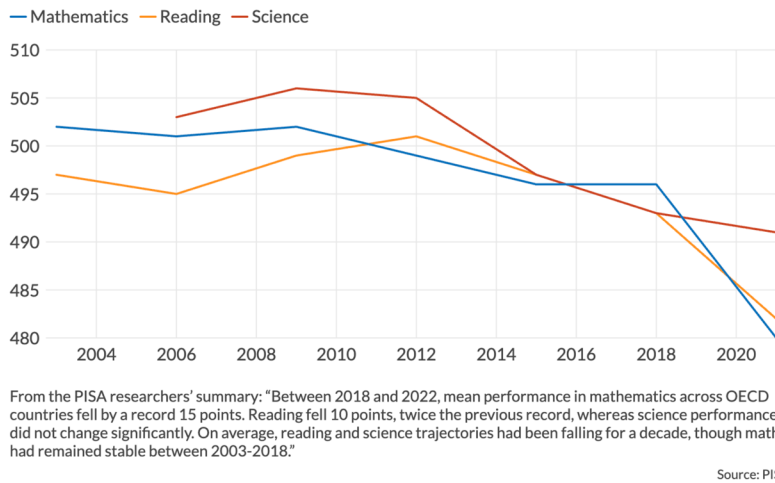


Figure 6: Scores of 15-year-old students worldwide on standardized tests of math, reading, and science, 2003-2022. Source: PISA. Graph by GIS.

The declines in academic performance are also directly associated with the use of electronic devices in school for leisure purposes, with declines in test scores significantly larger in countries where students spend more time using electronic devices for leisure purposes during the school day (see Figure 7).

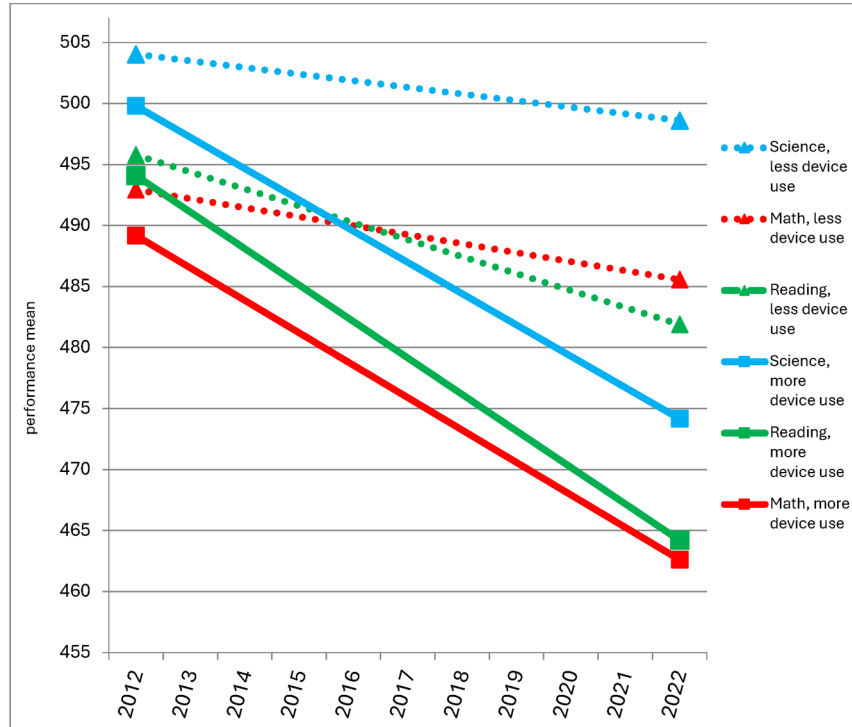


Figure 7: Standardized test scores of 15-year-old students in math, reading, and science, by use of electronic devices for leisure purposes during the school day, 2012-2022. Source: PISA; Analyses in Twenge (2025a).

Finland was once known for having the best school system in the world. In 2022, teens in Finland admitted to using their devices during the school day for non-school purposes for nearly ninety minutes. Perhaps as a result, the test scores of Finnish students plummeted between 2012

and 2022. In countries such as Japan, where students spend less than half an hour on their phones for leisure during the school day, academic performance has instead stayed steady (Twenge, 2025a).

Thus far, I have focused on population-level trends during the smartphone era, which are, by necessity, correlational data rather than experimental data. Experimental data, where participants are randomly assigned to different conditions, can prove causation to scientific standards. Experiments in this area also show that electronic devices, including smartphones, undermine academic performance. For example, several experiments have found that the mere presence of a smartphone reduces attention capacity and cognitive performance (Skowronek et al., 2023; Ward et al., 2017). Students with access to devices during class perform more poorly on tests, primarily because phones are so distracting (Lee et al., 2021). In one experiment, college students were randomly assigned to either hand their phone in or keep it while watching a twenty-minute educational video, a format similar to college lectures. They then took a quiz on what they saw. Students who did not have access to their phones scored 7 percentage points higher on the test than those who kept their phones (Lee et al., 2017). A follow-up study found an even bigger difference—those without access to their phones scored 13 percentage points higher on the test (Mendoza et al., 2018).

Phone bans appear to be an effective solution. A study of Norwegian middle schools found that smartphone bans led to improved academic performance, less bullying, and better mental health, especially for girls (Abrahamsson, 2024).

Even the use of electronic devices for educational purposes reduces academic performance. Several studies have found that reading on paper leads to significantly better reading comprehension than reading digitally (Delgado et al., 2018). U.S. fourth and eighth

graders who spent more time using digital devices in language arts classes performed worse on reading tests (Salmeron et al., 2023). College students who took handwritten notes were 58% more likely to get A's in college courses than those who typed notes on laptops, and those who typed notes were 75% more likely to fail the course than those who handwrote notes (Flanigan et al., 2024).

Digital homework can also cause issues. One study observed middle school, high school, and college students studying in their homes. Students lasted an average of six minutes studying on their laptops before they started browsing social media or texting. Even with someone observing them, students spent a third of their “study” time not studying – and that was before social media used sophisticated algorithms (Rosen et al., 2013). Distraction can be an issue even with school-issued devices. Many school-issued laptops allow access to YouTube, which can make it difficult for young students to focus on their homework instead of watching short video content.

Lack of social interaction

The consequences of phone access go beyond the classroom. When students are able to use their phones during lunch and breaks, many choose to do so rather than talk to their classmates. Russell Shaw, the head of Georgetown Day School, described seeing students look at their screens instead of fully engaging with one another. “I’ve watched students who struggle to make friends not learn how to, because they can retreat into the short-term safety of their phones rather than tolerate the discomfort that often precedes finding one’s way into a conversation,” he writes (Shaw, 2024). “Phones teach our students to abandon the eyes of the person they’re speaking to in order to glance at a newly arrived text or Snapchat message.”

The lack of social interaction at school has also been accompanied by a decline in teens socializing outside of school. In 2000, 47% of U.S. 10th graders got together with their friends informally almost every day, but by 2017 that was down to 26%. High school seniors in 2017 spent an hour less a day socializing and going to parties than high school seniors in 1987. The decline in in-person socializing also coincided with a sharp increase in the number of teens who felt lonely and left out (Twenge et al., 2019).

Exposure to pornography during school hours

A Common Sense Media survey found that nearly one out of four teens watched pornography *during the school day*. Half of those said they used a school-issued device to do so (Robb & Mann, 2023). Thus, not only are minors consuming pornography during school time, but other students can be inadvertently exposed to this adult content at school when students have access to their phones during the school day. My children's school district in suburban San Diego allows students to access their phones during the school day. My eldest daughter, who just graduated from high school and is now in the Navy, sat behind a boy in a high school class who was watching pornography on his phone.

More discipline referrals

Many student discipline issues are precipitated by texts and social media posts students receive during the school day. In a rural district in Colorado, more than half of the school's disciplinary issues were due to phones, including incidents of cyberbullying, recording fights, and students taking videos of classmates in bathrooms without their permission (Jargon, 2024a).

School districts that have banned phones during the school day have reported large declines in discipline referrals. When the North Adams school district in Massachusetts banned phones during the school day, discipline referrals dropped a stunning 75% (Banjeri, 2025). A

Connecticut high school reported a 35% decline in suspensions and a 50% drop in students getting sent to the principal's office after requiring students to place their phones in a locked Yondr pouch during the school day (Cross, 2024; Rohn et al., 2024).

Declines in teacher morale

Mitchell Rutherford taught biology at a public high school in Arizona for eleven years. Students' phones were not supposed be out during class, but it was up to teachers to enforce that policy. A few years ago, students would put their phones away when he asked, Rutherford says. "Now, you can ask them, bug them, remind them, and try to punish them, and still nothing works," he said. He quit his teaching job (Jargon, 2024b).

Minneapolis middle school science teacher Laura Kimball taught in a school with a similar policy. "Every day is a constant struggle against cellphone usage," she said. She, too, quit her job (Kimball, 2023).

Seventy-two percent of high school teachers say that students being distracted by their phones in the classroom is a major problem (Lin et al., 2024). "We're competing with Netflix, FaceTime, texting. They're even watching March Madness!" said Missouri science teacher Noelle Gilzow (Walker, 2024). The vast majority of American teachers—83%—support prohibiting student phone use during the entire school day (Walker, 2024). "I don't want to be the phone police. I want to teach," said California high school art teacher Devon Espejo (Walker, 2024).

If school policy says phones are fine everywhere but classrooms, teachers have to spend class time chasing students off phones or decide to not enforce the rule. "If the policy isn't clear and consistent at school, you get a slippery slope," Gilzow said (Walker, 2024). "You have the

‘cool’ teacher who lets me use my cellphone in class. And then there is the ‘mean’ teacher who does not. . . . it sets up a bad dynamic, an unhealthy culture in the building.”

Counterarguments

When I give talks at K-12 schools around the country, school principals tell me that they get the most resistance to phone bans not from students but from parents. Some parents are concerned about contacting their students during emergencies. In particular, they often say they would want to contact their student if there was a school shooting. However, school safety experts agree that students having phones during a shooting is actually *more* dangerous, for at least four reasons: 1. Students might miss important instructions during an emergency situation if they are distracted by their phones. 2. Noise from phones may alert shooters to where people are hiding. 3. Too many people trying to text or call at the same time from the same location can tie up bandwidth and keep authorities from communicating. 4. Although it sounds comforting that students could contact their parents during a shooting, parents will then rush to the school, creating traffic congestion that can keep police and ambulances from getting through. For all of these reasons, it is actually safer if students *do not* have their phones during an active shooter situation (Chuck, 2024; Kelly, 2022; Kyle, 2024; Murray, 2024).

What about the idea that students need to use devices to develop twenty-first-century skills? The problem is technology is constantly changing. As EverySchool founder Amy Tyson points out, a child starting school in this decade won’t retire until the 2080s. We cannot predict how digital tools will change, but we can predict that our kids will need good attention spans and social skills, and electronic devices undermine both (Tyson, 2024).

Conclusions

The smartphone era has coincided with increased loneliness at school, declines in academic performance, students spending less time interacting face to face, exposure to pornography during school hours, discipline referrals due to electronic communication and unauthorized filming, and undermined teacher morale. Experimental studies confirm that access to phones compromises academic performance. The most straightforward solution is a policy of no student access to smartphones during the school day. School policies around other technology, including laptops, should also be considered. For the sake of our children's mental health and learning, the vast natural experiment of phones in schools must come to an end.

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Chairman KILEY. Thank you very much. Under Committee Rule 9, we will now question witnesses under the 5-minute rule, and I will first recognize the Vice Chair of the Full Committee, Representative Owens.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you to Chairman Kiley. Thanks for this very important hearing on the usage and impact of screens in schools. Technology can often be a forced multiplier in the workforce. However, we need to better understand the implications when we expose our children to digital devices, and what the long-term effects might be.

I am grateful for the witnesses who are here today to talk about this topic, and how we can make sure that we are making the best decisions for our children. Dr. Twenge, I want, if you would not mind repeating, you just shared some percentage of children that have viewed inappropriate images on devices at schools.

Can you share that once again? I want to make sure people understand the impact that we are having in this particular case.

Ms. TWENGE. Right. This was a survey of teens done by Common Sense Media, a really respected organization, and they found that almost 1 out of 4 teens admitted they had watched pornography—inappropriate content during the school day, and half of those who have said that they did that, did it on a school issued device.

Mr. OWENS. Okay. Thank you so much. Dr. Nye, you work closely with Governor Cox, and other State officials, to craft and pass legislation in Utah. What role did officials play in helping to make the case to the public and stakeholders about the need to make these changes?

Mr. NYE. It was certainly a collaborative effort, right. In terms of the officials, you had not only legislators calling for it, parents calling for it, teachers calling for it, everyone saying something needs to be done. As you know, when you are crafting policy, that—statewide policy, that becomes very tricky in terms of if it is too prescriptive, then it limits or hinders innovation.

If it is too broad then of course, we are not going to accomplish our outcomes. Our local officials and State leaders got together and said well, what could this look like for Utah? Put together what was a very collaborative bill in this case, and through the process we got significant feedback to refine it into something that is a step forward.

Mr. OWENS. I gather the parents were also a big part of this collaborative effort?

Mr. NYE. They were, and so much of this policy, too originates at the local level, so there is permissive language in the bill that allows local control for local circumstances, and that is where you will have a school community council working with a principal,

working with the teachers saying we understand the statewide expectation is to reduce or eliminate, excuse me, phones in the classroom, but what else needs to be true at our school regarding that?

Then they could have that discussion and that engagement.

Mr. OWENS. Okay. Are districts and schools supporting teachers when enforcing these smart phone restrictions, and what does that kind of support look like?

Mr. NYE. I appreciate that. Any good policy, or any good rule is only as good as its degree to which it is enforced, and for teachers, especially they had called out early saying please help us, it would be great to have a law, or a district policy to help do that, so we have something to point to.

That is what they are doing now, and then to the degree administration is able to help when a teacher brings up the issue, or they are seeking to enforce what is the expectation when the administration is there having the conversation with the student, having a conversation with the parents, the teacher does feel supported in that effort, and is able to, you know, across the campus have some uniformity of expectation.

Mr. OWENS. You mentioned the Utah Senate Bill 178 received bipartisan support in the State legislation. In what specific ways did partners come together to cross the aisle to accomplish this?

Mr. NYE. Yes, I think with the focus being on what is the impact of cell phones and screens in schools, the untold aspects of that. Everyone recognized that the common denominator of it was it is hampering educational outcomes and student well-being. When we made that the focus, people can get around that. Now, how we get there to addressing it, of course there is a legislative process to do that is—but for that bipartisan support it was commonly recognized as a statewide issue that smart phones and that associated screen time were hindering what is occurring in our classrooms.

Mr. OWENS. To say the least the from bill-to-bill policy is so Utah. I love the innovation, love the collaboration, and I love that we are having this conversation, very, very important for our kids and our future, so thank you so much and I yield back my time.

Chairman KILEY. I now recognize the Ranking Member for 5 minutes.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that this is a critical issue and that it is bipartisan, but I also want to reiterate that the Federal Government does not play a role in establishing policies. That is up to states and local school districts. Our role could be to be an effective partner for the states through research and guidance, professional development.

Those are rendered more unlikely if not impossible without the Institute of Education Sciences and the Office of Education Technology at the Department of Education. We have been talking about academic outcomes and mental health, and you know, it is pretty clear from all of your testimony that we have a critical, serious issue to address with device addiction, and why it is so prevalent.

Also, we need to talk about the risks of access, but also what can schools do to address it? We know that this is affecting not only students in urban areas, like I mentioned with Portland Public

Schools and their programs funded through the bipartisan Safer Communities Act, but rural districts as well.

A small, rural school district in Oregon saw a significant improvement in access to behavioral healthcare for their students when they were able to hire additional social workers with grant funding from the bipartisan Safer Communities Act. I recently learned that that funding is being turned off, leaving students without the support and counseling they need.

Dr. Holcomb-McCoy, what are additional challenges that rural communities face, and why is that support through bills like the bipartisan Safer Communities Act so important?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Well, thank you for the question and for your concern about rural communities. The fact is—is that the American School Counselor Association has a recommendation that there should be one counselor to every 250 students, which is an ambitious ratio.

In rural districts often counselors have way more than 250 students because they are covering sometimes an entire county, which could be 700, 800, 900 students. The same is true in urban districts. Right now, we are just not hiring enough counselors that can manage the case load. On top of that, school counselors' work is based in school time, and so the issue of taking students out of instructional time for mental health concerns is also another challenge that there are not enough mental health providers in rural areas, also, that are close enough to provide the help that many students need there.

Ms. BONAMICI. I appreciate that. I remember having a very similar conversation in this very room after Sandy Hook and looking at the lack of school counselors and how important they are. We have heard pretty overwhelmingly about the positive effects of school phone bans and device bans.

Dr. Holcomb-McCoy, not all studies suggest that a ban is going to lead to improvements in student well-being. Why might that be? Is there a relation to lack of training among educators and administrators, and what would be the consequences of the cuts to research and Title II professional development funding on this issue?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Well, many as I said, educators need the training to understand the challenge, as well as how to use technology in a healthy way. Although we are talking about cell phone bans which I can understand the harm that is associated with that, there are many students that need screen time to connect with friends.

In my daughter's case it was to be able to communicate effectively and needing the time. It is important for teachers and educators, all educators, leaders in schools to understand this balance of how to use, how to create healthy digital use of technology.

Ms. BONAMICI. We need to get it right.

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. We need to get it right. It is almost like food. It is like we do not want to eat too much, it is harmful. Too little could be harmful as well. It is moderation that we are seeking for.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you. Dr. Twenge, I noticed in your testimony something that is—I know it is submitted in your written testimony, but I think it is important to talk about here, we never

take off our parent hats when we are parents of kids who are either in school or have been through school.

You said some of the strongest opposition has come from parents who are concerned that they will not be able to contact their child if there is an emergency. You know, I noted Sandy Hook, but there have been many other instances, for example, of gun violence, Uvalde, Parkland, we don't need to list them. There are way too many, so how do you respond to that?

Ms. TWENGE. Fortunately, it is a minority of parents who are against the smart phone bans during the school day, but the vast majority do support them. When concerns are brought up, it is very often in that category, what if there is an emergency. In particular, a lot of parents want to know that. When I give talks at school's, parents will bring that up.

Principals say they get that question from parents. It turns out school safety experts are in agreement that students having access to their phones during an active shooter situation is actually more dangerous, so that is for a number of reasons. For one thing, if they are distracted by their phones they may not listen to the instructions about where they need to go to keep themselves safe.

The noise from those devices can alert intruders to where students are hiding. If they are using those devices, even you would think maybe oh, this is comforting to contact their parents, and that causes a bunch of other problems, then the parents are going to rush to the school. That is going to block access to police and first responders, and it is going to tie up bandwidth that those first responders need to respond to the situation.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you. I know I have gone over, but I think it was important to get that on the record. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. Thank you very much. The Representative from Pennsylvania, Mr. Mackenzie, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MACKENZIE. Well, thank you Chairman. I appreciate everybody being here today. It is an important topic, and one that we hear about back in our communities fairly often from concerned parents and educators, so very important discussion to be had here.

Ms. Twenge, I would like to go to you first and just inquire about what we know and what we have learned, or Dr. Twenge, I am sorry, from other countries. Are there leaders in this field that we can look to who have kind of maybe taken steps more proactively, or faster, and what can we take away from those experiences?

Ms. TWENGE. Well, one of the things that I described in both my oral and written testimony is a study that is under review by myself and my colleagues, looking at the PISA dataset which is around the world, and it has measured things like loneliness at school, and it also has standardized measures of academic performance in math, reading and science.

There is a clear pattern. There are some countries where through restrictions or other means, students are not using their devices during the school day for leisure purposes like social media and texting as much as in other countries. We see a clear pattern that those countries that, where students spend less time on those devices for leisure purposes, better academic performance.

Academic performance has not declined as much as it has in other countries. It stayed relatively stable, and that there has not been as big of an increase in feelings of loneliness at school. That gives us the great source of data to look at, yes, that there is different ways of doing this, and you are getting the best outcomes when students are not watching TikTok during class, which I think should not be that surprising.

Mr. MACKENZIE. Thank you. I will go to Dr. Nye or Dr. Gibbins, either of you might be able to answer this question. When a school district is going about implementing a policy, and they have come up with what they think is a best approach, they have maybe gone through some hearings with their local communities or school board, how should we look at engagement with parents, not only in the development of these policies, but then also the implementation?

Mr. GIBBINS. Yes, sir, thank you for that question. I think as far as our district goes, we have really focused on transparency for everything that we do on a daily basis. I think the tide has really turned from there being an us against them kind of mentality when we are talking about parents and their involvement in the student's education.

For us it was definitely the idea of getting the information in front of our parents around what we were doing and why we were doing it. As you mentioned, we had several board meetings where we proposed the policy, we talked about it. We have frequently asked questions on our website.

We address the parents' concern around safety, all of those aspects are all on our website, and we are able to offer that information. Second, just good old-fashioned face to face, sit down and talk with a parent and be available for them to talk through whatever concerns they may have.

Our high school principals, when we implemented this policy were great at that. From a central level, I did not have very many conversations with concerned parents because our high school principals and our junior high principals took care of that, had good conversations, and helped our parents feel at ease.

Mr. MACKENZIE. After implementation have you done any followup with parents to see what their experience has been? If it has been positive for not only themselves, but also their students?

Mr. GIBBINS. Yes, sir. This is our third full year of implementation. In the first 2 years we sent out a survey to our parents and our students, and our staff, and so getting that information from our parents it was very clear that they understood the policy. They knew the reasoning why.

There is some general concern around it, which I think we have heard from some of our other colleagues here, but every year we gather that information and try to adjust and offer information, or additional sessions around training if we see that there is a spike and some type of a concern, even for a particular campus in general.

Mr. MACKENZIE. Great, and just with the remaining time that I have. It sounds like you have figured out a great approach that works in your local community, but it could be a model for other school districts. Is there anything that is being put together by ei-

ther your organization or others that you are aware of, that is a model policy, not only in the actual policy, but also that whole development and implementation and feedback program and approach that you just talked about?

Mr. GIBBINS. Yes, sir, thank you for that question. Actually, there is going to be a House Bill 1481 for the State of Texas that is going—will be signed by the Governor, or should be signed by the Governor that will help all districts formulate those types of things so there will be a requirement for a standardized policy.

There will be an understanding of what those need to look like from consequences, all those things, and we are going to be more than happy to work with our State legislators as needed to help with that. Our policy and our process was not perfect, and so we are hopeful to help share our fabulous failures as well, and what we want to do to make things better.

As we are moving forward, I think you will see more unification from that at the State level.

Mr. MACKENZIE. Sounds great, thank you again, and I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. The Representative from Arizona, Ms. Ansari, is recognized.

Ms. ANSARI. Good morning. I want to thank our expert witnesses so much for being here today. There is no question that technology has dramatically changed our education landscape and the lives of youth in this country in some ways for the better, and in others for the worst.

I personally got my first cell phone in the seventh grade, and I think often about how grateful I am that smart phones were not a thing until college, because growing up is stressful enough as it is, and My Space and Facebook were stressful enough as it is.

Very important conversation that we are having today. I also do want to note that we are having this conversation while the Trump administration is gutting the Department of Education, cutting funding for research and teacher education grants, and recently announced it was canceling 1 billion dollars in grants to school districts to hire mental health professionals.

Since 2010, we have seen a significant rise in mental health concerns among children and adolescents, coinciding with the rapid expansion of social media and screen time. Anxiety, behavioral disorders and depression have become increasingly prevalent, with 10 percent of children ages 3 to 17 diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in the U.S. as of the 2021 and 2022 school year.

In response to this growing issue, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force updated its recommendations in 2022 to include anxiety screening for children as young as 8 years old. Dr. Holcomb-McCoy, given these trends, what do we know about the relationship between screen time and youth mental health, and how should educators, parents and policymakers approach this issue to better support students?

Ms. HOLCOMB-McCOY. Well, the research that we have now shows that there is a relationship between screen time and mental health issues, particularly when we think about a noninstructional time on social media such as TikTok and other types of bad content. That is what we are really concerned about is the content not

being instructional and helpful to a student, and therefore it can cause mental health issues.

We are seeing that increase dramatically. We also see what we call comparisons, comparing oneself to others on social media, that is very, very harmful. The consequences can be vast if not treated, and one thing that we are seeing now is that we are seeing mental health issues among adolescents increasing dramatically, but the lack of treatment and intervention is the one that is so bothersome.

If there are no school counselors available, no school psychologists, or if you are in a rural area, and there are no mental health providers in your community, then we are talking about thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of students being graduating from high school with untreated mental health issues.

That is dangerous for many reasons. I could go into what that means as far as workforce issues, not being prepared to work, not being prepared to go on to stable relationships, overall, just not being able to be productive citizens. That will damage and be harmful for all of us.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you. On that note, do you believe that canceling 1 billion dollars in Federal grants to hire mental health professionals in schools will help or harm these efforts?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Harm.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you. Different students also have dramatically different needs and experiences when it comes to the use of screens in classrooms. You mentioned this in your opening statement.

As schools increasingly impose limits or outright bans on cell phones and other devices, we know that disability advocates are increasingly concerned that these policies could impede access to much needed assistive technology that students with disabilities rely on in the classroom.

Either technology that is on the student's phone or tablet, under the Individuals with Disabilities and Education Act, or IDEA, as well as the Americans with Disability Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, students have a right to access assistive technology in the classroom.

Can you also talk about schools can avoid assisting or—I am sorry, avoid restricting the access to assistive technology while they are setting policies to limit access to screens and devices during school hours?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Yes, I think, you know, I am a researcher myself, and I appreciate good research, and the research on cell ban, cell phone bans, is one type is on one type of device. Like my daughter for instance, with special needs and communication disorders, it was imperative that she had a tablet during school to be able to communicate with others.

This tablet, the use of this tablet is screen time, but it is helpful screen time, so that she can communicate. I think it is important for future research to show the differences between the different types of devices that are present in schools, so that we are not banning all screen time for students because it could be helpful to some and harmful to others.

We need more research that will help inform policy, and so that is—I mean that is, what is what I hear, the critical issue for us

to determine in the future is what types of devices have the most harm.

Ms. ANSARI. Right.

Ms. HOLCOMB-McCOY. I believe that the research on cell phones in schools is it is true and it is distracting. It is causing problems and harm to students, but there are other devices in schools as well that can be that can enhance learning, and so I think we need to look at that very carefully.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you so much. It is incredibly helpful, and I think the final note to make sure that we are not just implementing one size fits all solutions be important to be research based and make decisions that are according to such. Thank you.

Chairman KILEY. I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes. Dr. Nye, I want to ask you about some of your experiences and successes in Utah, and I have always been a fan of taking notes by hand and reading books, rather than on screens. I have always kind of felt intuitively that this is a more cognitively beneficial way of doing things, and now as we have discussed, there is actually a lot of research to bear that out.

At the same time just a couple months ago we held a hearing where I expressed my view that technology, and in particular, AI has the potential to close achievement gaps and elevate student achievement in ways that we have perhaps never seen before.

I do not actually believe that these two points of view are inconsistent. I actually think that one of the benefits of emergent technologies is there is the potential to liberate us from our screens. I think there is a growing consensus that the next major computing platform likely will not be screen based but will be more integrated with the real world.

Even looking at some of the different modalities by which AI tools can be advanced now, you have video, you have voice, so you can imagine for example, a student that is reading a book, or doing a math problem that is able to ask a question just by using their voice, and then get an answer that they can hear so that they are not forced to go to a screen and look something up, and get pulled into something else.

Have you seen examples of that where you can kind of use emerging technologies in a way that actually liberates us from screens, and enriches instruction?

Mr. NYE. Absolutely. Thank you, Chairman Kiley. I mean to be clear, to remove technology, or suggest that we do so out of the classroom altogether would be a disservice to our students. When we are thinking about the appropriate use, what is that technology enhanced classroom versus that technology driven classroom?

What we are primarily concerned is what are those—the device itself, whether it is a school provided device, or the one we carry on us is a smart phone, is only as good as what it's intended use is for. The concern, and the thing that we are wrestling with in the classroom is when the device is used inappropriately, or for means otherwise not associated or attributed to the educational and learning progression process, right?

The other aspect of it to your point, that technology enhanced classroom absolutely is a place, and our students need to be able to identify the appropriate uses of those, as you have discussed, as

well as the AI integration, and even blended classroom opportunities. There is a better balance, clearly, not only in the instruction side of it, but of course we are working to address all those negative uses of the devices as well.

Chairman KILEY. Yes. Everything is changing so fast that it is I think really important for us to be hearing from you about what you are seeing in your classrooms, so that we can share best practices and respond accordingly.

Dr. Twenge, I also wanted to ask you about your research on brain science, because we have learned a lot about what these devices actually do to the developing brain. I think it was Dr. Nye who mentioned there is something like 280 notifications the average students get a day from their phone, and we have learned about sort of the cheap and dopamine hits that things like social media provide, and then it kind of gets you into this vicious cycle where you need more and more of a hit in order, and you know, the reward is actually less, so then you are doing it more and more.

Then it actually sort of undercuts your ability to, you know, engage in more fulfilling activities like relationship with friends and that sort of thing. Could you kind of just expand on how these devices are actually rewiring the developing brain?

Ms. TWENGE. Yes, and I want to be clear I am not a neuroscientist, so I have not really, you know, done FMRI studies, or any of that. What we do know is the effect on attention span, and how people end up feeling a compulsion to take that phone out every time it buzzes, and adults feel that.

Then, think about being 10 and having your first smart phone, and that trains the brain to have that oh, it is buzzing, take it out, and that happens in school all the time, which is why that bell to bell policy is much better because if they have access to the phone in their pocket, and they are not supposed to take it out during class, but they know it is there, they know it is going to buzz, and they have that response.

This is one of the biggest challenges I think is that we have these devices which have radically shortened the attention span to the point where many students cannot make it through a book, even a short book, so a lot of high schools in English class no longer require students to read books. They have given up, they only read essays and short stories.

Even outside of school. Leisure reading is really important for developing empathy, for developing attention span for learning things. The number of high school seniors who read anything, a book, magazine, newspaper, anything longer form every day in the 70's and 80's, it was 60 percent who did that every day.

In more recent years in the big national surveys, it is more than 17 percent. We have seen this huge, huge decline in reading books and being able to pay attention for that long.

Chairman KILEY. That is very troubling. Thank you very much for sharing your perspective, and I think that, you know, maybe at some point later in the hearing if you had any tips as well for parents as to kind of little tweaks that you can make.

Maybe turning off notifications would be a good one, right because then you get one, and then you pull out the phone and you check your whatever it might be, Instagram message, and then oh,

here is a reel, and suddenly you are on your phone for 30 more minutes.

I would love to hear more about that as well, but my time is up, so I will now recognize the Representative from Pennsylvania, Ms. Lee.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I mean I would like to just start by saying that you know, the prevalence and the phenomenon of screen time is I think concerning for all of us. There is no doubt that screens are incredibly prevalent in classrooms right now, and there is no questioning the need to understand like how that technology is affecting students' learning and their well-being.

We know that children and teens' interaction with digital devices can lead to depression, to anxiety, and other concerning health outcomes, and we need to talk about it. We also need to address it, but what my concern is that Republicans are just giving lip service to mental health right now because the administration is ending grants.

We have heard grants that over 250 school districts relied on to hire school counselors and social workers. It makes me wonder how the Republicans are going to ask us to have a genuine conversation about harmful effects of screen time in schools when they are enabling the administration to dismantle the Department of Education, and any support structures that we have for schools, program by program, nickel and dime.

Republicans are asking schools to address students' mental health, while leaving them with very little support to actually do anything about it. Take the Institute for Education Sciences, the Department of Education has cut nearly 900 million dollars in IES contracts, and a majority of IES employees were dismissed.

This abruptly stopped ongoing research, including an evaluation examining whether mental health interventions were working. When states, districts, and schools make policies around screen time they turn to data and research to understand the scope of the problem, and what solutions could actually work.

How are going to ask schools to make evidence-based policies around screen time while simultaneously cutting off the production of the evidence that they need? Educators are already stretched incredibly thin, and now we are going to ask them to be data scientists and researchers too.

Dr. Holcomb-McCoy, why is it so important to invest in the Institute of Education Science? What role, and I know we have mentioned it in your opener, it has been mentioned, but what role specifically does IES data and research play in developing policies around using digital devices in school?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Thank you for that question because research is so important in education to guide practice, as well as policymaking. What IES different, if you compared to State level research, IES is/was a setting for—was an opportunity for researchers to do longer longitudinal studies, multi-State research to look at comparisons across many different school districts, many different states.

It was a center for research that answered some of these important questions around practice and policy. For instance, when I was at Johns Hopkins University, I was part of an IES grant that

looked at special education referrals, and it was a grant in which we looked at Baltimore schools, but Maryland schools in general, and looking at new interventions, and really testing those interventions by randomized trials to see if it actually had the impact that we hypothesized in the beginning.

The research that comes out of IES was so important to the work of educators because it informed. It gave us more rigorous evaluation of the policies and the practices, innovative practices, that we thought would really work. It is all about tell us what works, so that we are not, you know, involved in practices anymore because we think they work, we need to know that they work through the rigorous evaluation.

That is what IES gave us. It gave us a center for research, for researchers from our member institutions, as a part of AACTE, had many IES grants that were canceled that stopped the investigation of some of the most innovative practices.

Ms. LEE. Thank you. In the interest of time I will send in my second question to the record, but I want to conclude by saying that the bottom line is that as students are facing increasing mental health challenges, schools need more, not less, support to keep up with the evolving technology that may be contributing to the problem.

This Committee should be working to ensure that schools have the funding and the resources they need to understand and implement those best practices for the students. The Committee should be working to ensure policies around technology and schools address the growing digital divide for answers because while schools, or some schools are dealing with more and more screens, others are fighting for the bare minimal to teach students basic digital literacy.

The Committee could be working to provide adequate oversight to add tech companies who are sharing students' personal data with third parties. In order for these discussions to lead somewhere meaningful, to improve students' mental health and learning and safety, we need the Institute of Education Services, the Office of Education and Technology, and a fully staffed, fully funded Department of Education. Thank you so much for your time, and I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. The Representative from North Carolina, Mr. Harris, is recognized.

Mr. HARRIS. Well, thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of our panel for your presence here today for this very informative hearing, and an issue that I think is extremely concerning to parents all across our country. I believe most of us, as we have learned today, can agree that when used correctly, technology can be an invaluable educational tool that can enhance a student's classroom learning experience.

However, unfortunately, as we have also heard right here today every school district in the country has experienced the detrimental effects excessive screen time has on our children. There is a couple of questions that come to mind I would like to ask today.

Dr. Nye, first of all, while Utah Senate Bill 178 created a statewide framework, what flexibility did it provide, or does it provide

for school districts to adapt the policy to meet the unique needs of the communities?

Mr. NYE. Well, thank you for the question. The bill itself has some permissive language in it that would allow a local district, while setting a statewide expectation that phones are not to be used during instructional time, if a local district working with their constituents and all those local boards, and patrons of the district were to decide hey, there is this element that we need maybe a little more flexibility with.

As long as they write their policy, and the expectation is they do their own policy, that is in keeping with the intent of the statewide expectation but also identifies specific allowances within their community or within their school. That is certainly acceptable under the law.

Mr. HARRIS. Super. That will lead to a followup to you, Dr. Gibbins. In your experience, how important is it for local school districts to have the freedom and support of the State, and even the Federal Government to make decisions that are in the best interest of their local students?

Mr. GIBBINS. Yes, sir. Thank you for that question. I agree with you 100 percent. The autonomy of the local school district is really, really important. Every school district is different. Every community is different, and they have the ability to have meaningful discussions with not only the principal of the school for example, but the community that surrounds that school is priceless.

We need to continue with that, whether it be a cell phone policy, or you know, other policies that would affect their students, we need to have buy in from everyone. You know, schools were built around communities, that is the hub of a community, and especially in Richardson, Texas, we have schools that are the hub of the community.

If we alienate any part of that community, we cannot be transparent and have some type of challenge when it comes to trying to do what we think is best, so I agree with you 100 percent that autonomy and open conversation is really valuable.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you, sir. Well, I have long believed that states and school districts, and parents, are the ones best suited to address issues directly affecting their students. In fact, in my own home State of North Carolina, there are currently multiple bills that are working their way through the General Assembly that would empower schools to restrict or limit phone use within their own schools.

I believe we have got to get the Federal Government out of the way of the states, school districts and parents, and really get back to empowering them to make decisions that are in the best interest of their students. I will ask one more question, Dr. Gibbins. You stated—I enjoyed reading your testimony, that teacher retention rates stand between 84 and 94 percent following the implementation of the new policy.

How does that compare to retention rates in previous years?

Mr. GIBBINS. Yes, sir, that is definitely higher as compared to different previous years. As a district, I think we probably—85 percent retention rate as a district over the last several years. It has

been higher and lower, it has fluctuated, but we have several campuses where it has gone to upper 90's or mid-90's.

We have teachers who have made testimony around they drive by 7, 8 schools on their way to the campus in which they are teaching at because the policy that the school has in place around cell phones and just the comfort that they feel of not having to worry about that.

Yes sir, we have seen an increase in our cell phone policy campuses where we have had the ability to really see teachers stay, and we know when teachers stay, they build capacity with not only their students but as teachers, and we have seen it as a really positive thing.

Mr. HARRIS. For the record, you are hearing from teachers themselves that this is something they want, and this is why they are staying there in the retention rate?

Mr. GIBBINS. Yes, sir.

Mr. HARRIS. Excellent. Thank you again for your testimony, and Mr. Chairman I yield back my time.

Chairman KILEY. Since we have about 20 seconds, maybe Dr. Twenge, did you have any thoughts you wanted to add to my earlier question about some good habits, or maybe nudges for how use could be limited?

Ms. TWENGE. Well, I mean the first thing for parents is put off giving your kid an internet enabled phone, a smart phone, as long as possible. It is really tough for parents because many of them, their kids say, "Well, I'm the only one," so parents are trying to come together to agree that they are not going to give their kids a phone until later.

The rule in my own house is you get your first smart phone when you get your driver's license. You have to be at least 16 and then have that freedom of that driver's license. Before that our kids have had flip phones, or phones designed for kids that do not allow internet and social media. That also helps during the school day, and that phone is not as attractive and interesting to pick up.

There are these really specific things as you mentioned to talk to your kids about turning off notifications once they do get that smart phone. The other really, really important rule is no phones in the bedroom overnight. That is for adults too if you possibly can. You will sleep better and longer if that phone is not available, and then put those parental controls on, so it shuts down at night.

Even at 16 they cannot download apps because social media does not verify age, does not require parental permission. Your kid might have TikTok or Instagram, and you may not even know it. It happens with even 10 and 11-year-olds, so when they do get that phone, having that parental control in place that they have to have your permission to download an app is very important.

Chairman KILEY. Yes, great tips. Maybe some of them are applicable to adults as well as young people. I now recognize the Representative from North Carolina, Ms. Adams.

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you, Mr., Chairman and thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. We all agree that technology is transforming education, but we also know that how we use it matters. Too much screen time, unstructured or unmonitored can have real

consequences on students' attention spans, on their mental health, and on their academic success.

At the same time, when integrated thoughtfully, technology can open doors. It can personalize learning; it can create opportunities for students who might otherwise be left behind. Only if we are investing in all of our students, and that is where I want to begin.

Last Congress, this Committee passed a bill that would divert public dollars to public schools with no real accountability. Private schools do not have to follow the same civic rights protections. They are not bound by IDEA. They do not face the same transparency standards as our public schools.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle will not argue with you on that because that is the truth. Dr. Holcomb-McCoy, in your view what are the constitutional and civil rights concerns that we should keep in mind as we expand school choice and privatization, and are there risks in removing the Federal protections that ensure that all students, regardless of race, background or ability, receive a fair and equal education?

Ms. HOLCOMB-McCOY. Yes, thank you Dr. Adams for that great question. I think yes, there are civil rights concerns around the equal access to success and the same technology, the same policies that promote success for students. Our constitutional right to ensure that every student has access to the same opportunities.

That is really important. You know, as we talk about screen time and different schools and different policies, and as we are talking today about some schools having success with cell phone bans, and others do not, then you wonder whether or not some students are not having the same opportunity for success than others.

If you think about the different schools having, and there being no Federal oversight as far as having equal access, then that could be troubling because we could have more screen exposure to some students, and not to others.

Ms. ADAMS. Okay. Well, let us move on to screen time and mental health. We have heard a lot today about the risks of excessive screen time, especially for younger students, but the issue is not just how much time students spend on screens, it is also how that time is spent, and what kind of learning is taking place.

Dr. Holcomb-McCoy, how can schools better balance the integration of technology with the need for social emotional growth, and interpersonal connection in classrooms? What does that—what does thoughtful, effective integration look like, especially with students who are already vulnerable?

Ms. HOLCOMB-McCOY. Yes, thank you for that question as well. I am encouraged that, you know, there are policies that are keeping students engaged during school time, but we still have out of school time where students are engaging in possibly inappropriate exposure to screens and different content through their cell phones and other devices.

When we are thinking about, in your question, as far as how to be a healthy citizen, a digital citizen, how to regulate yourselves on parents having the information, the tips, to help students really understand how to be a citizen that understands the pitfalls to too much screen time, and also what works, and what will help them, and enhance their livelihood and their productivity.

That is what I would like to see us train teachers to be able to help students become healthy, digital citizens.

Ms. ADAMS. Okay. Let me get to my next question if I can.

Ms. HOLCOMB-McCOY. Okay, all right. All right.

Ms. ADAMS. In North Carolina we have more than 100,000 English learning students, one of the largest populations in the country, and I want to clear up a misconception, the vast majority are native born, but many attend schools that lack the funding, the staffing, or the training, to fully meet their needs.

Mr. Chairman, I want to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a 2019 report from the North Carolina Justice Center, which lays out how our students is underfunding the limited efficiency, English efficiency allotment.

Chairman KILEY. Without objection.

[The information of Rep. Adams follows:]

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May 2019

Addressing the Needs of North Carolina's *English Learning Students*

By SARAH E. MONTGOMERY, POLICY ADVOCATE

A BRIEF FROM
NCJCE **ED LAW**
EDUCATION & LAW PROJECT



For nearly a decade, North Carolina has seen a steep decline in its public education funding commitments resulting in declining student academic performance. The state is ranked 42nd for per-pupil spending, over \$3000 less than the national average.¹ North Carolina's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores reveal that student achievement has stagnated across all subjects after decades of improvement.² Additionally, the state continues to see growing achievement gaps between white students and students of color.³ The harm of inadequate funding is disproportionately severe for English Learning

students who face additional barriers to opportunity.⁴

Despite these obstacles, there are countless examples across the state that point to promising interventions that can help ensure more equitable outcomes for English learners. As children of immigrant families become increasingly central to our social and economic future, North Carolina has the opportunity to create inclusive, academically high performing learning environments for all children.

This brief provides an overview of the state's obligation to meet the needs of English learners, how limited funding exacerbates the opportunity gap,⁵ and highlights practices and policies that can ensure every child receive an education free from barriers to academic achievement.



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Supporting English Learning students is not just a good idea: it's the law

State and federal laws require school districts to ensure all children, regardless of their native language, have the opportunity to succeed.

FEDERAL LAWS PROTECT ENGLISH LEARNERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

At the federal level, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 secure basic education rights for English learners. These federal statutes create obligations for state and local entities to ensure English learners receive adequate resources and services to overcome language-based barriers to a sound education.

More recently, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires states to report more information about English learners' academic progress and to demonstrate efforts to advance local stakeholder engagement on behalf of these students.⁶

Legal precedent has been set throughout the past several decades requiring that English learners be offered a range of rights, services and accommodations, including:

- **Segregation prohibited:** *Menendez v. Westminster* (1946) held that the practice of segregating English learner students into separate schools was unconstitutional.
- **Language access required:** *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) held that school districts must take steps to guarantee English learners can comprehend the material and curricula being taught. This ruling led to the creation of guidelines for teaching English learners, including the requirement that instruction be offered in languages that they can comprehend.
- **High-Quality language acquisition programs required:** *Castaneda v. Pickard* (1978) required school districts to offer evaluated and proven English language acquisition programs.
- **Undocumented students have the right to an education:** *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) held that all children residing in the United States, regardless of immigration status, have the right to free elementary and secondary education.⁷

STATE OBLIGATIONS UNDER *LEANDRO V. STATE*

The North Carolina Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Leandro v. State* sets out the constitutional obligations for educating all students. This ruling establishes that all children residing in the state have a fundamental right to the "opportunity to receive a sound basic education" and that the responsibility for guaranteeing that right lies with the State of North Carolina rather than with local school districts. Funding gaps and entrenched economic disparities across communities create inequalities that deny opportunities to certain students, inequalities that the state is responsible for remedying. Leandro defines subgroups of "at-risk" students by having any of six distinct characteristics,⁸ including limited proficiency in English.



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North Carolina Is Failing Its Obligations to English Learners

Despite the state's constitutional obligation to ensure an equal education to all students, funding and support for effective educational programming has been inadequate and inequitable.⁹ Local school districts receive the majority of their funding through the state's allotment system, primarily through three central sources:

- "Base funding" amounts which provide a set amount to support all students
- "Student characteristic" funding, which provides additional amounts to support a school district's specific student needs such as Exceptional Children, students with low incomes, and English Learning students
- Additionally, districts can access "district-based" funding, which is primarily directed at low-wealth districts where adequate local revenue sources are absent¹⁰

Schools use a combination of these funds (as well as local and federal funding) to provide services and supports for English learners. However, the main source of direct state support for English learners is a specific "student characteristic" allotment known as the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) allotment. Many of the specific allotments addressing "student characteristic" needs were devised and capped without being adjusted to reflect population growth, linguistic diversity or evolving student needs. Rural school districts tend to rely more heavily on state and federal funding given the limitations on local revenue capacity,¹¹ making it even more difficult to provide needed supports and services.

The LEP allotment stands out from other funding streams in that a district must have at least 20 ELs, or at least 2.5 percent of their students, to be eligible. The LEP allotment is the only student characteristic allotment that contains such a minimum eligibility threshold. As a result, five school districts were denied any supplemental funding for English learners in FY 2017-2018.¹² In addition to the threshold, the allotment funding is capped at 10.6 percent of a district's total student headcount. Due to the cap, another 13 school districts have a greater concentration of EL students than the formula captures, resulting in LEP funding that does not match the level of need in these districts. Each district with at least 20 English learners receives the dollar equivalent of one teacher assistant position. Any remaining funds are allocated 50 percent the number of English learners and 50 percent of the concentration of English learners.¹³ Unfortunately, the current state budget for education reflects an inconsistent and incomplete investment in the LEP allotment.



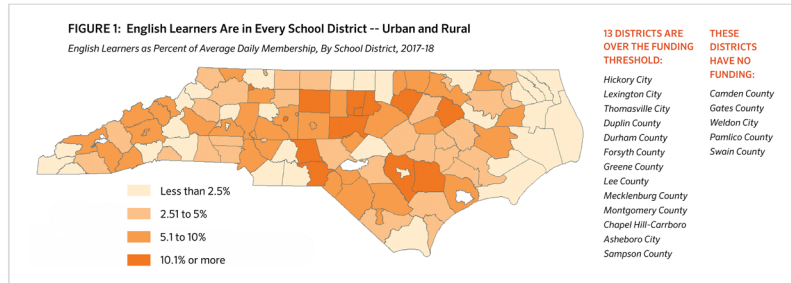
Adding to the barrier of insufficient funding support available via the LEP allotment is the state's overall trend in declining per-pupil investment, which contributes to a larger funding shortfall of \$994 million affecting spending on total allotments since 2009.¹⁴

In guaranteeing a sound, basic education for all children, the state must adequately fund the LEP allotment in order to meet the needs of a growing and linguistically diverse student population. The


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arbitrary cap must be lifted and the funding formula itself be evaluated. Additionally, the LEP allotment could be a strategic tool in addressing the state's teacher diversity problem by allowing districts to provide salary supplements to attract and retain bilingual teachers.¹⁵



English learners' academic outcomes are reflective of their unmet academic as well as social-emotional needs, as seen in cuts to per-pupil spending as well as supports and services such as Teachers Assistants, certified counselors, psychologists, nurses, social workers and librarians, classroom materials, instructional aids, and professional development training.

PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE: The Experience of Exceptional Children

There is growing acceptance of the importance of children learning together in an inclusive environment that attributes equal value to each student's unique needs and contributions. This profound shift is rooted in a recognition that inclusive practices benefit all children, regardless of whether they have special learning needs or not.

Since the 1975 implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), federal law has required states to allocate the appropriate funding to meet the needs of students with special needs. Just 10 years before this landmark decision, like many states during this time, North Carolina's General Assembly passed legislation that

sought to prevent children with disabilities from attending public schools.* Since IDEA (and Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act), states like North Carolina have been involved with an enormous range of litigation as they strive to ensure the state provides an education designed to meet the unique needs of every child with a special need. While the state support for these students also falls short of meeting federally-mandated goals, increased funding and bipartisan support for Exceptional Children has outpaced similarly needed supports and investments for English learners.

*1965 N.C. Sess. Laws ch. 584, § 17, <https://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/SessionLaws/HTML/1965-1966/SL1965-584.html>



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THE SCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT STAFF FUNDING CRISIS AND ITS EFFECT ON ENGLISH LEARNERS

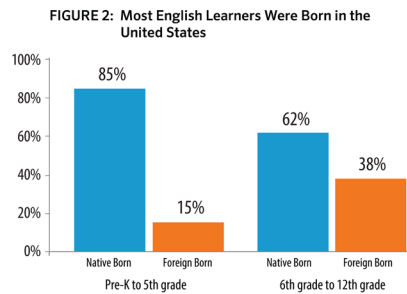
Over the last decade, state investment has fallen for instructional support staff by over 9 percent.

- The National Association of School Psychologists recommends school districts employ one psychologist for every 500 to 700 students; in North Carolina, current funding allows for just one psychologist for every 2,008 students
- The recommended ratio for School Counselors is one for every 250 students; North Carolina employs one counselor for every 367 students
- North Carolina nurses serve an average of 1,112 students, 48 percent more students than the federally recommended ratio of 1 nurse per 750 students.¹⁶
- The recommendation for School Social Workers is one for every 250 students; North Carolina's ratio is one for every 2,000 students¹⁷

Considering the unique mental health needs of children of immigrants and their families, the harm caused by inadequate school support staff funding is disproportionately severe. Research around childhood trauma, known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), is increasingly informing the way school systems understand their students' mental health needs; however, they are limited by severe staffing shortages, particularly a shortage of bilingual and culturally competent school staff. ACEs are traumatic events that can have long-term negative effects on health and well-being. Examples of ACEs that may be prevalent among children of immigrants include economic insecurity and family separation.¹⁸

The full estimated amount of necessary funding to bring North Carolina school support staffing up to at least the nationally recognized industry standards would require doubling the state's existing funding levels.¹⁹ This does not account for the need for bilingual support staff or cultural competency training.

NORTH CAROLINA'S ENDURING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY GAP



SOURCE: Migration Policy Institute

The vast majority of the 100,000 English learners in North Carolina are native born.²⁰ North Carolina has one of the 10 largest English learner populations nationwide²¹ and was among five states that experienced the greatest growth in English learners between 2000-2014.²² Despite such growth, the state has not kept pace with the need to support and prepare school systems to ensure academic success for English learners.

North Carolina is failing to close the gap between English learners and



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their peers. In the 2016-2017 school year, only 28.7 percent of English learners achieved proficiency on the State Reading/Language Arts assessment by 3rd grade. English learners also faced unique barriers in achieving proficiency in third grade Mathematics, with just 48 percent proficient.²³

English learners are also under-represented in Advanced and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) programs, largely due to language barriers and the lack of academic assessments offered in native languages.²⁴ In North Carolina, less than 1 percent of English learners are enrolled in AIG programs, compared to 11 percent of non-English learning students.²⁵

These disparities along the educational path lead to disturbingly glaring gaps in graduation rates. The graduation rate for English learners in North Carolina is among the worst in the country with just 58 percent of English learners graduating compared to the state's total graduation rate of 86.5 percent.²⁶

Many studies point to the positive correlation between teacher diversity and higher academic achievement for students of color.²⁷ North Carolina's teacher workforce, similar to the national teacher profile, is predominately female and white. In a state where students of color make up 52 percent of the traditional school population, over 80 percent of its teachers are white. Unsurprisingly, many teachers lack the language skills and cultural competency to address diverse students' needs, which can lead to additional barriers to full participation for both the student and family.

FIGURE 3: 2017 EL Graduation Rate Compared to Total Student Graduation Rate

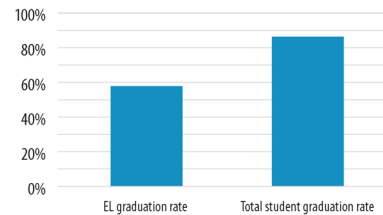
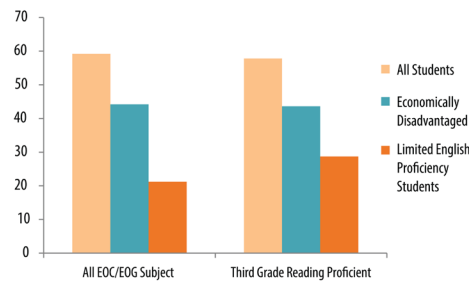


FIGURE 4: EL Proficiency Compared to Other Groups



SOURCE: NC Department of Public Instruction, Accountability and Testing Results, 2016-2017 and NC Department of Public Instruction, Four Year Cohort Graduation Rate.

With inadequate funding available to support the needs of English learners, it should come as no surprise that they face unique challenges to academic achievement. In a context of insufficient state funding perpetuating achievement gaps, some school districts are taking steps to address the needs of their English learners and to break down academic barriers that undermine the educational experience for everyone, native English-speaking and English learners alike.



Practices Promoting Academic Achievement

Adequate funding is necessary but insufficient to ensure the success of all students. Closing achievement gaps requires the implementation of evidence-based practices that create inclusive educational environments that benefit all students, regardless of their native language. This section reviews practices that can support better academic outcomes for all students.

BEST PRACTICES IN ENGLISH LEARNING PROGRAMS

Federal law requires that districts identify English learners in a timely manner to ensure that schools are taking “appropriate action”²⁸ to address student needs. Timely identification of English learners is the basis of a three-pronged test referred to as the Castañeda Standard, the result of a ruling outlining how schools must meet the requirements of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) as it pertains to English learners. This test is the basis for assessing whether a school district's English Learning program complies with federal law.

School districts identify English learners when it is determined that a language other than English is spoken in their homes. The district will then administer the Home Language Survey and, based on that result, the WIDA Screener assessment. The school will then determine the appropriate instructional delivery method.

While methods differ across districts and from school to school, we can assess them based on a range of practices known to either impede or advance inclusion. Most English learners in North Carolina receive traditional ‘pull-out’ English as a Second Language instruction (typically happening outside the traditional classroom) but spend the majority of the day in a classroom led by a general education teacher who has likely not received the necessary training to address their needs. While programs vary widely even within a school district, a common challenge is inadequate instructional support to complement the ESL program. Structured English Immersion (SEI) is a program seeking to ease the transition into an English-only speaking classroom where a trained instructor is prepared to meet the unique needs of the English learners.

While ESL programs are the most common form of instruction in North Carolina, evidence from the state's well-implemented and structured **dual language immersion education programs (DL/Is)** demonstrate this method as being the single most effective form of foreign language instruction for K-12 students. According to the NC Department of Instruction, there are currently more than 170 DL/I

Key findings from North Carolina

Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia P. Collier's five-year long longitudinal study of dual language education across seven school districts in North Carolina found it to be the single most effective form of foreign language instruction for K-12 students. They found the well-implemented and structured program was the only method allowing students to develop both deep academic proficiency in two languages while also allowing English learners to close fully the achievement gap with native English speaking students. Additionally, historically low-performing groups, such as African-Americans and students with low socioeconomic status who were enrolled in a dual language classroom, also outperformed non-enrolled students in End-of Grade (EOG) Reading and Math Achievement tests.*

*Thomas, W. P. & Collier, V.P. “Astounding Effectiveness—The North Carolina Story,” from *Dual Language Education for a Transformed World* (2012).

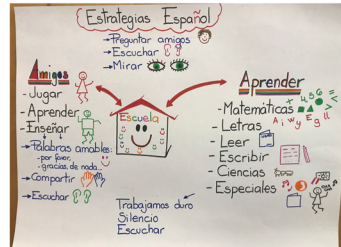


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programs across all eight state regions, in 42 districts and six charter schools.²⁹ North Carolina is an exemplary model of the academic benefits achieved by English Speaking and English Learning students enrolled in well-implemented, two-way dual language instruction programs. Such programs can be twice as effective in improving outcomes as reducing the size of traditional bilingual classes for English learners.

The collective findings from the 32-year, large-scale, longitudinal Thomas and Collier study³⁰ reveal that dual-language programs are incredibly successful. Highlighted in their work is the case study from North Carolina



Dual-immersion classroom at Southwest Elementary, Durham Public Schools. Photo taken with permission by author.

Some common programs for learning English that are considered educationally sound in theory under Castañeda's first prong include:

- **English as a Second Language (ESL)**, also known as English Language Development (ELD), is a program of techniques, methodology, and special curriculum designed to teach English learners explicitly about the English language, including the academic vocabulary needed to access content instruction, and to develop their English language proficiency in all four language domains (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing). ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of the English learning students' primary language(s).
- **Structured English Immersion (SEI)** is a program designed to impart English language skills so that the English learner can transition and succeed in an English-only mainstream classroom once proficient. All instruction in an immersion strategy program is in English.

Teachers have specialized training in meeting the needs of EL students (e.g., an ESL teaching credential and/or SEI training), and have demonstrated strong skills in promoting ELD and SEI strategies for ensuring EL students' access to content

- **Dual Language Program**, also known as two-way or developmental, is a bilingual program where the goal is for students to develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language in a classroom that is usually comprised of half primary-English speakers and half primary speakers of the other language.

Castañeda, 648 F.2d at 1009-10.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights: Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents (2015)



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which demonstrates that DL/Is are advancing academic outcomes for English learners as well as closing the achievement gap. The programs studied in North Carolina had been operating for at least four years and were part of six school districts: Chapel Hill-Carrboro City, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chatham County, Durham County, Greene County, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. The study demonstrated that, overall, "Reading and Math scores of students in two-way dual language education are higher for all students regardless of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic, LEP or special education status. In most cases, by middle school, two-way dual language students, regardless of subgroup, are at least a grade ahead in Reading and Math achievement compared to non-dual language students."³¹

Building upon the effectiveness of the state's dual language education and the documented academic gains from DL/I programs,³² North Carolina can expand such opportunities by investing additional resources to current programs, and by encouraging programs to expand to include middle and high school offerings. While number of DL/I programs has grown in recent years, they still represent less than 7 percent of the state's traditional public schools. The opening of the state's first Urdu-English dual-language immersion program in Guilford County is a promising example of a community's culturally responsive leadership in addressing the growing student population's needs.³³



Language Access and Culturally Competent Approaches to Encourage Equitable Family Engagement

Strong school-family-community involvement is a critical component to a child's academic and personal success,³⁴ while creating and maintaining positive, inclusive school cultures is integral in ensuring consistent, active family engagement. Fostering a set of shared values is essential in demonstrating that the school community is committed to providing a welcoming and tolerant environment for all families, regardless of a family's formal education, socioeconomic status, immigration status or native language. Linguistically diverse families are often barred entry to meaningful opportunities to engage with their child's school due to language access barriers, racial, and cultural bias.³⁵ There are numerous examples of successful and equitable family engagement across North Carolina. Rather than seeing a growing, diverse student and family population through a deficit³⁶ mindset, such school communities are embracing inclusive strategies. Emphasizing culturally appropriate language access and positive



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school-family relationships that honor, welcome, and celebrate diversity are strategies to ensure academic success for all children.³⁷

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The Community Schools approach³⁸ seeks to reimagine the relationship between a school and its surrounding community, transforming schools from providers of education into tools for addressing the full range of social and family conditions that influence students' prospects. Research-based strategies are key components of the model:

- Engaging, culturally relevant, and challenging curricula
- An emphasis on high-quality teaching instead of high-stakes testing
- Wrap-around supports and opportunities
- Positive discipline practices, such as restorative justice
- Authentic parent and community engagement
- Inclusive school leadership³⁹

The Community Schools model is rooted in four mechanisms for addressing the barriers that can stand in the way of student success: as asset and needs assessment, the development of a strategic plan, engagement of key stakeholders and partners, and the placement of a Community Schools Coordinator.⁴⁰



With this model, strategic partnerships are developed to integrate the needs and resources in both the school and greater community. When communities see schools as learning centers and responsively addressing the needs of its members, there will be more opportunities to transform deeply rooted challenges. Using this model, the school might be accessible to parents and family members seeking workforce development trainings, ESL classes, and counseling. The school may also house medical, dental, and mental-health services in order to eliminate barriers to care and improve academic outcomes for all students.

Additionally, the Community Schools model may include a focus on trauma-informed school practices, a strategy with heightened importance under an immigration policy climate that disproportionately targets the families of English learners. This is particularly important given the current funding shortfalls of school support staff, such as social



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workers, counselors, and nurses, as well as the additional needs of staffing bilingual support staff. With an increase in trauma-informed school practices,⁴¹ needs can be identified and appropriately addressed in a caring and inclusive environment.⁴²

The Community School model presents a uniquely promising strategy to combine many of the practices known to improve academic outcomes for English learners. Part of the fundamental components of a well-designed and implemented Community Schools partnership include family and community engagement and culturally responsive delivery models. Evidence backed research is also demonstrating that, similar to the encouraging results from the dual-language programs in North Carolina, a well-implemented Community Schools model can both improve student outcomes and help close achievement gaps.⁴³

Two Community Schools initiatives⁴⁴ in North Carolina may offer models for other districts: Asheville-Buncombe Middle Grades Network⁴⁵ and the Bull City Community Schools Partnership⁴⁶ in Durham Public Schools.⁴⁷ Both seek to increase equity and inclusion as well as close the achievement gap.

One of the schools chosen to participate in Durham's pilot year program⁴⁸ is Southwest Elementary. Southwest's DL/I programs has existed for over a decade and currently follows a 90/10 model. With this model, 90 percent of core instruction is in Spanish at the kindergarten level with the percentage of English language instruction increasing each year until it is a 50 percent English/50 percent Spanish balance by 3rd grade. Southwest has demonstrated consistent academic success with participating students outperforming their district counterparts in Math and Reading End-of-Grade (EOG) tests. In addition to academic achievement, the program incorporates a parent-to-parent paring initiative, which matches each English-speaking parent with a Spanish-speaking parent. This fosters a school-wide culture of inclusion and integration. Regular communication and language exchange is encouraged and facilitated via bilingual community meetings and cultural events at the school.

Outcomes from Southwest's DL/I Program:

- mCLASS scores indicate that students in two-way immersion classes are reading, on average, as well as peers in other classes and meeting grade level expectations by the end of 3rd grade.
- EOG scores show Hispanic males and females are outperforming other Hispanic students in the district with the proficiency of Hispanic males significantly higher at 61.1 percent, 30.9 percent more than the district as a whole.
- EOG scores indicate a narrowing of the gap in math achievement between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking students in dual language classes, and between Hispanic and White students school-wide.

*data provided by school principal, Nicholas Rotosky and was compiled for School Board proposal seeking Durham Public School's support (March 2018)



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ESL PARENT LIAISON AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STAFF

Districts that employ an ESL Parent Liaison or comparable support staff are well positioned to address the specific needs of diverse families and English learners. Having a trained, bilingual liaison can help bridge the gap in communication between the school and home, and serve as an essential navigator to assist parents in understanding the system and ensuring their children have the opportunity to succeed. Additionally, districts can bolster meaningful and active family engagement by providing consistent, high quality interpretation and translation at school events, parent meetings, and School Board meetings.

Districts employing an ESL Parent Liaison can help build a strong and resilient extended school community by explicitly welcoming all families and ensuring their equal access to opportunity and fair treatment.⁴⁹ All students, regardless of immigration status, have the right to enroll in any public school free from discrimination. Alarming, a Duke Children's Law Clinic report revealed that about 60 percent of public school districts in North Carolina inhibited enrollment for immigrant students by requiring non-essential documentation and failing to make enrollment requirements accessible.⁵⁰ Advocates rely on trusted parent-school liaisons to help report such violations, intervene on a student's behalf, and educate district staff on the law and relevant rules and procedures.

Other programs that help foster inclusion and a positive integration into the school system are new family welcome orientations and Newcomer programs. The Doris Henderson Newcomers School in Greensboro helps ease the transition to an English-only traditional school by integrating content area subjects into ESL instruction.⁵¹

Conclusion

Progress requires holding leaders accountable for upholding the state constitutional obligation to provide a sound, basic education to all of our children. Through adequate funding, well designed and implemented instructional programs, and practices that foster equitable family engagement, North Carolina can remove academic barriers to education and meet the needs of its English learning students. ■


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ACTION FOR ADVOCATES
Develop Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement

- ✓ Identify opportunities to provide meaningful community and parent feedback to advance academic outcomes for English learners.
- ✓ Help develop engagement strategies to increase involvement of English learning students and their families in your local school or district.
- ✓ Help build knowledge and understanding of school supports and services and the right to enrollment, language access, and appropriate interventions.

Advocate for Equitable Funding

- ✓ Advocate for adequate LEP allotments.
- ✓ Get involved in the development of your local school district's budget, demonstrate need, and request adequate funding.
- ✓ Advocate for increased funding for the staffing, supports and services English learners need to achieve academic success, including cultural competency, language training, and Professional Development opportunities for educators.
- ✓ Advocate for more funding for early childhood opportunities that include bilingual programs and bilingual teacher training.
- ✓ Advocate for expanded opportunities to attend well-designed after-school programs with properly trained instructors to promote literacy achievement and academic reinforcement.
- ✓ Advocate for expanded funding for Dual Language/Immersion and Newcomers Programs.
- ✓ Demand increased per-pupil funding and efforts to improve the competitiveness of NC teacher pay.

Develop Programs Tailored to Local Needs

- ✓ Partner with your local Dual Language/Immersion programs to identify needs and opportunities for community collaboration.
- ✓ Communicate program successes and challenges to your local School Board.
- ✓ Identify budgetary barriers preventing implementation of Dual Language/Immersion programs in your school district.
- ✓ Learn more about the Community Schools model and inquire about local efforts underway in your school community (such as wrap around support services and community partnerships) and opportunities for alignment with this approach and statewide network of practitioners.
- ✓ Schedule a tour with your local school or district leaders of a Dual Language/Immersion program near you to learn more.
- ✓ Replicate the English-speaking parent-to ESL-speaking parent model at your local school.
- ✓ Ensure local districts can provide a continuum of Dual Language/Immersion programs throughout K-5, middle, and high school by advocating for program investments and expansions.



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Endnotes

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2. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/NC>
3. <https://hechingerreport.org/national-test-scores-reveal-a-decade-of-educational-stagnation/>
4. Referred to as Limited English Proficient Students under US DOE Title IX:
See U.S. Department of Education Title IX: General Provisions (20 U.S.C. § 7801 et seq.) LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT: The term limited English proficient; when used with respect to an individual, means an individual —
(A) who is aged 3 through 21;
(B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
(C)(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
(ii)(i) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
(ii) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or
(iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and
(D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual —
(i) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3);
(ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
(iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society.
5. <http://schottfoundation.org/issues/opportunity-gap/talking-points>
6. For more, see: <https://edtrust.org/students-cant-wait/english-language-proficiency/>
7. National Education Association, "All In! How Educators Can Advocate for English Language Learners" 2015. https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/ADV104_DODSON_All_In_How_Educators_Can_Advocate_for_ELLs.pdf
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Ms. ADAMS. Dr. McCoy, what role can technology play in making classrooms more inclusive, and effective for English learners, particularly in underfunded states like North Carolina?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Well, first I know that English language learners, as they are learning English for instance, possibly need devices to help them with translations, to help them read better, the pausing, the—you know, reading passages. There are some best practices in using technology to help them develop the language acquisition.

At the same time, we do not have enough research to know the possible pitfalls of the harm that screen time can have. Going back to the research piece again, we need to know more about what works with English language learners, a population in our country that going back to your question around civil rights, we want to make sure that we are doing the best, using the best educational practices, instructional practices for every population of students, so that's really important.

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you. I am out of time. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. I did not hear an objection to your unanimous consent request, so that communicated into the record. I now recognize the Chair of the Full Committee, Mr. Walberg.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the panel for being here. I would be remiss as Chairman of the Full Committee to not say what we are hearing today is common sense, right?

Simple common sense. The same common sense that Mr. Ziemer, my fifth-hour social studies teacher, used when he caught me, though, doing the best that I could, to run that earphone up my sleeve to my ear, so I could listen on my transistor radio to the World Series.

He understood through common sense that the World Series and social studies and the learning of social studies at the time did not go well together. He was not opposed to the World Series. He was not opposed to me enjoying FX, but he wanted more of the opportunity to educate me.

I think we are talking common sense here. We know, we know that cell phones and smart phones are hurting our kids when they are not controlled. We know that they are affecting our classrooms. We know that our teachers are frustrated with it. We know that when we get it right for students, parents and teachers, education works.

I appreciate the school districts here represented that have taken the step to say enough already. We understand we are in this century, and we are going to have more with AI and technology, and we are going to use it for some things that helicopter parents and other have to get used to, that their kids will do just fine if they are in a classroom where education is first and foremost, and not social media.

We know that research will inform us on that, but we do not need some of the research, we have seen it already. I agree that we should not have the Federal Government stepping in, but we ought to encourage states, and especially local districts, and espe-

cially parents to step up to the plate and say enough, enough. Let us get back to what really works in education.

Thank you for being here, and thank you for listening to my rant. I am Chairman, so I can do that, right, expect it of me. No objection. Dr. Twenge, you referenced studies, comparing the reading comprehension on screenings versus paper. What do those studies show, and why might reading on screens produce different outcomes than reading on paper?

Ms. TWENGE. Yes, it is interesting, we have got some of those experiments now that show, most of them are with college students when they take notes on paper versus taking notes on a laptop, they tend to do better, especially on comprehensive exams, things that take more thought.

You know, I think the brain mechanisms behind that are still to be explored, but we have a challenge in education finding that balance between using technology for what it is good for but then making sure that that individual use of technology does not interfere with learning.

Front of room technology, showing a video that everyone is seeing or using those types of resources, that clearly has benefits, but whether that individual one to one policy of K through 12 students having that laptop or tablet with them all the time, that does not seem to have had the benefits that people were hoping for, given what we have seen in test scores, for example.

Mr. WALBERG. Okay, thank you. Dr. Gibbins, you mentioned magnetically sealed pouches being used or simply restricting the phone usage. Are you seeing any difference in effectiveness or compliances between those two approaches? If so, what are the reasons?

Mr. GIBBINS. Yes, sir. We are seeing a little bit of the difference. You know, as a district we implemented a phone free policy, and then offered the opportunity for campuses that were interested or felt like it was a need to use the Yondr pouches, which are the magnetically sealed pouches.

From the very beginning we knew that everyone had the same expectation, but how they reached that and how they did that was up to them.

When we look at, for example, instructional time on campuses, when you look at, and forgive me for simplifying this, but when we have our non-Yondr campuses, you know, the instructional time that they got back was 9 to 10 minutes for our Yondr-campus, the campuses that were implementing the magnetically sealed bag, it was more almost close to 13 to 14 minutes.

There are some percentage discrepancies when it comes to that. We have seen overall improvement of course, with the implementation of the entire policy, but a little bit of improvement even farther than that with the Yondr pouch.

Mr. WALBERG. I appreciate that. I see my time is going to expire, so if somebody wants to yield me later on, I have got another question for Mr. Nye. I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Mr. Scott.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Holcomb-McCoy, Virginia recently implemented a policy restricting cell

phone use in schools. One of the things that has occurred to some of us, as there might be some financial barriers. Are there any financial barriers in implementing cell phone bans?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. That is a good question. I am not sure about the financial burden on parents or students because of bans. I think in many cases because the usage of cell phones really started with parents wanting to be able to communicate with their students. It could be that the financial burden of not using something that they have purchased could be a possibility, but I am unsure of that question, so I need to get back to you on it.

Mr. SCOTT. Is there any financial burden on the school district?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. With bans?

Mr. SCOTT. Right.

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Well, the possibility of how do you enforce school cell phone bans could be a possible financial obligation on the part of the school district. If you weigh, you know, I am thinking about weighing you know, the costs of hiring more counselors and mental health professionals, and the costs of saving students in comparison to the cost compared to hiring to monitor school bans, and what that will do as far as disciplinary actions and others.

I do not know that, but that is really an important question, I think, for local school districts to really look at very carefully.

Mr. SCOTT. You mentioned discipline. Do any school bans include sanctions on students who might get them caught up in a school to prison pipeline?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Yes. I think that is a real issue that should be explored. After the bans have been in place for a period of time, to look very carefully at the data of who is being disciplined for having a phone anyway. Those are the types—those are the datapoints that I think that we do not know enough about yet, that really should be examined in the future.

Mr. SCOTT. Are there any educational aspects of schooling that may be improved by having personal devices in classrooms?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Yes. I gave earlier today I talked about even my daughter, who has special needs, who has really, her education has been enhanced by the use of screen time through tablets, not necessarily her cell phone, but by the use of tablets and other types of devices.

When you are calculating screen time, and not just cell phone time for her, it was important to have screen time on other devices, and that did enhance her ability to learn. That is the case for other children with disabilities and other different learning styles and needs.

Mr. SCOTT. The studies that show that teachers are more likely to use education technology if they feel competent in its application, but we have cut funding for teacher quality partnerships in supporting effective educator development. Why is it important for the Federal Government to continue its commitment to supporting educator preparation and development as we see the rise of technology in the classroom?

Ms. HOLCOMB-MCCOY. Yes. Well, I am not opposed to policies that increase learning, so cell phone bans could be—we might see an increase in academic achievement. One thing that we do know

through our research over many years, is that teachers play a critical role. The effectiveness of teachers and teacher quality plays an effective role in the academic achievement.

Training teachers, preparation for teachers and educators in this digital age is so important. We have many teachers who are not trained to use technology responsibility in a classroom. There could be positive screen time that could be working to the benefit of students.

Educator preparation, teacher preparation is still key, it is important when we are thinking—when we are talking about academic achievement, academic progress, the quality of our teachers, their preparation in classrooms is still key, no matter what.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KILEY. The Representative from Guam, Mr. Moylan is recognized.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Ney, since COVID-19 of course, many schools have kept portions of their online learning model, and computers and the internet have become increasingly integrated into the classroom, and in fact, if you do not have one it seems like your school is outdated.

The students are even learning the usage of these electronic devices probably faster than the teachers, definitely faster than I can. We have got to get this balance. What policies can local school districts and the State district—government, rather, the State governments, consider where we can place this balance for modern learning, and at the same time limiting the non-academic screen time?

Mr. NEY. Thank you. As far as the policies are concerned, really what that instructional progression looks like, technology ought to be a part of that in some way. What districts are doing right now in Utah, and across several of them, they are analyzing the degree that they are incorporating the use of those devices, as part of their instruction.

As much as we are asking students to limit some of their screen time, several districts are identifying well, they ought to limit some of the use of their screen time because it has become over-dependent. I had one student that tugged on my suitcoat when I was visiting a school and says help. I said what is going on? He says well, unfortunately I feel like all we do is open up the laptop and we start working, and there is little interaction there.

Clearly that would be inappropriate, and so measures are being taken to say well, if that—to that extreme is not conducive to learning, then how do we just incorporate that, or find that better balance?

Districts right now, schools right now, parents are asking the same questions, students are rising to the front and saying well, technology is clearly important in the classroom, however, to what degree should it be used?

That looks, in some cases as has been noted, that varies from student to student at times, but in that general tier 1 instruction, that primary instruction, we do need to find a better balance, and those are the questions that we are asking in our classrooms.

Mr. MOYLAN. I can picture that student, that would be like me. I prefer the interaction with the instructor. They are the motivating part for me, and one teacher would go a certain way, but

if I changed my teacher, boy I got a straight A, so there is a big difference. Thank you for pointing that out.

Another question for you please. Our biggest concern about limiting access to phones in schools and communicating with students during emergencies. How can school districts adapt policies that balance the student's safety with proper learning environments?

Mr. NEY. Yes, one of the biggest questions or concerns that we receive from parents was to that point. Saying, I would love to get ahold of my student during the day, or they need to get ahold of me if there is an emergency at the school. What we find, even our first responders have suggested, and we have experienced where inaccurate information is communicated during an emergency that has further complicated our first responder's ability to engage for a lot of different reasons.

There does need to be a better balance there. Our policies in Utah do allow for exigent circumstances for students to have access to their devices in the case of an emergency. However, that balance is tenuous at best because at times it can actually hinder our first responders and their efforts to see to.

I am speaking to a large emergency where first responders are involved, and maybe it is a situation where our students feel like they need to communicate, or parents need to find out that the child is safe.

All those things are very valid, and so we are seeking to find a better balance in that.

Mr. MOYLAN. I appreciate. That is very important as well, the proper information coming on down. Excellent, thank you. Dr. Twenge, girls seem to spend a large percentage of their day engaged in social media, they are a lot faster than I am with their thumbs, they are on the machines too.

Your research analysis shows a rise in depression, self-harm, suicide and other forms of mental health struggle, especially in young girls. Could you explain the specific harms girls are facing from their exposure to social media, and how reducing access during school hours might help support student mental health?

Ms. TWENGE. Thank you for that question. We have seen extremely concerning rises in depression, it has doubled since 2012, and that is not diagnosed depression, that is from a screening study, so it cannot be due to greater help seeking, or changes in diagnoses. That is based on the symptoms of depression among adolescents.

Among girls in particular, we have seen really large increases in suicide and in self-harm, so it is just one example. The CDC keeps data on emergency room admissions for self-harm. Those have quintupled, increased by a factor of five, among 10 to 14-year-old girls, so the youngest group.

There is a number of mechanisms of harm here. First, if you are spending 5 hours a day on social media, as the average U.S. teen now does, that's a lot less time for sleep, less time for interacting with friends and family in person, less time for just appreciating what is around you.

Then there is the specific harms of comparing yourself, especially with body image on platforms like Instagram, and the competition for likes and followers, seeing what everyone else is doing without

you, and I could go on, but you get the idea, there is really, really severe harms, particularly to girls.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Doctor, thank you Mr. Chairman.

Chairman KILEY. The Representative from Indiana, Mr. Messmer is recognized.

Mr. MESSMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for the witnesses for being here. Dr. Nye, I understand as Superintendent you have led a pilot program in your district that implemented the cell phone restriction. Could you share what you observed in that process, and what lessons you have taken away from the experience?

Mr. NYE. A few years ago, before statewide expectations, we identified as an issue, and working with the few junior high schools, and one high school, we identified what would be a bell-to-bell restriction. What we identified there as data is very important to track to see what the effect is, right?

This is the intervention, what are the outcomes? What we noticed in that first of all the students for the first 2 weeks really struggled, and I visited the school before the restriction took place, and I just made a casual observation in the lunchroom and heads were buried in the phones, and very little interaction was occurring.

Followup, fast forward, when the restrictions in place I was in the lunchroom, students were talking to teach other, they are engaging, they are laughing, they are having a much better time, more interactive time. I would say as far as the data is concerned, over the course of those 3 years we have seen an increase in proficiency in ELA, math and science, both not only in the proficiency, but in the growth in those academic content areas, as well as student discipline improving.

What was once a well, office referrals. I will use this for instance, the number of office referrals decreased by 43 percent. These are the students that, for whatever reason, they have engaged inappropriately in a classroom, and they need to go take a little—take it to the principal's office, so to speak, those have been reduced by 43 percent.

Wildly favor and parents have adjusted and appreciated it as well.

Mr. MESSMER. Thank you. Dr. Gibbins, last year there were almost 50,000 teacher positions in your State unfilled or filled by someone who was not certified for that position. Do you believe the policies restricting cell phone usage could play a role in improving the overall classroom environment, and therefore incentivize more qualified teachers to join the workforce?

Mr. GIBBONS. Yes, sir. I do. The idea of having a qualified, certified teacher in a classroom is the best-case scenario for any student. Although we do have alternatively certified teachers and have a wealth of experience in the outside world coming into the classroom, which is beneficial, having the certified teacher in the classroom, there is no other way to do that.

The idea of having teachers who want to come to our district, for example, because we have a cell phone free policy, and because we have maybe less discipline, less opportunities for that teacher to have to engage around a phone, the better. Any time that we can

get a certified teacher in a classroom, we are going to be benefiting, both not only for the campus, but for the students.

Mr. MESSMER. Thank you. Dr. Twenge, you quoted a headmaster in your written testimony saying that students can retreat in the short-term safety of their phones, rather than tolerate the discomfort that often proceeds finding one's way into a conversation. Can you talk about the short-term and—long-term dangers of that type of phone dependent coping behavior?

Ms. TWENGE. This is something I hear from my undergraduate students a lot as well, that they feel a lot of anxiety in social situations, and ironically, some of that anxiety comes from their phones that they are used to communicating via text, instead of speaking to people in person.

It also comes from the nervousness that a lot of people, particularly on what people feel around something called phubbing, which is a combination of phone and snubbing. It is where you are talking to someone and they take out their phone. Everybody does it, but everybody hates it.

You never know when you are talking to your friend when he or she is going to take out that phone, and then you think well, what is going on? Am I boring? What did I say? It is this very unhealthy dynamic. It really interferes with that natural development of social skills during that crucial time of adolescents.

Student knows this. I had a sophomore at a high school in Texas where I was speaking come up to me and say I really want to talk to my friends at lunch, but they want to play games on their phone.

What can I do? My heart broke a little bit because what can he do, but if his school has that no phones during the school day bell to bell policy where they are not allowed to take them out during lunch, that problem is instantly solved.

Mr. MESSMER. Excellent. Thank you for all of the answers, and Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. Chair Walberg, do you want to take a shot with the last 30 seconds?

Mr. WALBERG. I would love to, thank you. Dr. Ney, you mentioned the role of State and local entities in this issue. Why was it important for your Governor to pursue a statewide approach?

Mr. NEY. For us, we recognized that it was a statewide issue, and while local effort clearly could have taken place before that site was statewide expectation, it seemed to be slow and sporadic. As we identified just surveying what the conditions were across schools throughout Utah, identified that there was a lot to be gained through a statewide expectation.

Mr. WALBERG. That push an incentive, okay. Yes, I appreciate that. I yield back.

Chairman KILEY. Thanks very much. Ranking Member Bonamici, we have both been without our phones for 2 hours, how are you managing?

Ms. BONAMICI. I am doing pretty well actually. I did not miss my phones, and I think without a doubt it helped me concentrate.

Chairman KILEY. This is my yield to you for your closing statement by the way.

Ms. BONAMICI. I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I truly have appreciated the discussion today and I learned a lot on you know, the effects of screen time on students, but I want to reiterate that it is really crucial to recognize that there are many other issues within our jurisdiction that demand our attention.

Yes, this is important, but we cannot pretend that everything is normal when the recent actions by the Trump administration in this proposed what I call the Big Bad Ugly Bill present significant threats to the well-being of students and the integrity of our public education system.

The abrupt cancellation of the student mental health funding established under the bipartisan—I emphasize bipartisan Safer Communities Act has left many school districts without funding that provided critical support services, and access to behavioral healthcare.

The proposed elimination, as we have heard, at the Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology and IES, Institute of Education Sciences, again, would remove vital resources for schools that are striving to integrate technology efficiently and equitably, but also in light of everything we heard today, in a way that is going to really help students be more successful.

It is also very concerning that the proposed cuts to Medicaid and SNAP in this Reconciliation Bill would strip away critical support for millions of families, including children. The programs are not just safety nets. They are lifelines that give students the stability they need to succeed academically.

As we have seen, these issues are not abstract, they have real tangible consequences in the lives of students across the country, and I know all of the witnesses, I really appreciated your testimony today.

I also want to note that we have heard in this Committee room and in public, the administration and Members of this Committee, talk about the NAEP scores as a reason why they need to get rid of the Department of Education. NAEP scores are down, therefore we do not need the Department of Education.

We should turn everything back to the states. I think what we heard today make a case for protecting the Department of Education particularly in research, and its research capacity, protecting the funding that was provided by Congress for those grants to help with mental healthcare access, and I think this is a place where we can make the case that it is much more complex.

Why are the NAEP scores down? We heard a lot today about how students cannot concentrate, how they cannot focus, how they are distracted. I just want to add that because it is a complex issue, but the fact that the NAEP scores are down is not a reason to eliminate the Department of Education.

In fact, it is a reason to ask why can we not do better. I urge all my colleagues to focus on restoring that funding for access to mental health services, protecting the Department of Education, especially its research capacity, and focusing on policies that will give every child the opportunity to learn and thrive.

Thank you again for your excellent testimony, and I yield back. I hope Mr. Chairman, that you will tell us how you are doing for the 2 hours without your phone.

Mr. KILEY. I think I am doing all right, but you do after a while just start to say where is my phone, right? It would be good if we can get out of those habits. I think it is been a great hearing. I want to thank all the witnesses for your outstanding testimony and insights, and other than a few tangents here and there, it has been mostly bipartisan, which I really appreciate as well.

You know, it has been around 20 years since we had the arrival of this miracle where each of us has a supercomputer in our pocket that lets us instantly access the world's information, and press a button and a car shows up to take you wherever you want to go, and maybe meet your future spouse, and anything else that you could imagine.

The adoption was so rapid, and so exciting, and so transformative that we never really stopped to pause and consider okay, what is the etiquette around this new technology, and what is it doing to us as individuals and our values as a society, and to our young people?

I really worry about this generation of young people that has grown up never knowing a world without smart phones and then having gone through the COVID experience as well, which sort of habituated the idea that digital connection is a substitute for real world connection.

I think that we have got some really good takeaways from today's hearing. First, is the idea that when it comes to instructional time there should be an expectation of no use of personal devices. Now how far that policy extends beyond that basic idea is subject to some debate, but that seems to be a pretty clear takeaway from the testimony and the evidence we have considered is that schools do a lot better when they have that expectation no personal device use during instructional time.

Then second, when it comes to school issue devices that we ought to be strategic in terms of how we deploy them. For example, their use should be time limited. They should be used for activities where having a device actually adds value.

For example, you do not need to necessarily have an e-reader just to look at a document, maybe read a book, or a printout instead, but where the technology adds value, that is when you want to utilize it. Then, also we want to use them in a way that assists teachers and empowers teachers to do the sort of things that only teachers can do as opposed to sort of replacing the role of the teacher.

A third principle to take away is the importance of local control. While we have this expectation that we want to set, that Utah has set for example on a statewide level, that these are really complicated questions, and it is important to have an ongoing dialog with parents, with the community, get feedback from teachers, administrators and students themselves in order to craft the policy in the right way.

Maybe just as importantly, create the right school culture. When you go to a school that is really high performing and that has a great school culture, just kind of rules in general are sort of self-enforcing because if the students will kind of you know, encourage each other to follow the rules because you do not want to be out of step with that culture.

That is the kind of culture I think you want to establish around the use of devices as well. Then finally, I think, we want to really be thinking seriously about how emerging technology gives us opportunities, not just to advance student achievement, but also to solve some of our issues related to screens.

I mean we are in a moment that are we able to really be just as transformative, if not more so, than the revolution with smart phones, and I think we have the opportunity to kind of learn from that past experience and think seriously about how we can assure that the adoption of new technologies actually serves to reinforce our values, and to advance education in the right kind of educational environments for our young people.

Thank you again, everyone for your testimony. Without objection, there being no further business, the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:04 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

[Additional submissions from Ranking Member Bonamici follows:]

Children and Screens

Institute of
Digital Media and
Child Development

**Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the
Committee on Education and the Workforce
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Hearing on
“Screentime in Schools”
Tuesday, June 10, 2025**

**Kris Perry
Executive Director
Children and Screens
Institute of Digital Media and Child Development**

Thank you to the committee for undertaking this important hearing topic. It comes at a critical time as researchers, educators, and parents grapple with new technology and the appropriate use inside, and out, of the classroom. For years, parents, educators, and policymakers were promised that technology would transform education—enhance learning outcomes, reduce teacher workload, and expand access to quality resources. In some cases, those benefits have materialized. But too often, the reality has fallen short of the promise.

This is not an argument against educational technology. Rather, it reflects a broader challenge: as a nation, we have not invested enough in rigorous, independent research to guide when, how, and for whom technology actually supports learning—and when it may be a distraction or even a barrier.

The influx of personal devices into schools, and the recent advances in generative AI, have made it clear that we are unprepared for the scale and complexity of technology’s role in education. Instead of thoughtful integration, many schools have adopted digital tools without adequate evidence, guardrails, or training. We owe it to students and teachers to do better.

Our nation is faced with a moment of reflection and opportunity. With bipartisan support, we can commit to asking the right questions: Where does technology genuinely improve educational outcomes? Where might it undermine them? And how do we ensure that our approach is equitable, evidence-based, and centered on student well-being?

To answer these questions, we need a renewed national investment in research on the impact of digital technology in education—research that is transparent, nonpartisan, and focused on what works for children, families, and educators.

Testimony of Kris Perry, Children and Screens

Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development has the following policy recommendations:

- Invest in and support public interest research to study the effects of technology and digital media, especially education technology and artificial intelligence, on children's learning and development.
- Study the impacts of school smart device bans, including but not limited to any actual changes in student device use, enforcement of school smart device policies, student academic achievement, student mental health and wellbeing, disciplinary actions and incidences involving devices, and staff mental health and wellbeing.
- Do not require or encourage integrating a technology in schools until it has been thoroughly studied for its pedagogical or educational value.
- Increase enforcement of existing regulations including the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.
- Compel companies to divulge the information necessary to enforce regulations and inform consumers. This includes, but is not limited to, advertising data, the number and age of users, any uses of AI, data handling practices, content and account moderation practices, and derived user data.

Since 2013, Children and Screens—a 501(c)(3) organization—has worked to help young people lead healthy lives in a digital world by synthesizing and disseminating the latest scientific research, while also supporting advancements in the field through research funding and scientific convenings. We stand ready to assist the committee in this important issue through offering validated data and research.

[Additional submissions from Rep. Owens follows:]

Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the
Committee on Education and the Workforce
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Hearing on
“Screentime in Schools”
Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Testimony of
Emily B. Cherkin, M.Ed.

There are two distinct challenges to digital technology when it comes to education:

1. The use of student’s personal devices at school, which include smartphones and smartwatches.
2. The use of EdTech products and tools for teaching and learning (1:1 devices, digital curricula, learning management systems, etc.).

I feel it is important to address both of these challenges, and any fix for one will benefit the other.

For several years, I have been deeply concerned about the reach and influence of EdTech companies, particularly the way in which they collect and monetize data about our children, and pressure schools to put screens before skills. Any EdTech tools designed for use by students must include at its core two priorities: **Informed consent** and **Skills before screens**.

I’d like to share two stories that illustrate the need for these solutions:

In the Summer of 2020, an advocacy group I co-founded called The Student Data Privacy Project attempted to test the efficacy of the federal student data privacy

law known as the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA. We recruited parent volunteers from around the country to request the data collected by EdTech vendors about their children, a protection granted under FERPA. We successfully brought over a dozen parent complaints from across 9 states.

What we found was shocking. Most parents received no meaningful response, and the ones who did were disturbed by what they learned. One parent in Minnesota received over 2,000 files about their young daughter held by various EdTech platforms used by her school. The files included photos of her as a baby, her artwork, written assignments, and videos of her doing yoga in her bedroom during an online PE class. The family was not told how long this information would be held, where it was stored, to whom it was disclosed, or for what purpose it was being used. We filed complaints with the Department of Education in July of 2021. We have received no response since. This failed effort showed what we had suspected— that the federal government is not willing or able to protect kids' privacy via FERPA, which has not been meaningfully updated since 1974.

EdTech is widespread, and so are its harms. In 2022, the K-12 EdTech Safety Benchmark report by the Internet Safety Lab found that nearly every school in the United States uses EdTech in some way. Schools average 125 EdTech platforms per school. Nearly all apps reviewed in this report (96%) share children's personal information with third parties; 28% are "non-education specific" (such as YouTube and Spotify); and 23% expose children to digital ads, creating risk for leaking personal data to advertising companies. When EdTech companies sell the data they collect to third parties, it is often without parent, student, or school consent or knowledge.

EdTech is a lucrative and rapidly growing industry. The global market for EdTech is roughly \$150 billion today and is expected to grow to \$550 billion in the next 10 years.

Additionally, **dependence on EdTech products and tools pressures schools to put screens before skills.**

In 2015, I tutored a 6th grader named Carly. 100% of Carly's school and learning materials were on a school-district-issue iPad— textbooks were digital, written assignments were typed, and turning in homework meant uploading it to a learning management system, where grades and teacher feedback were also located.

One day, Carly told me she had a science assignment to work on. She pulled out her iPad, and opened several tabs:

- her science e-book
- her learning management system where the assignment was listed
- the Notability app in which she would write— I mean, type— her answers.

After reading the first question, Carly started skimming through her eBook for the related chapter. It was hundreds of pages of a PDF and she started to get frustrated. After a few minutes of fruitless searching, Carly went back to the assignment, copied the question, opened a Google browser, pasted it into the search bar, copied the first response, then went back to her Notability app to paste the answer.

“There!” she said, satisfied.

I was shocked. I asked— “Do you know what plagiarism is?”

She replied, “Yes, but my teacher doesn’t really read the assignments anyway.”

I said, “What about at least paraphrasing the answer in your own words?”

Carly replied, “Well, I don’t even know how to type.”

While this anecdote is shocking, it is not uncommon. As schools increasingly rely on EdTech platforms to, as they claim, “alleviate teacher burnout”, “differentiate instruction”, and “meet each child where they are” this scenario has become the norm.

Unfortunately, the technology industry would also prefer for this to be viewed as a parenting problem, rather than a design one.

Let me be clear:

It is not parents’ fault that these applications have been designed to displace skills, mine data, and manipulate neural pathways. It *is* our job as parents to educate ourselves so we can make more intentional decisions around technology, but until technology companies are held to— at bare minimum— a stricter design code that prioritizes informed consent, skills before screens, and transparent business practices, parents alone will never be able to solve this problem. We wouldn’t be here today if that were the case.

The elephant in the room is the technology companies themselves, whose business models rely on addictive persuasive design features and whose profits are

too good to meaningfully make changes, even when those changes are what is best for children (and I would argue, humanity). EdTech companies operate under the same exact business model as that of Snapchat, Meta, and TikTok. EdTech, as I always say, is just Big Tech in a sweater vest.

This brings me to solutions. I am not anti-tech, and I do not believe we can or even should attempt to remove all technology from education entirely. Instead, we need a tech-intentional™ approach to EdTech and EdTech design. I define tech-intentional design as follows:

Tech-intentional design in educational technology-based products used by children for school would mean technology companies must create screen-based technology choices that are in line with child development and the pedagogy of learning; that put the best interests of a child before the profits of a company; that never monetizes a child's attention or data; and which require informed consent and transparency.

Informed consent, as a design standard, simply means that every family should be able to clearly understand what data about their child will be captured by EdTech used in their school, so they can give (or deny) informed consent. Of course, this means it also must be easy, and painless, for families not only to access this information, but to opt their children out of EdTech in the classroom, without fear of reprisal or negative consequences. Unfortunately, due to state standardized testing being almost entirely digital now, many schools will not “allow” children to “opt out,” forcing families to choose between an education or privacy.

Prioritizing **skills before screens** means ensuring the schools put child developmental needs before putting children in front of a screen in the name of

“education.” This means ensuring that schools *prove* that a technological solution is better than an analog alternative *before* implementing an EdTech version, using independently funded research and knowledge of child developmental needs to inform such decisions. It also means making pencil and paper the default experience, not the exception, and relying on independent—not industry-funded research— to prove that an app or platform is a better pedagogical tool than what it is replacing (it almost never will be).

I would be remiss if I didn’t also offer a warning about Artificial Intelligence in the classroom. Lawmakers must recognize the rapidly growing threat tools like GenAI present to children, not just risks about mis-information that are rampant in AI tools, but the risk they present to displacing true learning experiences. At this point, GenAI tools like ChatGPT are available to students and teachers, who are using such tools to assess student writing.

We cannot disregard the wisdom and expertise of trained educators in favor of technologists making decisions about what is best for children and development. Children are not standardized.

Public education is not a for-profit business (or shouldn’t be).

Teaching and learning is full of nuance and complexity and most importantly, it is rooted in real-world, real-life relationships.

Childhood is brief. Children cannot vote. Children need adults who understand development and learning to advocate on their behalf.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

[Questions and responses submitted for the record by Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy follows:]

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Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, Ph.D.
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Dear Dr. Holcomb-McCoy:

Thank you again for testifying at the June 10, 2025, Committee on Education and Workforce subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing titled "Screentime in Schools." Enclosed are additional questions submitted by Committee members following the hearing. Please provide a written response no later than February 27th, 2026, for inclusion in the hearing record. Responses should be sent to Eli Mitchell (eli.mitchell@mail.house.gov) of the Committee staff.

We appreciate your contribution to the work of the Committee.

Sincerely,

Kevin Kiley
 Chairman
 U.S. House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
 Committee on Education and Workforce

Questions for the Record from
REPRESENTATIVE SUMMER LEE

Committee on Education and the Workforce
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee hearing titled:
“Screentime in Schools”

Tuesday, June 10th, 2025
10:15 A.M.

Representative Summer Lee (D-PA)
Question for Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy,

1. The Department of Education’s Office of Educational Technology (OET) was created to provide districts and states with guidance, best practices, and resources on technology in schools, including guidance on screentime. But, the Department of Education dismissed all OET staff, essentially eliminating the Office.
 - a. How will the elimination of the Office of Educational Technology limit our ability to address concerns about screentime and mental health? How will the elimination of OET hurt schools and students?



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & CEO

February 17, 2026

Congresswoman Lee, thank you for raising this crucial question.

The decision to eliminate the Office of Educational Technology (OET) comes at a particularly critical juncture in our nation's educational journey. We are witnessing an unprecedented and irreversible expansion of technology in our schools, including artificial intelligence, digital tutoring platforms, virtual and augmented reality simulations, predictive analytics dashboards, tele-mental health tools, biometric attendance systems, immersive career exploration software, and AI-powered postsecondary advising platforms. Technology is not slowing down; it is accelerating. Thus, eliminating OET does not halt the growth of educational technology. Instead, it risks removing vital national leadership and guidance, which are essential in ensuring that this rapid expansion benefits all students and educators equitably.

Historically, the Office of Educational Technology has been a small yet strategically vital unit within the U.S. Department of Education. Its role has been to develop and update the National Educational Technology Plan, provide implementation guidance to states and districts, translate research into practical policies, advise on student data privacy and cybersecurity, support digital equity initiatives, and convene stakeholders around responsible technology use. The most recent *National Educational Technology Plan* underscores the urgent need to close digital access, design, and use divides while ensuring that technology is implemented to advance equity and learning¹. Despite its modest size, OET has served as a vital coordinating hub, providing coherence, synthesizing research, and establishing guardrails in a rapidly evolving landscape.

In my opinion and in accordance with AACTE's vision for the future of education and educator preparation, we should expand OET's scope and capacity rather than dismantle it. Here's why. First, there is a pressing need for rigorous federal research to identify which technologies truly enhance student learning. For instance, evidence shows that high-impact tutoring supported by digital platforms can produce substantial gains in achievement², and adaptive learning systems demonstrate positive effects when implemented with strong instructional design³. However, technology alone does not improve learning; its effectiveness is amplified when combined with effective teaching. OET has been instrumental in translating this nuanced understanding to states, and rather than dismantling this function, we should enhance it to include rapid evaluations of AI tools, digital tutoring, simulations, and early warning analytics.

Second, technology is transforming how teachers prepare and develop professionally. Classroom simulation platforms enable candidates to rehearse instructional strategies and classroom management in low-risk settings, improving their readiness and confidence⁴. Sustained, technology-supported professional development further enhances teacher effectiveness and retention. Strengthening OET could involve developing standards for simulation use, supporting AI literacy among educators, and funding research on technology's role in elevating teaching quality, areas where federal coordination can significantly guide district and educator efforts.

Third, concerns around digital well-being and mental health are valid. Excessive screen time raises legitimate issues, but technology can also support students' mental health in schools, if used responsibly. Tele-mental health services, anonymous reporting systems, AI-enabled check-ins, and early warning systems are examples of how technology can promote safety and well-being. OET has played a role in synthesizing research on responsible use, helping states differentiate between harmful and beneficial applications. Eliminating this office would weaken our capacity to scale evidence-based practices that support students' mental health.

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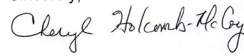
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Finally, the role of technology in postsecondary access and success is expanding. AI-driven advising tools, digital nudges, scholarship platforms, and interactive career exploration are helping students navigate complex pathways more effectively. Studies show that these digital interventions can significantly boost college enrollment and persistence, especially among first-generation students³. Yet these innovations require ongoing research, ethical oversight, and equitable implementation, all of which are ideally suited to OET.

In summary, educational technology represents the future of learning. It is no longer a temporary trend but a foundational element of education and workforce readiness. Research shows that digital competency and fluency are now central to economic participation and to ensuring educational equity. And during the pandemic, we learned that districts with stronger digital infrastructure experienced fewer disruptions, underscoring technology's vital role⁴.

The question before us is not whether technology will influence education but how we choose to guide it. Without OET, state and local efforts would lack coherent guidance, resources for translation and implementation, and protection against vendor influence and data privacy risks. As technology platforms grow exponentially, the absence of federal leadership leaves us with no guardrails. Therefore, in my opinion, instead of dismantling OET, Congress should expand the office's role. The path forward requires us to broaden OET's scope and capacity to ensure that educational technology continues to serve educators and students.

Sincerely,



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³ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology. *National Educational Technology Plan 2024: A Call to Action for Closing the Digital Access, Design, and Use Divides*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2024. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED641164.pdf>

⁴ Bhatt, Monica P., et al. *Can Technology Facilitate Scale? Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation of High Dosage Tutoring*. NBER Working Paper No. 32510, National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2024, <https://doi.org/10.3386/w32510>

⁵ Dahlmann, Jennifer C., "Guidelines for Effective Adaptive Learning: A Meta-Analysis" (2021). *Instructional Design Capstones Collection*. 73.

⁶ CIDDLA. "Introducing Simulations into Teacher Preparation Programs." Center for Innovative Development of Educational Leaders and Learners. <https://ciddl.org/introducing-simulations-into-teacher-preparation-programs/#:~:text=Connect%20with%20Pedagogy&text=Simulation%20provides%20candidates%20an%20opportunity,about%20themselves%20and%20their%20students>

⁷ Avery, Christopher, Joshua S. Goodman, and Sarah Turner. "The Effects of Nudging for College: Evidence from a National Texting Campaign." *Journal of Human Resources*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2021, pp. 699–734. <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.56.3.0418-9413R1>

⁸ Goldhaber, Dan, Thomas J. Kane, Andrew McEachin, Emily Morton, Tyler Patterson, and Douglas O. Staiger. "The Consequences of Remote and Hybrid Instruction during the Pandemic." *CALDER Working Paper No. 267-0922*, 2022, National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. <https://caldercenter.org/publications/consequences-remote-and-hybrid-instruction-during-pandemic>