



Why Smartphones Don't Belong in School

1 Smartphones are distracting.

The mere presence of a phone diminishes student attention and performance, especially for tasks that require greater cognitive demands. [Even students who do not have phones in class do worse when their peers have phones.]

In one study, students who were not using their mobile phones wrote down 62% more information in their notes, were able to recall more from a lecture, and scored a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple choice test than students who were actively using their mobile phones.¹

2 Smartphones are highly addictive.

Many students have an extremely difficult time separating from their phones,² even when they try, which puts teachers in the unfair position of having to use instructional time to police personal device use. Teachers have been threatened, punched and even pepper-sprayed when trying to take away a student's phone during class. Can you imagine schools allowing other addictive products like drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, vape pens, and slot machines? Of course not.

3 Attention spans are declining.

The average adult's attention span on a screen has declined from around 2.5 minutes in 2004 to an average of just 47 seconds today³ — a 66% decrease. To learn, students need the ability to focus for sustained periods. This ability is rapidly being eroded by excessive exposure to quick, super-short videos that interfere with sustained attention, a key element in deep learning.

4 Reading and math scores are declining.

The most recent federal assessment of student reading and math skills (known as "The Nation's Report Card") revealed an alarming drop among America's 13-year-olds. The decline in math performance marks the single largest decline observed in the last half century. Reading scores among the lowest performers were lower than the first year the data was collected, in 1971.⁴

5 Social media platforms are filled with content that has no place in schools.

Content shared and/or promoted on social media includes violence, self-harm, hate speech, racism and unrealistic beauty standards. Most schools have codes of conduct forbidding this type of imagery or behavior. Why allow students to access and share this content *during school hours*?

6 Access to smartphones + social media inspires violent behavior.

About 46% of schools in the U.S. have seen an increase in fighting and violence.⁵ Many educators report that students' eagerness to record and post fight videos makes it less likely they will discourage or help break up physical confrontations, putting all students — and teachers — at risk.

7 Phones make cheating easier.

In a survey of over 1,000 students, ages 13-18, *more than a third* admitted using their phones to cheat.⁶

8 We are in the middle of a national emergency in youth mental health.

Smartphones and social media are linked to an increase in depression, anxiety, and even suicide in children and adolescents.⁷ Schools should promote only healthy behaviors and practices, like in-person socializing — the primary means through which kids acquire fundamental social and emotional skills.

Sources:

¹Thornton, B., Faires, A., Robbins, M., & Rollins, E. (2014). ²The Economist (2017). ³Mark, Gloria (2022). ⁴The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress ⁵Wilkins, Gale (2023). ⁶Common Sense Media (2009). ⁷American Academy of Pediatrics (2021).