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**Topic:** District-wide policy on cell phone use in all TPS schools

My career as a pediatrician began in 2010, just before the widespread adoption of smartphones. As a society, we embraced this technology without fully understanding its impact on young, developing minds. The effects have been profound.

Ongoing screen and cell phone use has been linked to mental health disorders, sleep disturbance, addiction, delayed social skill development, and, increasingly, even high-frequency hearing loss. While limiting or eliminating cell phone use during the school day may not directly change behaviors at home, it could help mitigate many of these side effects.

In my clinic, I have observed the following concerning trends among patients:

- **Addiction:**
  - Adolescents angrily storming out of exam rooms when discussing phone usage.
  - Young school-aged children throwing tantrums when their phones are taken away.
  - Preschoolers delaying toilet training because they refuse to put down their phones, opting instead to use pull-ups.
  - Parents, who are business owners, expressing disappointment in recent graduates whose work ethic is compromised by constant phone usage.
- **Mental health: Anxiety and depression:**
  - Patients with depression or anxiety showing measurable improvement when limiting screen time.
  - A decline in objective mental health metrics when screen time suddenly increases.
  - Many teens forgoing sleep to use their phones, further exacerbating their mental health symptoms.
- **Loss of social connection:**
  - The most resilient patients tend to be those actively engaged in their communities—whether through sports, extracurricular activities, service work, church, etc.

- These students spend more time with peers, fostering a sense of belonging and community, which research increasingly identifies as a **Positive Childhood Experience (PCE)**—a key factor in building resilience into adulthood.
- Limiting phone usage at school could potentially give more students the opportunity to develop these positive connections, benefiting them throughout their lives.

If the district adopts a new policy, it presents an opportunity for our entire community to develop a shared language and understanding of how to navigate an increasingly technological world while centering children’s needs. (I am asked often by parents: how do you limit screen time? I never dealt with this as a child, and I can’t ask my own parents what they did). A great starting point would be promoting the **American Academy of Pediatrics Family Media Plan**—an evidence-based tool available in multiple languages. If all of us in Tacoma begin considering these strategies, discussing with them with one another, and learn from the experiences of each other we would build community simply by trying to do right by our children in this regard.

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1. Positive Childhood Experiences one-pager: [BRFShandout2-18.pdf](#)
2. AAP Family Media Plan: [AAP Media Plan](#)
3. AAP and Media resources: [Media and Children](#)