

Hello School Board Directors,

Please see attached for a summary of the family survey on cell phone use from Hunt Middle School. I will speak briefly about this at the upcoming board meeting. I am one of the parents who worked with Principal Messersmith and School Counselors Ravi Jaskar and Clare Rock to send out the survey and summarize the findings.

Thank you,

Jennifer S. Arnold, Ph.D. . | she, her, hers

Feedback from Families on Hunt Middle School's Proposed "Phone Free Bell-to-Bell" Policy

June 25, 2025

Background

Hunt Middle School is exploring an update to our school's phone policy based on growing concerns about student well-being and focus during the school day. Inspired by insights from *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, we are considering a "no phone use from bell-to-bell" policy—meaning students would store their phones in their backpacks or other designated areas and not use phones during class time, breaks, or lunch. Principal Messersmith sent out a survey to families of all incoming sixth, seventh and eighth grade students (approximately 550 students), which was open June 8- 24. This survey and summary of findings was created by Hunt families in collaboration with school counselors.

Findings

We heard from 205 families representing 225 students, which is approximately half the student body.

- 74% were strongly supportive (152 families)
- 5% were strongly opposed (11 families)

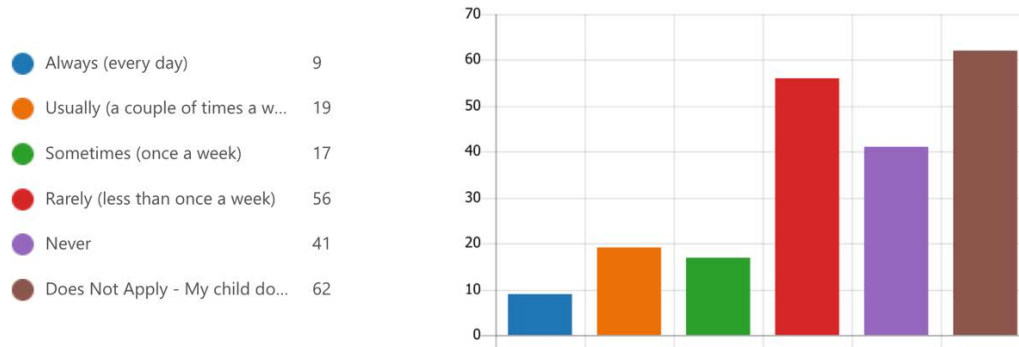
How supportive are you of a "phone free bell-to-bell" policy at Hunt Middle School (Students would store their device in their backpack or other designated area for the entire day)?

● Strongly Supportive	152
● Somewhat Supportive	21
● Neutral	7
● Somewhat Opposed	14
● Strongly Opposed	11



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- 34% currently do not have a cell phone (72 families)
 - 13% have a phone but do not bring it to school (27 families)
 - 53% bring their phone always or sometimes (107 families)
 - 78% of families rarely or never contact their student at school using their device (159 families)
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Do you contact your child at school using their device?



By far, the top two reasons families wanted their students to have cell phones were:

- Communicating with students if there is an emergency at school and allowing students to call 911 directly, specifically some families mentioned the potential for a school shooter and one family mentioned fear of violence against trans or BIPOC kids, and
- Communicating about logistics, change in plans during the day, or transportation before or after school. Most families said they felt confident they could communicate about logistics through the school office or with their student directly before or after school. A few families felt this was inconvenient or they didn't like to bother front office staff.

One to a few families also mentioned other reasons for cell phone use in the schools:

- Monitoring blood sugar (This would still be allowed with a "phone free bell-to-bell" policy.)
- Communicating with family to get support for anxiety and students with anxiety not feeling comfortable asking teachers for help
- Reporting or capturing crimes in progress or proving a student's innocence
- Ability to listen to music quietly using headphones during passing times or breaks, and
- Ability to track a student's location at all times due to fear of human trafficking.

In addition to the reasons above, a few families expressed concerns specific to the proposed policy:

- Consistency in enforcement and consequences among teachers, including unfairness from students who don't follow the rules
- Phones could get stolen in backpacks, especially when left unattended
- Phones are a tool and we should be teaching students how to use them responsibly, and
- Unlimited communication between families and students is important.

Families who were supportive of this policy emphasized a few of their concerns with cell phones:

- Distraction for students and teachers trying to focus on academics
- Reduced opportunity to socialize during lunch or enjoy time outside during breaks, and
- Division between "the haves" and "have nots" leading to peer pressure and social isolation for students who don't have a smart phone.

In general, there was enthusiastic support from the majority of families:

- “Let these young folks talk to each other!”
- “Thank you for prioritizing student engagement and learning while their growing brains develop.”
- “Parents can easily pass a message to their student through the office staff.”
- “We do it at Baker and it makes a world of difference.”
- “Other middle schools in the district have done this and it has been very successful. Kristi King at Wainwright would be a good contact for how it was rolled out schoolwide in 23-24.”
- “It takes real courage to implement a no-phone policy, and while there may be pushback, it’s a decision that will benefit students' mental health in the long run. Like seat belts and cigarette bans, it may not be popular at first—but it’s the right move.”

Conclusions

We heard strong support at Hunt for a “phone free bell-to-bell” policy. We also see an opportunity to continue building awareness about smartphone use and strengthening support and communication systems, especially for emergency situations, transportation, anxiety, and medical issues.