

# Digital Health at TCA

## FAQs

Most questions fell into 4 main categories: philosophical, staff/rules/curriculum, physical logistics, and safety & communication, and many questions fall into multiple categories based on the way the question was asked. In each category, some questions were asked multiple times, so instead of listing all the separate questions, we've listed the main topic of those sets of questions along with the number or times that topic was asked.

### Philosophical:

1. Policies have been in place in the past regarding cell phone use, but they haven't been enforced. What makes you believe that this policy will be enforced? What is the current policy, and what are the consequences?

Response: Current TCA Academic Policy JICJ-TCA states that "During class time, all student phones and other electronic devices must be checked or kept in a locker," primarily to control distractions. With the new data that is available regarding the negative effects of cell phones and electronic devices, creating a stricter, more easily enforced policy that applies not only to class time but passing periods and lunch, will be to the students' ultimate benefit.

2. What will you do to help detox the kids from their cell phone addiction?

Response: If the Board creates a new electronic device policy, students will be expected to comply on the first day of school in August 2023. Parents will be notified of the policy in May 2023 and will have the option of helping their children reduce time on cell phone/electronic devices during the last month of school and over the summer.

3. How will you implement a complete cell phone ban during the school day? What will the consequences be if a student is found with a cell phone or other electronic device?

Response: Until the Board makes a decision regarding electronic device use, we won't have a full plan in place. There are many options available for investigation, such as cell phone lockers, Yondr cases, etc. We will be researching and making decisions over the summer in anticipation of full implementation on the first day of school in August 2023. If approved, the policy will be enforced at each level: elementary, secondary, etc. The expectations and consequences will be listed in the 2023-24 Student Handbooks.

4. Will this be just cell phones or all electronic devices?

Response: The intent is for all cell phones, smart watches, iPads, etc. Any personal device that can send/receive phone calls, text messages, social media, pictures, etc. during the day would be off limits.

5. Will removing cell phones during the school day really help improve mental health?

Response: Research strongly supports the fact that the prevalence of smart devices has increased the rates of depression and anxiety among adolescent and teen children. We acknowledge that there are 16 hours in the day that we don't have direct contact with the students, but we believe giving them 7-8 hours a day where students are in a safe zone without the added pressures of electronic devices will

help rather than hurt. And if some of these school- based controls help parents establish similar parameters away from school, we believe there could be additional benefits across our community.

6. If people leave the school because they don't support the new policy, will you stay the course? What level of attrition can you withstand?

Response: We will absolutely stay the course, if that is what the Board decides. We believe any attrition increases would be small, and in fact creating a device-free school day may actually attract additional families. Ultimately, any reasonable attrition "cost" will be worth the benefit to the our learning environment and improved health and safety of our students

7. How will you get parent buy-in? Will parents be able to request and exemption from the policy?

Response: From our initial feedback efforts, we believe a majority of our community is supportive. The next several months will also bring additional opportunities to seek parent buy- in. Parents will be able to request exemptions for health care reasons, on a case-by-case basis.

8. How will you get student buy-in? Aren't you making kids even more fragile and sheltered

Response: Dr. Sojourner and our principals have begun meeting with different student groups, and will continue to do so over the next several months. While we are certainly seeking student buy-in, it's important to remember that children don't always agree with what is best for them, and it is up to the adults in their lives to help make those decisions for them. Such is the case for example with our uniform/dress code policy – understanding that secondary students in particular are generally reluctant to completely agree/buy-in. Regarding the issue of cell phones/devices, when psychologist Dr. Jonathan Haidt was recently asked during an evening lecture at UCCS the question about creating kids that are more fragile, his response was emphatically no – "I'm protecting you from something that is/can be damaging while you're younger and your brain is still developing."

## Staff/Rules/Curriculum:

1. Will staff be held to the same no cell phone policy?

Response: While some staff members need to have their phones available for situations involving student health, safety, security, or emergency, the staff in general will be asked to refrain from using cell phones for personal use while in the company of students during the school day. We know this may be a change for some staff members, but we are committed to role modeling the best possible environment for our students.

2. How will you change the curriculum of certain classes, so that teachers don't request students bring their phones to class to complete Quizlets and use Google Classrooms, Kahoot, etc?

Response: Some individual classroom practice will need to change. These uses of technology will not be used in a classroom environment unless pre-coordinated by the teacher and administration. In general, laptops and other school-provided technology can be available for use by our teachers, when needed and appropriate.

3. How will teachers enforce this policy?

Response: As with other implementation questions, we'll have procedures in place to enforce any new policy. We see this policy as potentially easier (and more important) to enforce than some aspects of our dress code, for instance. Teacher have reported that this type of restrictive policy would help them eliminate difficult ambiguities and differences of interpretation that currently exist with our current cell phone policy.

4. What about children who need to photograph the board for assignments?

Response: This may seem like a good pedagogical practice, but in reality, most studies show that taking a picture is not effective in helping students with recall. The key element of the hand-to-brain processing does not engage the mind, which is a critical piece in memory recall. Students on specific learning plans will have accommodations as they do now, and those accommodations may include allowing a student to photograph a board or assignment – how that is done will be coordinated in the learning plan.

5. At TCA, what attempts have been made to effectively integrate digital learning and balance into classes?

Response: This is not one of the educational goals of TCA. Yes, in the digital citizenship realm we want and do talk about responsible use of digital technology, but philosophically we are trying to restore BALANCE by creating a safe zone during the school day, and we understand that students will use their phones and access social media after school hours. We are simply striving to eliminate some of the distractions and other negative cell phone effects during the school day while providing the best education for our students. Recall also one of our foundational Core Values statements, "TCA sees to bring its philosophy to life through limiting use of personal electronic devices..."

## Physical Logistics:

1. Do you intend to hire more staff so that students can come to the office and use the phone? Will you be installing pay phones? You don't have enough phone lines or staff to handle all the calls that will need to be made between classes and before and after school.

Response: We do not believe more staff will be required; however, we will re-evaluate on an as-needed basis, similar to our current procedure. Students *can* have a cell phone, if their parents want them to have it, before and after school. We encourage pre-planning with your child so they know who will be picking them up from school and at what time so they're not confused or anxious about that. If there is a need for you to communicate with your child during the school hours, we will get a message to them or call them to the office to call you back, using our office phones. Likewise, if your child needs to communicate with you during the day, they can come to their school office and make a phone call. This currently works at the elementary level and has worked at the secondary level for years.

2. Have you considered an 'easing-in' period or a trial period this school year?

Response: The high school is considering a Phone for Casual day or two, similar to our Cash for Casual days. High school students will also be participating in some Classroom directed media fasts throughout the year. Otherwise, we are not considering an easing in period or trial period this year.

3. How will you secure phones on campus? If students have to leave them in their cars, that would increase car break-ins and cause the phones to overheat.

Response: We are still working through the physical logistics of implementing this type of policy. There are many available options that we need to evaluate to determine our best way forward.

4. What about using parental controls/time limits as a means of disallowing cell use during school hours?

Response: Parental controls and time limits are great for home use, and we highly encourage them. At TCA, due to our educational philosophy of limiting use to personal electronic devices, we believe that cell phones should not be in use at all during the school day. Parental controls and/or social media limitations do not eliminate some of the negative effects of cell phone use and presence involving distractions or relationship building.

5. How will you prevent kids from sneaking their phones in their pockets or backpacks?

Response: As all parents know, nothing will prevent kids from testing their boundaries. We do however intend to create a strong policy with clear boundaries and consequences.

6. How will you handle students who need their cell phones for their jobs or younger siblings?

Response: Similarly to a previous question, students should have a clear understanding of how/when they'll be picked up. If a younger student needs to contact their older sibling for a ride, they'll have access to their cell phone after school. If a plan changes during the day, call the office and we will get a message to your child. This need has always existed at TCA, and many of our front office personnel and administrators functioned well and successfully here for years using this type of system.

## Safety/Communication:

1. What if there is an active shooter on school grounds? I want to know my child is safe.

Response: We know this is a valid concern for our parents. There are several reasons why it is actually safer for your child not to have a cell phone during an emergency situation – the most important of which is the influx of cellular calls during an emergency that can bring down the cell capabilities, making it very difficult for first responders to communicate among themselves and with the school administration. In addition, safety experts have consistently advised that students often communicate misinformation during an emergency, which can also affect first responder actions/reactions. Finally, in these terrible situations, the noise created by incoming calls and texts can alert an active shooter to the presence of teachers and children. Our priority during any school emergency is our students. We will protect them to the absolute best of our abilities, and we promise to communicate with you as soon as we are able during any emergency situation. We are parents too, so we know how important this topic is to you.

2. What about students whose parents are divorced and there is confusion over pick up?

Response: Again, pre-planning with your children will help alleviate any anxiety they have about pick up.

3. Can you legally keep a cell phone away from an 18-year-old senior?

Response: Yes.

4. What about apps that check insulin levels/blood sugar?

Response: This would fall into a health-related medical exemption category, and would be allowed.

General Comments: The majority of the comments were positive, and a selection of representative comments are listed below. In general, the positive comments were broad in nature from a philosophically-aligned perspective. The negative comments were generally more anecdotally based, relating to personal experiences or situations. These questions and comments were made prior to Monday's Town Hall (09.26.2022). We also can't speak to specific anecdotal or personal situations, and recommend that if you have a concern you work through your school administration to resolve that concern directly.

### Positive Comments:

1. We are on board! We love the thought of this new policy.
  1. "BRAVO – We appreciate your bold move protecting our students from this crisis of health. It's sad parents haven't demanded this."
  2. "I firmly believe creating a safe zone would improve our students feeling safe, happy, and good. If even one student's innocence can be protected, it would be worth doing."
  3. "If TCA doesn't attempt something because of how difficult it will be, what kind of message does that send to our kids?"
  4. "As the mother of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader and two incoming kindergarteners (2020 and 2021), I am not yet 'in the weeds' of parenting kids with cell phone access. However, this data is SCARY. I am fully supportive of TCA moving forward with removing cell phones during school hours and am looking forward to this policy becoming TCA's new normal – so by the time my kids get to junior high and high school this will hopefully be a non-issue (at least during school hours)! THANK YOU!"
  5. "We are behind you 100%! As a teacher in a D-20 public school, I am appalled that cell phones & society rule the school atmosphere! What a tragedy! I ban cell phones and take them in our classroom, and I see the damage they do! Wake up D-20!"
2. We support you, and think you should bring the students into the discussion.
  1. "I support creating a 'safe zone' at school in regards to cell phone use. I do believe there needs to be a way to invite the students into the process as a way to communicate we value their voice and allow them to be a part of the revolution here at TCA, similar to the idea Mr. Shields shared about the students conferring together at a coffee shop with their phones in the middle of the table."
  2. "I advocate no cell phone usage during the school day. I advocate respecting and honoring our kids to be a part of their decision and working together to agree and enact this policy."
  3. "The media fast for seniors was enlightening. They did not miss their phones knowing that everyone was aligned. If our kids aren't convinced, or parents aren't, try the media fast for all grades. It's a relief. We take away or limit bad things for our kids, why not this?"
  4. "To respond to a parent's statement about how taking cell phones away in high school doesn't prepare them for dealing with cell phone use in college – I disagree. It will give students the experience of a cell phone free zone and they might see the value of it and therefore carry it over to other parts of their lives, including college."

### Negative Comments:

1. "To associate suicidality and self-harm behavior to digital health is inconclusive and is a scare tactic. Instead the rate of suicide is dropping for teens in El Paso County. The Beyond the Surface and Prevention/Education programming utilizing text and phone support has seen a meaningful reduction in the rate."
2. "Let's look at what is wrong in our school and fix it. It is not because of the phones that our students are killing themselves. We have teachers with totally unrealistic expectations. They assign hours of

homework nightly and on weekends. They do not provide examples of what is good enough work for A, B, or C grades – they simply pile it on and the students sacrifice their own wellbeing because they don't have the experience in life to know when enough is enough. The students believe they have to get straight A's to attend ANY college. We know that is not true."

3. "Our children were depressed and anxious before cell phones. We have wolves dressed in sheep's clothing, specifically teachers who: cannot teach rudimentary skills, intimidate rather than encourage, try to relive their teen years by inappropriately befriending some students and belittling others. In these situations our children need their phones to check in with us and be encouraged during the day."
4. "It was stated at lunch and at passing periods people use cell phones to communicate with the others. That is completely false coming from a student who is there. Any cellular activity between students is complementary to the communication that happens in person. For example, someone may share a photo with the others that they can laugh about it, and this brings them more together. Not only will taking away phones not help make people, it will make it more difficult to achieve the happiness you want."
5. "I called the office and asked them to give my daughter a message since she does not have a cell phone. The response I got was "Why don't you text her?" Again, I stated she does not have a phone. They responded, "We'll try to get her a message." She never got the message."
6. "Taking phones away in HS won't help students learn to be able to ignore them in college and the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, phones will never go away in our society. I think that this would make our students even more fragile and sheltered, and will not help them in the long run."