

What it's like to go to school without cellphones

Surprise: Wakefield students say it's beneficial

BY TANA BRADY

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With social media use and its effects on young people in the zeitgeist, the Wakefield Country Day School journalism class undertook a survey in grades 9-12 about the use of cellphones during school hours. In its survey, the student journalists found a surprising trend among the Gen Z and Gen Alpha students.

The current cellphone policy at WCDS states, "All phones are to be stowed in lockers for the duration of school, not to be used between classes, during lunch, or during morning and afternoon breaks, without express permission of a teacher or administrator.

"If found, student phones are placed in the principal's office and may be collected at the end of the day."

"It's a big issue," said Arnold Glass, a professor of psychology at Rutgers University who has researched the impact of cellphones on student performance. "They lose anywhere between a half and whole letter grade if they are allowed to consult their phones in class."

Current beliefs might lead one to expect students to be unhappy with the FOMO (fear of missing out) that comes from being without access to social media. But, what the survey found was quite the contrary.

While a fraction of current students wish they could use their cellphones during school, an overwhelming majority of them felt the policy was either beneficial to their learning, beneficial to their mental health, and many students said both.

"At my old school, I know kids have their phones out during class to check notifications, use Snapchat, play games," said WCDS student Annaliese Miglino. "I think having access to our cellphones has a negative effect on what we're able to learn in class. I do think social media is very addictive and everyone I know is on it every single day. I did research for a project on the effects of social media when I was in middle school. The feeling you get with a quick update is called 'instant gratification,' and it releases dopamine."

When asked if she felt unsafe when not having access to her phone, Miglino said, "I don't feel at risk here, but I could understand it if I was at a larger school with behavior problems. Still, if there was any danger, wouldn't you want to be as quiet as possible and do whatever your teacher was telling you to do rather than be on the phone?"

A survey of Warren County Public Schools, a school district next door to



PHOTOS BY CLAIRE MULLINS

Annaliese Miglino stows her phone in her locker before the start of school.

Rappahannock County, found about a third of teachers tell students to put their cellphones away five to 10 times per class, and 14.7% of the teachers did so more than 20 times a class.

One student, Tristan Mattingly, has to leave his cellphone at home during

the school day. His mom confiscated it after multiple infractions at school with regards to the rules.

"I had my phone taken away three times by three different teachers, so my mom took it away from me," Mattingly said. "I have to wait until I get home to look at it. Now I prefer having it at home because it keeps my mind off the need to check social media, text messages or any other stuff that might be distracting."

The results from a WCDS faculty survey showed that while there have been a few instances this year when a teacher had to confiscate a student's phone, overall there is little interruption, which leads to a more conducive environment for teaching.

"Obviously, when you have a student's full attention, the chances of learning increase exponentially," said journalism teacher, Suzanne Zylonis. "Students are more interested in collaborating and engaging with one another when they're not in their 'cellphone silo.'"

"We encourage socialization from a very young age; allowing students to self-isolate in a room full of peers is completely anathema to being a member of a classroom," she said.

Stella Budwash, a first-year student at WCDS, said, "I think the policy is great. It gives us more time to focus on school."



Confiscated phones are deposited in the Head of School Paul Lerner's office until the end of the school day.

CELLPHONES IN SCHOOLS

► **Coming next week:** What is the cellphone policy in Rappahannock County Public Schools?

► **In Richmond:** A Virginia Senate bill would allow school boards to ban cellphones and other "handheld communication devices" during regular school hours. Full story online: [rappnews.link/8st](https://www.rappnews.com/link/8st)

Budwash is one of a handful of students who do not have a personal phone, and said she feels more socially available. "I find it easy to make conversation; some kids who are always on their phones find it more difficult. And not being on my phone gives me more time to focus on important things like school, friendships and my family," she said.

Budwash says she is not on social media, at all. "My parents, and rightfully so, don't want me on social media. It's been proven that it's terrible for kids, and I'm perfectly capable of comparing myself to others without social media."

Tana Brady is a sophomore and journalism student at Wakefield Country Day School in Huntly.