



# Community Unit School District 200

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To: Board of Education

From: Jeff Schuler – Superintendent of Schools

Date: April 9, 2025

Re: CAC Feedback About Cell Phone Policies

## **Background:**

As has been reported across the country (including school districts nearby in Illinois), districts are taking a more active approach to managing student cell phones and cellular device use during the school day. A number of states have moved toward a statewide approach to managing cell phones in schools. There are proposed bills in the House and Senate in Illinois that would take a similar approach.

Earlier in the school year, CUSD 200 Board Members expressed an interest in this topic and asked that the administration work with the Citizens' Advisory Committee to research and solicit feedback on the topic.

The goal of the policy exploration was to develop a plan that would create a learning environment with fewer distractions for students and staff, while still providing the flexibility and responsibility of cell phone possession. Consistent with changes in state and local practices, emerging research, student and staff feedback, administrators have explored adjusted policy expectations to be considered for the 2025-2026 school year. The goal is to present this plan to the Board of Education at the May Board of Education Meeting.

The purpose of this memo is to summarize the feedback and suggestions that we received from the CAC and the full administration team which will shape the recommendations that will come to the Board for consideration in May.

## **Current Policy Language:**

For the 2024-2025 school year, the following language is included in the general school information section of handbooks.

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### **Elementary School:**

CELLULAR PHONES Students may not use a cellular phone or any other electronic communication device in any manner that disrupts the educational environment. Any student carrying a cellular phone must keep it turned off and out of sight during the regular school day unless authorized and approved by the building principal. (Policy 7.190)

### **Middle School:**

CELLULAR PHONES Students may not use a cellular phone or any other electronic communication device in any manner that disrupts the educational environment. Any student carrying a cellular phone must keep it turned off and out of sight during the regular school day unless authorized and approved by the building principal. Cell phones are not allowed in locker rooms at any time. (Policy 7.190)

For all levels, this is included in the student discipline section on prohibited student conduct:

Using a cellular telephone, or another electronic device, including iPods and tablets, unless authorized and approved by the Building Principal, in any manner that disrupts the educational environment, including using the device to cheat, transmit digital images, signal others, send messages or otherwise violate student conduct rules. All electronic devices must be kept turned off and out of sight during the regular school day unless: (a) authorized and approved by the Building Principal, (b) the supervising teacher grants permission, (c) use of the device is provided in a student's IEP, or (d) it is needed in an emergency that threatens the safety of students, staff, or other individuals.

Individual buildings have employed additional practices consistent with this policy language. This has included more active classroom storage options such as cell phone caddies. At some schools, this has included more specific monitoring and management of other cellular devices, such as watches, based on building experiences.

### **Summary of Research and Stakeholder Feedback:**

The topic of cell phone policies in schools was requested as an agenda topic by both the Board of Education and Members of CAC. We began the discussion by reviewing a research brief by EAB, a research organization the District partners with, on the topic of technology use and the impact on students in school buildings. While the entire research brief did not focus only on cell phones, it was certainly discussed prominently. Research is clear that growing numbers of students have cellular phones and devices. Research highlighted the difference between educational uses of technology and passive/entertainment uses. Research has been able to highlight the trade-offs of cell phone use in schools. Banning them can reduce distractions and improve discipline, but may negatively impact perceptions of safety and culture.

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With the help of the EAB article and other readings done by individual members of the community, CAC started by identifying questions they would like to have answered by students, teachers, mental health staff, and administrators related to cell phone use in schools. These questions were captured in a single list and shared with Board Student Ambassadors and our high school administrative teams.

As members of CAC prepared to hear the feedback from students, teachers, and mental health providers in our schools relative to student phone use and the impact on students, they were asked to keep the following three potential paths in mind:

- Option 1** - Make no change - keep policies and practices consistent with where they currently are.
- Option 2** - Review current policies, perhaps make some minor adjustments or clarifications where appropriate, but document cell phone expectations in a place that is easily accessible for students, parents, and staff. Documenting current or revised expectations also brings clarity for the entire system to ensure a more consistent adherence to expectations to provide a greater level of accountability for those governed by the policy/procedure.
- Option 3** - Consider more significant changes to current practices. Significant changes to practices could involve putting additional restrictions or expectations into place (such as eliminating use of phones during lunch and passing periods at the high school), or reducing restrictions at any of the levels if that was consistent with the feedback. Putting in place a more significant change to the current policy/practice would likely need to involve a working group or committee involving multiple stakeholder groups to draft and then solicit feedback on the proposed changes that would need to be brought to the Board as a policy or handbook change.

Board Student ambassadors were able to gather feedback from high school students via a combination of surveys and focus groups. The Board Student Ambassadors joined our CAC Meeting in January to provide feedback on the questions identified for them by the committee. Ambassadors engaged in conversation around the questions identified for them, feedback they gathered from students, and their own thoughts around student access to phones during the school day.

High school staff representatives joined CAC in February. Like our student representatives, they provided feedback from a staff survey given to all high school staff on the topic of cellular devices in schools, and engaged in similar conversations around access to phones during the school day.

Following the discussion and debrief, CAC members indicated their preferred recommendation to administration below:

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<b>Options</b>	<b>Option Details</b>	<b>Number of CAC Members Preferred</b>
Option #1	Make no change; keep policies & practices consistent with where they currently are	
Option #2	Review current policies, make minor adjustments or clarifications where appropriate; document cell phone expectations in an accessible place for all	15
Option #3	Consider more significant changes to current practices.	11

### **Option #2 Feedback**

- The policy needs to be consistently enforced across all classrooms at both HS.
- Consider different policies based on grades (Freshman - more limited than seniors).
- Consider more consistency and not fully relying on teachers to create & police.
- Would need clear discipline procedures.
- Building level consistency needed.
- Change from “regular school day” to “instructional time”.
- No phones in bathrooms - 100%.
- Have phones available for kids to use (pay phones?).
- Consistency throughout the district is good.
- Modification to include - strict no use during classroom time except for IEP or 504 students, or emergency; and allows use during passing and lunch periods.
- Include language on wearable devices (ear buds, AI glasses, etc.)
- In favor of a districtwide, consistent policy; smart watches and airpods/headphones should be included in the phone policy.
- Based on new law, think phone caddies/out-of-sight rules with teacher discretion should be used if will be used during school or at break/completion of work; non-instructional time - students should have access; more latitude for juniors and seniors; having a consistent rule provides teachers something to fall back on.

### **Option #3 Feedback**

- Classroom “panic buttons” to make students & parents feel safer about students having phones in sleeves or backpacks.
- Policy consistently enforced by teachers/admin and be consistent across the board, not dependent on school/classroom.
- Consider allowing phones at lunch, but away during classroom learning so kids can focus. Consider different policy depending on age of student (more freedom for seniors).
- Using cell phones effects consciousness; phone use should be limited during school; beer muscles are more dangerous than keyboard muscles.
- Policy - as a teacher, If I see it, I take it; keep it in your backpack. If you don't give it to me, you will be marked with an unexcused absence.

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- Get ahead of legislation now & then review more closely.
- School policy - try “bell-to-bell” as a pilot.
- A policy that is the same across the district would be helpful to teachers and would take the pressure off of them; also, taking away the different policies in each class would help the students; attach the AirPods to the policy.
- Add “IEP or 504” to any exception language; am a proponent of “bell-to-bell” restrictions.
- More restrictions would be good. Recognize that students also need to learn how to navigate their phones in the world. Perhaps a tiered rule system could be implemented, with Freshmen/Sophomores having more restrictions and eased rules for upperclassmen. Apple watches and earbuds should be considered too.

As this feedback was reviewed with the HR/Policy Committee, the committee recommended that we review this feedback with the full Board of Education at this meeting, and come prepared with a recommended handbook change at your next meeting. The recommended change would come in the form of new language to be included in the student handbook, and an overall district-wide document outlining expectations for cell phones and cellular devices in District 200.