

## Cellphones in schools give more screen time to overloaded students

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Students (from left) Jack Doyle, Ryan Ward, Aiden Franz and Gray Rager use their cellphones during lunch at Westland Middle School in Bethesda, Maryland. Photo by: Washington Post by Michael Robinson Chavez

Kids started bringing cellphones to school many years ago. Educators still don't know what to do about it, though.

Should they allow cellphones in elementary schools? What about letting middle-schoolers use them at lunch? Which rules make the sense?

Montgomery County Public Schools is Maryland's biggest school system. Students, parents and educators at these schools are in the middle of a big argument about these questions.

The district just changed its rules. Before, kids in fifth grade and younger could have cellphones only with special permission. But over the years, more parents wanted their kids to take phones to school. Many believed kids would be safer when they walked home.

Now, the district says kids can bring them to school. Students still can't use phones during school, unless a teacher uses them as part of a lesson. They may use them after school is over and on the

bus.

Some parents have objected. They are shocked that children as young as 6 or 7 are allowed to bring smartphones to school.

### Too Much Screen Time

"A phone would be more of a distraction," said Art Bennett. He has three children in school. He said that unless there's a good reason, there shouldn't be phones in elementary school at all.

The new rules also allow middle school students to use cellphones during lunch. The principals have to give the OK, though. Some parents are not very happy about this, either. They are already worried that their kids spend too much time on screens.

"We all know the phone is a blessing and a curse," said Lisa Cline. She is part of the PTA. That stands for Parent Teacher Association. Cline helps run a safe technology committee for a group of PTAs.

### Little Adults

"I don't see why we want to make these children into little adults," Cline said.

Different schools handle cellphones in different ways. Some schools ban smartphones. Others allow them in hallways or during lunch periods. Some schools let teachers use them as part of a lesson.

Elizabeth Englander is a professor. She teaches at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts. "Nobody really knows what to do," she said.

Englander recently studied third-graders in five states. She found that four out of 10 had a cellphone. That number doubled from 2013 to 2017. Among kids who had a phone, most brought the phone to school every day.

In Montgomery, school system officials say the times are changing. More parents are buying their children phones. And more children are taking these phones to school.

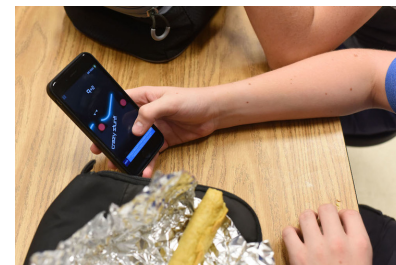
Still, many parents want their kids to talk with people face-to-face. They say it helps students develop social skills and make friends. It also helps them learn to deal with uncomfortable situations. These parents worry that phones will get in the way.

### Almost No One Talked At Lunch

Angie Melton has two children in middle school. She said her kids' school allowed phones for a week. Her kids said that almost no one talked at lunch that week.

"They get in their virtual worlds," she said. "I want them in the real world."

Justus Swan is 11 years old. He said he is in no hurry to bring cellphones to the cafeteria. Lunch is about talking to other kids.



"It defeats the point," Justus said.

But the phone-friendly lunch has supporters.

Gary Rager is 14 and goes to Westland Middle School. He said that having phones at lunch is a good thing. Kids can text parents. They can check their grades online. They can also play music and watch videos, he said.

"It's a nice freedom to have," he said.

### **Students And Parents Disagree**

His school took a survey. Most students liked the idea of phones at lunch. But most parents did not, said Westland Principal Alison Serino.

Principal Serino has offered a compromise. Kids can have cellphones during lunch on Fridays. They have to follow the rules, though. No Snapchat or Instagram. No violent games. No taking photos or videos. Also, kids must wear ear buds if they are playing music.

### **Quiz**

- 1 Which detail BEST shows that there is a lot of disagreement about what cellphone rules schools should have?
  - (A) Should they allow cellphones in elementary schools? What about letting middle-schoolers use them at lunch?
  - (B) Students, parents and educators at these schools are in the middle of a big argument about these questions.
  - (C) The district just changed its rules. Before, kids in fifth grade and younger could have cellphones only with special permission.
  - (D) They are shocked that children as young as 6 or 7 are allowed to bring smartphones to school.
  
- 2 Read the section "Little Adults."  
Select the paragraph that gives examples of school cellphone rules.
  
- 3 Read the selection from "Too Much Screen Time."  

*"A phone would be more of a distraction," said Art Bennett.*

What is Art Bennett's point of view about using cellphones in school?

  - (A) He believes that no student should be allowed to have a cellphone.
  - (B) He thinks that phones could take students' attention away from learning.
  - (C) He wants phones only to be used at lunch.
  - (D) He doesn't think that phones help keep students safe.
  
- 4 Which statement would Gary Rager be MOST likely to agree with?
  - (A) Students should spend their lunch time talking to their friends.
  - (B) Kids should be able to use Instagram and Snapchat during lunch.
  - (C) Using a cellphone during the day is a good break for a student.
  - (D) Schools should have stricter rules about using cellphones in schools.