

St. Genevieve Parish Schools: June 28, 2024

PHONE-FREE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

For the last several months, our leadership team has been in dialogue regarding emerging research showing the damaging results on teenagers stemming from the frequent usage of smart phones. It is alarming. We have included in some recent weekly newsletters some of the research findings.

We have been in conversation with students in middle school and high school attempting to make them aware of the dangers to their mental health. On one such instance, we introduced students to the **Yondr** pouch that many schools and districts are adopting. The pouch allows students to keep their phones with them during the day; however, the phones are locked in the pouches from arrival to dismissal.

Research suggests “excessive cell phone use impacts adolescents’ mental health and well-being and is associated with increased **stress, anxiety, depression, sleep issues, feelings of aggression, and suicidal thoughts.**”

Additionally, limiting cell phone usage and social media access during the school day **increases academic performance and has positive effects on student mental health.**” Many schools-both public and private-that have enacted similar cell phone free environments. The results in these schools have been overwhelmingly positive-both in terms of focus and academic performance and on student mental health.

Although **no final decision has been made at this time**, St. Genevieve Schools will likely move to a phone free environment at some point during the 2024-25 school year.

Interestingly, schools report that parents have a more challenging time adapting to smart-phone free campuses. Parents have grown so accustomed to messaging children throughout the school day, some become angry and worried. Studies are proving that the concerns parents express are unfounded.

We realize our parent community will have questions about this new policy, for instance, what if there is a school emergency. Safety is paramount and we will direct our students to follow our school emergency plan. It is the advisement of **National School Safety and Security Services** and the **California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services** that cell phone use during an emergency creates a less safe school emergency response. Specifically:

- Cell phone use during crisis management may overload telephone systems and render them useless.
- Calls, texts, and other outside communications have the potential to alert a dangerous individual to the location of students during a lockdown.
- Cell phone use accelerates the unintentional (and potentially intentional) spread of misinformation, rumors, and fears.
- We are looking to provide each student in middle and high school with a device free of social applications but will allow them to complete necessary school assignments.
- If you need to get a message to your child during the school day, it will be possible to do it the “old-fashioned way” by calling the school office.

We are confident that moving to a cell phone free environment will help our students better focus, be less distracted, improve academic performance and have a positive impact on students’ mental health.