

Testimony of Dr. Ashley Loboda, MD

Pediatrician and Pennsylvanian Parent

Presented to the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee

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Subject: In Support of a “Bell to Bell” Cell Phone Policy in Pennsylvania Public Schools

Madam Chair Lynda Schlegel Culver and Honorable Members of the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Ashley Loboda and I am a board-certified pediatrician who has been practicing for over 15 years in Pittsburgh (Allegheny County), Pennsylvania. I am the mother of four school-aged children in the Mount Lebanon School District (2 high school students, 1 middle school student, and 1 elementary school student), two of my children qualify for special education (IEP and GIEP), and the wife of a public high school teacher. I hope that all of these credentials will help you to further appreciate my experience as a physician and parent in Pennsylvania. I am here today because I care deeply about the quality of education, school safety, and the mental health of our children — and because I fully support the adoption of a “bell to bell” cell phone policy in all public schools in Pennsylvania.

This is not simply an education policy. It is a public health measure with a direct impact on the well-being of Pennsylvania’s children.

What I see as a Parent in Pennsylvania

Like many parents, I’ve watched how cell phones have become a constant presence in our children’s lives — not just at home, but in the classroom, in the hallways, and even in the cafeteria. As a parent, I have worked to establish boundaries for cell phone and social media use in our home and after school. My children attend a school district that has an “instructional time only” cell phone policy. This is not enough. My children spend 7 hours a day at school where access to cell phones is impeding their education, social-emotional growth, and physical safety.

I’ve seen firsthand how:

- My children’s attention and academic performance can suffer from constant phone notifications during the school day. My children on average receive 100’s of notifications daily--this is not unique to my kids. Every ping and vibration is a distraction during and in between classes.
- An “instructional time only” cell phone policy is insufficient to prevent the most prominent cell phone issues during a school day: distractions into academic time and relentless social pressures. Furthermore, classroom to classroom temporary storage solutions unintentionally increase smartphone usage: requiring students to pick up the devices at the end of each class directly places the device back into their hands which translates into immediate device usage.
- Social drama, bullying, and anxiety are worsened because of what happens online — not after school, but during school hours. Students use cell phones to take videos and pictures of other students, violating their privacy, during the school day and post them on

social media. In addition, our middle school was rewarding students for good behavior with “tech lunches” that allowed them to use personal devices during lunch, incentivizing this behavior and further ostracizing students that did not have a cell phone. I know our school is not unique with this type of reward.

- Parents are constantly battling pressures from peers that are perpetuated through social media networks. We are up against companies that are profiting off of our children. They are hiring the best and brightest software engineers, psychologists, and neuroscientists to create platforms and apps meant to be as addictive as possible. Persuasive design is a real thing that works very well - and this is directly impacting our children’s access to education during the school day.
- If the students have access to these devices during the school day, I hear from teachers (including my husband) and administrators that they are spending precious educational time reminding students to put the device away. The reality is that there are inconsistent school-wide or district-wide policies. Teachers are in a daily battle to compete with screens for the attention of their students and managing daily student cell phone use in the classroom is exhausting and untenable over the course of an entire school year.

As parents, many of us set screen time limits at home. We encourage our kids to unplug and focus. But we can’t do it alone. There is a growing grass roots effort from parents asking for school districts to implement stronger cell phone policies. In Mt Lebanon, we have a group called “Lebo Unplugged” that meets monthly to have productive conversations about technology in our schools. We all want our children to have the best academic and social emotional learning during the school day. Parents want their children to not be distracted by cell phones during the school day. We need schools — and state leadership — to partner with us on this and improve education in Pennsylvania.

Why Parents Support at “Bell to Bell” Policy

A “bell to bell” policy — keeping personal cell phones away and off from the first bell to the last — is not extreme. It’s practical and the only effective solution. It provides:

- Consistent boundaries for students
- Fewer distractions for students and teachers
- A healthier learning environment for everyone
- A safer school environment during a crisis situation

This kind of structure helps students focus on what they’re in school to do: learn academic and social skills. It also helps reduce the pressure to constantly check messages, respond to social media, or be part of group chats that can be harmful or stressful. Recently, we took away the privilege of a cell phone for one of our high school students. Their biggest concern for this punishment was what would happen at lunch and study hall when everyone else was on a cell phone. This is disturbing to me and should be to everyone paying taxes toward public schools. In 2025 the Journal of the American Medical Association, published data confirming that most time on student cell phones is not used for academics and that students are using their cell phones on average for 60 minutes per day--the majority of which was on social media. Data from a 2023 report from Common Sense Media and the University of Michigan found that nearly one third of all teens reported that they have been exposed to pornography during the school day. We can and must do better to protect our children while at school.

In schools that have implemented a bell to bell policy:

- Students have many more minutes of learning without distraction each day. This can add up to days of additional educational time each year.
- Students are more engaged in learning; they choose to take an elective class instead of sitting in study hall since they can no longer scroll on a cell phone during study hall.
- Students are more engaged in face-to-face conversations with peers, making eye contact, and learning important social-emotional skills that build resiliency to cope with boredom or disappointment in ways that don't involve screens.
- Students experience less anxiety when social media concerns and privacy violations are reduced.
- Parents report less difficulty in managing cell phone use at home.

And let's be honest — our kids are still kids. Their brains are still developing. They are not yet equipped to self-regulate the way adults are. That's why we put limits on driving and age restrictions on substances. As a parent and pediatrician, I expect the Pennsylvania public school system to have a cell phone policy that will provide consistent regulations to protect our children's education.

What I See as a Pediatrician in Pennsylvania

In my practice here in Pennsylvania, I care for children and adolescents over the course of their childhood. Over the past decade — and especially since the widespread adoption of smartphones among youth — I have witnessed a clear and troubling rise in:

- Anxiety, depression, and suicidality
- Difficulty focusing and completing schoolwork
- Sleep disturbances
- Social withdrawal
- Cyberbullying and online harassment

We cannot continue to ignore these trends. The mental health of our children is worsening. Among children between the ages of 15 and 19, suicide is the second leading cause of death, and the leading cause of death for 14- to 15-year-olds (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were more than 4 times as likely to report thoughts of suicide and to attempt suicide than peers who did not experience cyberbullying. We can all agree that our school buildings and classrooms must establish and uphold a safe and healthy environment for all students. Allowing personal electronic devices to be accessible and used in school buildings and at school functions jeopardizes this fundamental and critical school responsibility.

Parents Are Asking for This

Contrary to popular belief, many parents support school cell phone limits. In a recent report from my Congressman, Chris Deluzio, 76% of parents wanted a "bell to bell" cell phone policy in their schools. In my medical practice, parents tell me they want help setting boundaries. Students

admit they feel pressure to be constantly connected, even when it interferes with learning or causes stress. They need adults to lead on this.

Congressman Deluzio recently surveyed all 59 constituent school districts in Allegheny & Beaver Counties. Astonishingly 13% of the schools currently have no policy for cell phones, while another 64% had some cell phone limitations. This means that currently 77% of schools in his district are not utilizing the best practice “bell to bell” policy.

A statewide, consistent “bell to bell” policy would ensure equal opportunities to access education across districts and consistency when district leaders change. Additionally, it would reduce peer pressures and give educators the authority to focus on teaching, not policing phone use.

As legislators, you have the opportunity to support policies that align with both educational excellence and child health protection. A statewide “bell to bell” cell phone policy is a practical, common-sense solution that would:

- Strengthen classroom learning
- Protect student mental health
- Support teachers and administrators
- Give parents much-needed reinforcement in managing screen time

In Conclusion

As a parent and a pediatrician dedicated to improving the lives of Pennsylvania’s children, I urge you to pass legislation that restricts student cell phone use during the school day — from the first bell to the last — across our public schools.

Cell phone use and addiction have become a public health crisis that is impacting our children especially during the school day. Let’s give all of Pennsylvania’s children the best possible environment to support their academic learning and social-emotional growth.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to the future of our children.

Respectfully submitted,



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