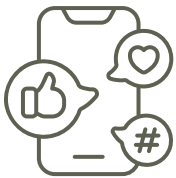


Digital Wellbeing at South St. Paul Middle School

South St. Paul Middle School implemented a schoolwide cell phone policy during the 2022-23 school year to help with a wide range of learning and classroom issues such as:

- Learning disruptions
- Ability to pay attention and learn
- Misuse of technology
- Social and emotional impacts



Facts on student smartphone owners:

- 43% of 8 to 12 year olds have smartphones
- 78% of 11 to 13 year olds have smartphones
- From 2019 to 2021, social media use increased by 17% for tweens and teens



Who?

Dakota County Public Health supported the initiative through the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership ([SHIP](#)). South St. Paul Middle School's Principal was the key champion who initiated the policy change while engaging staff, students, and parents.



How?

This project was funded by the SHIP School Wellness Community Partner Award and used a coordinated approach, that included:

Planning → Policy Development → Communication → Implementation (and supports) → Evaluation

1. Every student received a secure, locking pouch for their cell phone
2. Families and students received direct and clear communication about the new policy; staff listened to concerns
3. The school implemented the new policy: cell phone free from 7:50 a.m. to 2:25 p.m.
4. Staff created clear procedures and consistently applied them when they discovered student cell phone use
5. Staff captured outcomes and shared results



Healthy students are better learners, and people with higher levels of education are more likely to be healthier and live longer.

Outcomes

As a result of implementing a cell phone free school, South St. Paul Middle School has seen the following changes (compared the 2022-23 school year to 2021-22):

- 89% of staff said they wanted to continue with the cell phone policy
- 19% reduction in offenses resulting in suspension
- 22% less fights and assaults
- 11% reduction in tardiness



MCA Test Results Increased

Percentage of SSP Middle School Students Proficient

	2021 before policy	2024 after policy (2yr)
Math	12%	20%
Reading	30%	36%



Positive Improvements

- More student work during independent time
- More engaged students
- More school work turned in on time
- More communication with teachers (& peer-to-peer)
- Less bullying/cyber-bullying behavior, recording of incidents, people, etc.



Fewer Phone Confiscations

Staff confiscated fewer phones in year 2, compared to year 1

YEAR 1	YEAR 2
at least 1 confiscated per day	a total of 8 phones in entire month

Lessons Learned

- Engage stakeholders at the start
- Explain the state [statute](#), and the problems that cell phones are causing for learning and mental health
- Listen to and acknowledge concerns of families and staff
- Enforce policy clearly and consistently
- Ensure the cell phone policy will not affect student safety
- Monitor results

"I see happier kids!"

"Teaching is hard, teaching during the pandemic was really hard and having the phone pouch policy made it possible for me to enjoy my job again."

- Teachers/staff
SSP Middle School

Resources

- SSP Middle School cell phone/electronics policy: <https://www.sspps.org/resources/handbooks>
- Minnesota State Statute: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2024/0/Session+Law/Chapter/109/>
- LiveMore ScreenLess: <https://livemorescreenless.org/>
- Harvard Graduate School of Education Digital Wellbeing Resources: <https://pz.harvard.edu/resources/teaching-digital-well-being-evidence-based-resources-help-youth-thrive>
- MN School Boards Association Cell Phone Tool Kit: <https://mnmsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CellPhoneToolkit.pdf>

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Dakota County
Public Health

South St. Paul
Public Schools

