

To: Michelle Kidani, Chair, Senate Committee on Education
Justin Woodson, Chair, House Committee on Education
From: Deborah Bond-Upson, for HE'E Coalition and Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i
Re: Cell phone ban in schools
Date: February 27, 2025

We are unsure of the status of the various bills on school cell phone bans, so I am writing to you both with views from HE'E Coalition and Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i.

Both organizations have spent time this fall considering cellphones, bans, and family needs for communication. Cell phones, social media, time spent streaming instead of conversing and exploring "in real life" concern us all. In school cell phones represent a special problem when they make it more difficult for students to pay attention in class and force teachers to spend time managing cellphone use. Cell phones have brought much concern about mental health especially given the isolation and stress of the pandemic. They also bring comfort and connection.

Many parents are assured of the student's welfare and location by the provision of cell phones. Parents and students use cellphones to communicate between classes and during lunch about plans for the day and arrangements for pick ups. Cell phones are helpful in tracking student attendance, assignments and grades. Students and parents can login to Infinite Campus to see attendance by period, assignments outstanding and completed, and progress in grades. This gives an immediate touch point to confer and to spur student activity. Cellphones can help parent student communication, help with school family engagement, and are a great resource for academic research as well as entertainment, games and social media.

Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i conducted a survey this fall seeking views on cellphone bans. We heard from 310 teachers, 310 parents (some are both), 42 administrators, and 13 students. Of the parents, their students were spread across all 3 levels-- 41% elementary school, 49% middle/intermediate school, and 47% high school. (Many parents had more than one child in our schools.).

The main reasons parents send their children to school with phones are family communications especially about transportation and plans, safety, and emergencies including parental fears of violence in which they would want their child to have a phone. We have all heard of children talking to parents during school shootings.

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Many parents are able to be assured of the student's welfare and location given cell phones. Personally, I found that cellphones enabled my foster children and I to communicate between classes about plans for the day and arrangements for pick ups. Cell phones were helpful in tracking their work. They and I could login to Infinite Campus to see attendance by period, assignments outstanding and completed, and progress in grades - this gave us an immediate touch point to confer and to spur their activity. Cellphones can help parent student communication, help with school family engagement, and are a great resource for academic research as well as engaging entertainment, games and social media.

Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i conducted a survey this fall seeking views on cellphone bans. We heard from 539 individuals: 310 teachers, 310 parents (some are both), 42 administrators, and 13 students. Of the parents, their students were spread across all 3 levels-- 41% elementary school, 49% middle/intermediate school, and 47% high school. (Many parents had more than one child in our schools.)

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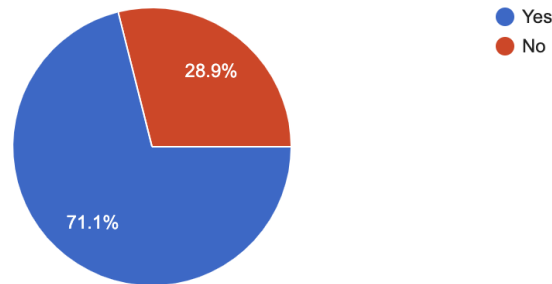
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one child in our schools.) 71.1% of all parents send their children to school with cell phones.

3. If you are a parent, do your kids carry cellphones to school? If you are a student, do you have a cellphone at school?

391 responses

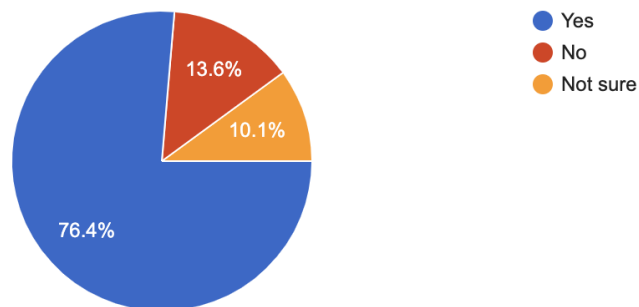


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76.4 % favor "some kind" of cell phone ban in school. 10.1% were not sure, 13.5% were against a ban.

5. Would you support some form of a cellphone ban in school?

537 responses



But when we asked about what kind of ban they wanted--

26.4%. wanted the students to retain their phones throughout the day but to have them unusable in Yondr pouches during instructional periods. (These pouches are being used across the country including one school in Kihei. They cost \$20-30 per student)

23.9% wanted the teacher to collect phones at the beginning of class and hand them out at the end. (In addition to loss of class learning and teacher time, the potential of loss of expensive phones for student and family, and potential liability for the school district are issues of concern.)

16.9% wanted the schools to deploy an app to block streaming, social, and games- but allow emergency contact. We have tested such an app and the developer is eager to provide it for Hawai'i schools wanting to pilot it, or to the whole district. It works by aiming the phone at a QR code to lock and another to unlock.

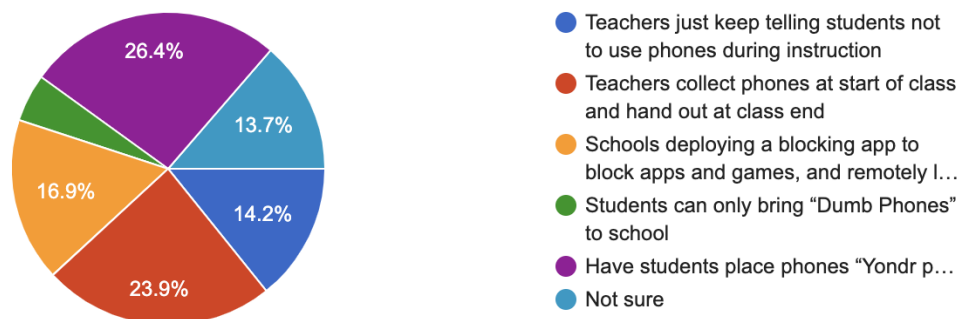
14.2% wanted teachers to just keep reminding students not to use the phones during instruction unless in an academic task.

13.7% were not sure.

6. What option would you favor?

 Copy chart

527 responses



In our district, the only one in the country that covers the whole state, since 2008's Act 51 schools have had authority over issues such as this and curriculum. The development of technologies make it possible and necessary to develop policy at the state/district level with implementation by the schools.

It seems ideal for the legislature to require the BOE to develop a policy that restricts cell phone use during instructional time, except for teacher directed academic usage. That policy could be accompanied by an app or device available statewide to make the instructional time ban effective without wasting valuable class, teacher, and student learning time.

For the legislature to dictate that the BOE/DOE ban student cell phones during the whole school day could be very difficult for families and students. Instructional time is what needs protecting, not time between classes, before and after school, and during lunch when communications may be needed.

Technology has advanced, and we hope it will be used to create a more nuanced policy that supports the needs of our community rather than a blanket school day ban.