

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 10, 2024**

***Handley Students Will Have Phones Off and Away All Day in 24-25***

**Winchester, VA:** Following a June vote by the Winchester School Board, John Handley High School (JHHS) students will be required to personal electronic devices including cell phones, smartwatches and earbuds off and away for the entirety of the school day starting in the 2024-2025 school year.

A revision to [School Board Policy JFI](#) eliminates the option for high school students to use cell phones during the school day in non-instructional zones such as the hallway and cafeteria. Now, Handley students will join students in grades K-8 who were already required to have cell phones off and away at all times during the school day.

Last spring, JHHS hosted a pilot program to test special cell phone pouches in eight classrooms as a potential way to address student cell phone use. By policy, students were not allowed to use their phones during instructional time; however, 93% of JHHS staff said in a pre-survey that student cell phone use during instructional time was a challenge at JHHS, and 77% said they address appropriate cell phone use multiple times a day with their students. During the pilot program, student [grades improved](#) when they had phones locked away in the pouches during instructional time. In addition, 69% of parents felt that their child was more engaged as a result of not having the distraction of a cell phone in class and 68% said they would support having phones off and away throughout the entirety of the school day.

Although the locking cell phone pouches from the pilot program will not be utilized, other changes will be implemented at Handley to ensure the new policy change is followed successfully:

- Students will place their personal electronic devices in a designated area upon entering each classroom. The devices will be returned to students at the end of each instructional block.
- Personal electronic devices will be kept in student pockets or backpacks during hallway transitions and confiscated if they are visible.
- Beginning with the first offense, the student's parent/guardian will be contacted and required to pick up the confiscated device. Consequences for further offenses include a meeting with the student's parent/guardian, after school detention and in-school or off-site restriction.

Parents will be able to contact their students during the school day by leaving a phone or email message with front office staff at JHHS or the Emil & Grace Shihadeh Innovation Center.

Students will be allowed to use cell phones and other electronic devices during non-academic after school activities, when they have a documented medical exception, and when riding the school bus as long as the cell phone use is not disruptive or distracting.

On July 9, Governor Glenn Youngkin approved [Executive Order 33](#), establishing a cell phone-free education to promote the health and safety of students in grades K-12 in Virginia. In this Executive Order, the need for cell phone-free education is documented by the “alarming mental health crises and chronic health conditions affecting adolescents, such as depression and anxiety, driven in part by extensive social media usage and widespread cell phone possession among children.” If students are no longer allowed to use cell phones at school, it will reduce the amount of time they are on phones without supervision from parents or guardians. The Executive Order notes several statistics:

- Children spend an average of 4.8 hours a day on social media, and recent studies indicate that spending more than 3 hours a day on social media doubles the risk of poor mental health for adolescents
- The rate of suicide has increased 167% since 2010 for girls and 91% for boys
- The rate of depression has increased 161% since 2010 for girls and 145% for boys
- Studies indicate that students who use their phones during class learn less and achieve lower grades

Dr. Jason Van Heukelum, Superintendent of Winchester Public Schools, embraces the spirit of Youngkin’s executive order:

“We must recognize that cell phone usage and social media has a detrimental impact on the health and academic success of our students. This is no longer a debate and it cannot be ignored. This policy change - along with essential support from our families - will ensure consistent expectations in all Handley classrooms and give our students the most freedom to learn”

JHHS families and students will receive additional communications throughout the summer and beginning of the school year to ensure collective understanding and support for this policy.

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Thank you,

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