

# Should there be a law against cellphones in schools?

Policies, laws, rules—who makes them? Who follows them? Who agrees or disagrees with them? And, how can each of us get involved in making them? These are critically essential questions to bring up with youth, both in the abstract and in the specific. Today it is the specific—cellphones (something they can relate to).

Let's take a few examples, starting with France.

As of this past September, students age 15 or younger at public schools can no longer have their phones during the school day. I went there a month after the law started and you can watch student reactions to the law in this 1-minute video from my trip:



Next, a bill that was recently introduced in California by Assemblyman Muratsuchi that would, if passed, require California school boards to enact policies that limit or prohibit cellphone use in schools.

Around the same time the California bill was introduced, the government of Ontario, Canada announced a ban on cellphones in schools (except for specific instructional use) starting in the Fall of 2019.

And finally, in Hawaii, there is a bill circulating that would appropriate funds for the Department of Health to create a campaign to inform youth and adults about proven ways to reduce screen time.

When I started shooting *Screenagers*, some people would say to me, "Why are you doing this film, the cat is out of the bag—tech is going to be unstoppable, and it is just too hard to limit it for youth, so don't even try." Luckily, I didn't let these ideas stop me, and as the filming progressed, it became clear that there are very effective ways to engage youth in limiting screen time. At the same time it also became clear to me how critical it is for the entire village—schools, afterschool programs, parents, faith leaders, governmental bodies, and more—to work together to reduce screen time.

Another thing people often said to me was "Kids just need to learn on their own how to manage screen time." I am a huge believer that learning from experience is important for youth, but when we are dealing with the intense developmental need for social involvement (i.e. social media), as well as the stimulation of video games, and much more, learning to self regulate on screens is not equal to other learning experiences. I am convinced we are often doing a disservice to youth when we put these devices in their pockets and assume they can overcome the onslaught of temptations.

Research shows that the upsides of youth having phones on them all day at school are outweighed by downsides. There are studies that show academic decline due to distractions of phones, and even just the presence of a phone is shown to decrease test scores.

Let's also consider the impact of the emotions that occur throughout the school day from social media interactions when they have access to their phones at school. Last week my friend's daughter received a prom proposal during lunch at school and within an hour most of the other teens at school learned about it through Instagram or Snapchat. Then, within a few hours, there were many meltdowns among girls who suddenly felt anxious that they would not get a proposal. Of course, this kind of reaction happened in the "olden days" pre-phone and social media, but the constant reminders and potential triggers were not there for youth throughout their school day (and beyond).

Today (or anytime this week) ask youth in your life about their thoughts on policies and cellphones:

1. Have them watch my short France [video](#) and then ask them whether they think the government should be involved in the regulation of cellphone use?
2. It would be interesting to ask them who they think sets the cellphone policies at their school. Is it the principal, the school district superintendent? The school board?
3. Ask them if they were to write a state law around cellphones what would it be? Here is the [link to the California bill](#) that can give them ideas about how laws are written.

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