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## DRAFT Minutes

### Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time September 5, 2024

The third meeting of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time began at 4:00 p.m. on September 5, 2024. The meeting was virtual.

Co-Chairs: Principal Brian Houghton and Student Ava Gustin.

Excused absences: Alexa Hernandez, Erika Sheets, Tricia Moritz, Chase Blasi, and Danny Zeck (technical problems)

#### Purpose

Develop guidance/recommendations, based in research, on:

- students' personal device use in school,
- screen time and mental health, and
- parental oversight of district-owned devices.

These recommendations will be presented to the state board for consideration by November, with final action possible in December.

#### Introduction

Commissioner Watson welcomed the task force members. He reminded everyone that the purpose of this task force is to learn about the effects of screen time and personal devices on students. In coming weeks, the focus will turn to the policies and practices surrounding district owned devices/laptops. There may be a decision to offer some policy guidance to districts and schools, or the task force may decide not to offer any guidance. The conclusions of the task force will be offered to the state board in November, and the board will then make decisions about further steps. The Commissioner asked Co-Chairs Principal Brian Houghton and Student Ava Gustin to run the meeting.

Co-Chair Ava Gustin asked Gabrielle Hull, KSDE staff, to report on last week's conversations on personal devices in schools.

Welcome  
04:25

Mrs. Hull gave a summary of last week's breakout groups.

- Educating school communities and getting buy-in will be an important part of any policy's implementation.
- Members mentioned that having guidance from the state may be beneficial because it would provide teachers and administration with additional support, referred to as "having a leg to stand on."
- Local control is important to consider when developing potential guidance.
- Some groups did discuss potential benefits to specific policies, such as bell-to-bell policies, and how they may help with consistent enforcement and allow students to focus solely on their education during the school day.
- It may be difficult for districts to do this all at once, and a stepwise process could help.
- Several people mentioned they did not feel prepared or that they had enough information to provide a recommendation.

## Research

Payton Lynn, KSDE staff, gave a presentation sharing some research on screen time and mental health.

To bring the research from the abstract to the real, Miss Lynn asked everyone on the task force to check the screen time monitor on their cell phones/personal devices. Each member was asked to log their usage time into a survey that was offered to the task force online. Results were shared later in the meeting.

Miss Lynn reminded the task force of the three areas of focus that the state board requested be investigated:

- Personal devices in school
- Screen time and mental health
- Parental oversight of district owned devices

To frame today's meeting, which will focus on screen time and mental health, she used Jonathan Haidt's "The Anxious Generation" theory that there are four fundamental harms stemming from the current patterns of screen time use by students:

1. Social deprivation
2. Sleep Deprivation
3. Attention Fragmentation
4. Addiction

Report on  
8/29 group  
discussions  
07:11

Research on  
Mental  
Health  
09:40

The decline of daily time *in person* with friends has declined over the past sixteen years, especially for the fifteen to twenty four age group. That group saw a decline from one hundred and fifty minutes per day average to forty minutes average.

Sleep deprivation was referred to in a survey from 2023, which showed sixty seven percent of eleven to seventeen year olds responded Sometimes/Often to the question "Are you short of sleep due to being on your phone or the internet late at night?"

In another study by [Commonsense.org](https://www.commonsense.org) it was reported that teens receive an average of 237 notifications every day, twenty five percent of those during school. These interruptions cause attention fragmentation.

The final study Miss Lynn shared was also from commonsensemedia.org and reflected the addictive nature of technology and how it impacts student's choices, i.e. to neglect school or family life by choosing to use technology, to use technology to escape from sorrow or negative feelings, and to choose to spend time online rather than going out with others in person.

Social media does have positive benefits, such as, increasing connection with friends and the larger/global community, helping people engage with others and with issues, and it is an outlet for expression.

**Panel: Mental Health and screen time from the perspective of school counselors presently working in Kansas schools**

Panel  
20:40

- a. Tracie Chauvin, Director of Student Support Programs, KCK Public Schools
- b. Hanna Kemble, Elementary School Counselor, Indian Hills Elementary, Topeka
- c. Mallory Jacobs, Elementary School Counselor, Topeka Public Schools

Tracie Chavin has worked in public schools for many years as a clinical social worker, and throughout that time she has worked in outpatient/inpatient, suburban and urban schools, and she has seen students go from pen and paper to digital 1:1. She observes her students in a state of hyperarousal, caused by more stress hormones, and a desynchronization of their circadian rhythms, caused by the blue light they are exposed to almost constantly. This causes a drop in dopamine. Sleep/wake cycles are interrupted. Circadian rhythms are dependent on sunlight and darkness, and that is eclipsed by the blue light of screens. Melatonin production goes down and sleep is less effective. Screens have an impact on our overall physiology.

Hanna Kemble-Mick is the Dean of elementary counselors in Kansas and is the Kansas

school counselor of 2024. She mentioned that she has a bit of a techie in her, and she sees both positive and negative elements of modern technology. In her elementary school screen time is carefully limited by the teachers. Teachers set limits and are always focused on using screen time as an educational aid. Kids are becoming fluent with digital devices prior to learning to read and developing vocabulary; their brains are being rewired for digital skills. In her school there are no cell phones, but she observes hyper-activity and inability to focus which she believes is a result of using screens and personal devices outside of school.

Mallory Jacobs is an elementary school counselor, works at KSDE as a counselor consultant, and was the Kansas school counselor of the year in 2023. She is approaching these issues in a positive way. In elementary schools there are no cell phones, however she believes the kids need to learn how to use them properly because these devices are awesome and can be used in so many great ways. Some phones can be used as a “calm down room.” She sees issues with sleep, and children hiding phones or tablets, so they can use them late at night. That lack of sleep is a very real obstacle to learning throughout the school day.

There was a lively discussion with the task force.

Kansas State Board of Education Chair Melanie Haas asked about what the counselors do with the problems (like students not sleeping and being on their tablets). Mrs. Kemble-Mick explained that the first step is always to establish a good relationship with the student and the family. She tries to partner with the family, not shame them. Some parents give a time limit and then take away the device so the child cannot access it. She recommends reading to children at night. Also, drawing, doodling, petting the dog, all kinds of slowing down activities are helpful. In school, they try to teach digital citizenship and how to use a device responsibly. The family needs to be involved in that teaching and the limits that need to be set. Mrs. Chavin added that this needs to be seen as a health issue. The lack of sleep, lower dopamine, and dysregulation affect the health of both kids and adults. She recommends mindfulness therapy and cognitive behavior therapy. Mrs. Jacobs recommends replacement behaviors. Her school is starting to focus on family night, a replacement activity for the screen time. She was at a restaurant recently and observing the families around her, she noticed the parents were all on their phones. Mrs. Chavin agreed that parents are modeling all the time and when they always have a phone at hand a child will want to follow that same pattern.

Representative Scott Hill asked whether the panel have seen an increase in serious mental health problems in young people. Mrs. Kemble-Mick brought up “The Anxious Generation” stating that the author has overlooked some changes in the past few years that may be

Panel discussion with Task Force members 29:23

influencing the numbers in terms of mental health. For instance, the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), has made some recent changes, “loosening” it a bit so more people are being diagnosed with mental disorders. Also, Obamacare insured millions of children who had not had access to mental health care, and suddenly were able to afford treatment. That changed the numbers of children who were diagnosed as mentally ill. Many states adopted a screener, for instance, adolescent girls were suddenly being screened for depression and anxiety, and this changed the statistics. Mrs. Jacobs sees an uptick with kids being diagnosed, on more medication, on behavior plans and IEPs and 504s. She noted there is more support available for kids emotionally. There are support staff, rooms for kids with special needs, and great community resources that come into the school. Teachers are getting more professional development in terms of mental health issues. Mrs. Chavin pointed out that pre-pandemic and post-pandemic there was change. In the pre-pandemic statistics in the decade prior, there was more reported depression, hopelessness, and in Kansas she observed a substantial rise when staff all went through mandated reporter trainings. Schools put identification procedures in place, and then there were more referrals to the social workers and counselors, and that often led to mental health disorder diagnoses.

Parent Kim Whitman referred to the book wherein the author writes about suicide among children. She stated that suicide is the leading cause of death for children ten years old and up. She asked about high school age kids. Mrs. Chavin answered that the problems are similar: attention span, disrupted sleep, and a resistance to “non-preferred” activities (beyond the digital world).

Co-Chair Brian Houghton referred to the Zoom chat where there was a question about finding sources for digital citizenship curriculum. The panelists offered “Be Internet Awesome” as an excellent choice. Also commonsense.org.

[https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en\\_us/educators](https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/educators)  
<https://www.netsmartkids.org/>

Miss Lynn shared the results of the poll that the group took. Fifty percent of the group reported three to four hours spent on social media and other personal device activities. Twenty-two percent of the group reported seven or more hours.

Co-Chair Houghton thanked the panelists and then moved on to the breakout room discussions to go into these policies more in depth.

**Discussion questions for all groups:**

1. What are your reactions to what you read and what you have heard during this meeting?

Breakout  
Session  
1:00:50

2. What aspects of screen time and mental health should the task force consider making recommendations on, if any?

The breakout groups on Zoom could not be shared simultaneously, so there was a break in the livestream, while the task force members moved into small group discussions.

### **Closing**

Principal Houghton stated the KSDE staff will have the notetakers compile all the suggestions and main points from the breakout room discussions and present some of those back to the whole group at the beginning of our next meeting. He thanked everyone and ended the meeting.