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District 10

Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time August 22, 2024

The first meeting of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time began at 4:00 p.m. on August 22, 2024. The meeting was virtual.

The task force is made up of 36 members:

Superintendents

Travis Githens, Cherryvale
Brian Huff, Gardner Edgerton
Brad Kempf, Jefferson County North
Troy Pitsch, Wabaunsee
Tonya Merrigan, Blue Valley

Principals

Eric Hofer Holdeman, Wichita Public Schools
Brian Houghton, Fredonia
Kathleen Brennan, Fort Riley Middle School
John Niehues, Greeley County Schools
Kamiel Evans, Jefferson Elementary School (Wichita)

Teachers

Tawna Hall, Derby School District
Jose Martinez, Wichita Public Schools
Carol Budde, Newton
Anna Luke, Beloit Junior-Senior High School
Connie Martin, Shawnee Mission South High School

Students

Jessica Claire, Leavenworth High School
Ananya Agrawal, Blue Valley West High School
Ava Gustin, Mission Valley High School
Lane Lamping, Basehor Linwood High School
Alexa Hernandez, Dodge City High School

Parents

Amy Warren, Wichita

00:04:22
Dr. Watson
Welcomes
Task Force

Kim Whitman, Shawnee Mission
Erika Sheets, Blue Valley
Korin Poppe, Republic County
Lori Barnes, Arkansas City

Local Board Members

Sue Bolley, Topeka Public Schools
Jackie Gigot, Garden City
Katie Allen, Manhattan-Ogden
Laura Corey, Hutchinson
Trisha Moritz, Attica

IT Staff

Travis True (School), Topeka Public Schools
Lyndsay Noble (Industry), Rockhurst University

Kansas State Legislators

Representative Scott Hill
Senator Chase Blasi

State Board Members

Chair Melanie Haas
Mr. Danny Zeck

Several members had difficulty logging on, but eventually, all members were present.

Commissioner Watson welcomed the members and stated the purpose of the Task Force and the three areas of focus:

The purpose is to develop guidance/recommendations, based in research, for local school boards, school districts, and school buildings, who wish to implement policy regarding:

- 1) Students' personal device use in school,
- 2) Screen time and mental health, and
- 3) Parental oversight of district-owned devices.

Dr. Watson explained the task force would meet weekly and develop a report to be shared with the Kansas State Board of Education for consideration by November, with final action to be taken by the board in December. He cautioned the task force to remember that all meetings are open and transparent, including comments shared in the zoom chat. The meetings are live streamed and will be archived for the public. Because the group is large, there will not be time to have each member introduce themselves, but all members are

asked to send in a short biography that will be shared with the whole group. The meeting will be on a tight timeline. He described the meeting procedure: the co-chairs will start at 4:00 p.m., Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) staff will present research, a presenter or panel will present, there will be a time for questions and then a breakout room (in groups of 6) discussion. The meeting will end at 5:30.

The schedule for the task force meetings will be:

1. Weeks 1 and 2: Personal devices in schools
2. Weeks 3 and 4: Screen time and mental health
3. Weeks 5 and 6: Parental oversight of school-owned devices
4. Weeks 7 and 8: Collective Action
5. Weeks 9 and 10: Flexible for what task force wants to see/hear
6. Week 11, October 31: No meeting, read draft of report instead
7. Week 12, November 7: Report finalized
8. November 12/13: Report and recommendations presented to the State Board
9. December 10/11: Recommendations voted on by the State Board

STAFF INTRODUCTION

KSDE Staff member, Payton Lynn, explained the report will be crafted by staff (Dr. Jake Steel, Gabrielle Hull and herself) based on the discussions of the task force meeting. The report will be shared with the State Board, which in turn, will vote on the recommendations that will be accessible to local school boards, school districts, school buildings and teachers. The staff will work to capture accurately the will of the task force, primarily through the thoughts expressed in the breakout sessions, discussions with presenters, reading materials, and other parts of the task force agenda. They will create a report that the task force can add or subtract from prior to the final form. The staff will work hard to capture the work of the task force.

00:11:39
KSDE Staff

Gabrielle Hull added the staff is present to be of service to the task force. They will provide research, answer questions, post meetings on the web page, and she noted that there is a dedicated email address (shared with the task force via the zoom chat) so that the members can easily communicate with staff.

CO-CHAIRS

Dr. Watson introduced the Co-Chairs of the Task Force:
Principal Brian Houghton, Fredonia
Student Ava Gustin, Senior at Mission Valley High School

Mr. Houghton introduced himself and noted it is his privilege to work with the task force. His school is very engaged in looking at the use of technology by students, cell phones and mental health in school systems.

Ava Gustin introduced herself. She is a senior this year. She loves to garden and spend time with animals.

00:20:57
Research

RESEARCH

Payton Lynn shared the research for this week's topic (personal devices in school). Payton shared research on parents' view on cell phone use, which showed 48% of parents felt cell phones were a positive influence on their children, and 35% felt they were negative. She noted that much online research suggests that parents think cell phones are negative, but there is research that shows many parents support their children using cell phones.

Another study compared student perception of how distracting digital devices are, with teacher perception of that distraction. 30% of students reported they were distracted by their own devices and 20% reported they were distracted by other students using devices during a math class. 72% of high school teachers reported that the distraction level is a major problem. 33% of middle school teachers, and 6% of elementary school teachers reported it is a major problem.

PANEL

Mr. Houghton introduced the panel of educators who are presently working in Kansas schools which have some personal device policies in place.

00:23:39
Panel intro

Katie Barrientos, Math Teacher, Goddard USD 265

Ron Barry, Superintendent, Halstead-Bently USD 440

Tyler Applegate, Vice Principal, Chanute USD 413

Mrs. Barrientos has been teaching for ten years. This past spring she read *The Anxious Generation*. This book confirmed her personal experience that cell phones, social media and technology have been damaging our students. She presented to her faculty prior to school starting. Her school does have a phone policy, but she feels it is not well enforced. She is adamant that schools need to be phone free.

Mr. Barry has been in education for nineteen years, and he has a passion for educational technology. As superintendent, starting with the Covid pandemic, he had to use his knowledge to shift his schools into using virtual learning. It was a challenge because they are not a one to one district, meaning they do not have 1 personal computer for each student. He experienced how using technology creatively is a powerful tool for educators. However, he also has the perspective of being in a district that implemented a cell phone policy a year ago. He has been able to see how this policy has impacted his school system. The policy has been added at a handbook level, not a local school board level.

Mr. Applegate is the assistant principal in Chanute. They have implemented a ban on cell phone use in the high school. He has seen improvement in behavior and an increase in social interaction of students.

Mr. Houghton asked about the role do the teachers play in the cell phone policy.

Mr. Applegate explained that in Chanute, teachers are 100% in support of the policy. The administration supports the teachers, and enforces the rules. If there is a phone being used, it is confiscated, and parents are called by the administrators. The community has been very supportive of this policy. In three years, he can only think of one or two upset parents.

Mrs. Barrientos stated that in her school there is not a consistent policy and that it is up to the teachers to set and enforce any ban on cell phones. She feels her administration completely supports the teachers, but they are very hesitant to implement a full “bell to bell ban” (beginning of the day to the end of the day) . The principal has had the experience of having the police called by parents, to confront him for confiscating a phone. In her classroom she is very strict with the policy. No cell phones can be visible or used. The classroom next door may have a different rule. She feels that a consistent, enforced ban is important, or it will be teacher to teacher.

Mr. Barry agreed that the teachers are the front line regarding policies. In his schools there is not a complete ban. Cell phones are allowed between classes and in the lunchroom. They are to be kept in lockers. But the policy, he noted, is only as good as the teacher buy-in. If you don’t have that, he observed, you may create more problems within your system, both for students and teachers.

Ava Gustin asked the legalities of students who are no longer minors.

Mrs. Barrientos wasn’t sure of the answer, but she thought that if it is in the handbook, it is a rule for all.

Mr. Houghton asked how the bans have affected students/teachers.

Mr. Applegate shared that the ban was a collaborative effort between students, teachers and the community. In Chanute, some classes started looking at screentime use, and it was alarming to see how much time students were spending on cell phones, social media and other internet sites in a given day. A documentary on social media, “The Social Dilemma”, was shown to the entire high school, and there was a student presentation on cell phone usage. Teachers are more comfortable having a stand-alone, school-wide policy. It works well if the administration enforces it.

Mrs. Barrientos shared that after her presentation to the faculty, she had many teachers come to her and share their support for a school-wide ban. She noted that when students are asked to put their phones away, they talk to each other. In the past what she has observed when students have down time is they all reach for their phones, and each is individually focused on a screen in a quiet room. To see the students interact with each other has been good to see.

Mr. Barry noted that whenever a policy is implemented there will be some push back from students because they have become accustomed to something being available to them. Over time it becomes the norm. However, there are some teachers who believe that personal devices can be utilized in a classroom. That can cause friction within the teaching staff. He referenced the Apple commercial where students are filming a movie using a cell phone. A photography class might want to use a personal device instead of a chrome book.

The task force members began to ask questions of the panelists.

Senator Blasi noted that uniformity works best, instead of teacher by teacher. He wondered what the techniques are for personal device bans.

Mr. Barry noted they have uniformity. In middle school there are no phones allowed at all. In high school they allow students to access their phones between classes and at lunch. They do have doorhanger pouches. Many students leave devices in their lockers.

Mrs. Barrientos noted that in her opinion allowing devices to be used between classes/lunchtime is not a ban. There are phone jails in every classroom. She had to put a roster by the jail, and had to call out students who did not store their phone in the jail. Sometimes students put a fake phone in the jail. This year, the students put their phones in their bookbags and put their bags at the back of the room. She referenced a study called "Brain Drain" which shows that even just having their phones next to them in a bag, affects attention and thus learning. If another student is using their phone in class, it is distracting and affects other students. Ideally, she believes having a phone as far away as possible is best.

Mr. Applegate noted that most of us have our phones within reach right now. He shared that the members of the task force have probably done something on their phones during the zoom. He stated that he had used his cell phone since the meeting started. He agreed that it is a distraction and the farther they can get away from it the better. His school has bell-to-bell, no phones allowed from the start of school to the final bell. They are not allowed between classes or during lunch. He contrasted the atmosphere prior to school,

when students are waiting in the commons before the first bell, it is quiet, with everyone looking at their phones. At lunch time, without devices, it is noisy; it is fun; it is social. He feels this is very positive.

Mr. Barry observed that after the cell phone ban there was an increase in tardiness, but fewer students were late. He also shared books checked out from the library increased by 200%.

There was a discussion about adults in schools modeling behavior. Sometimes a teacher will use a cell phone at a time when students are not allowed to access them. There was a comment about teachers needing to check on their own children in day care, etc. Teachers need to be role models.

Another issue was making sure that parents can get ahold of their children. Some schools have complex automated phone systems, and it is difficult to connect to an actual person. Office protocol needs to be changed to accommodate communication. Some parent training prior to putting a ban in place might be useful. There needs to be communication with families and the community at large about policy changes.

There was a concern that phones can offer some equity in districts that are low on technology resources. If there aren't enough computers for all students, they can use their phones for some projects. Some students use their phones as a coping mechanism.

There was a conversation about standardized digital citizenship. There needs to be education for students on how to use personal devices responsibly. This conflicts with banning them completely at school. Another question is when phones are confiscated and the parents must come pick the phones up, then students are sent home without having access to help (like emergency services) because many do not have land lines.

Mr. Barry noted that he is in a small school district but they have not had any issues with kids not having communication at home. Phones can be connection to peers outside of school. There are concerns about mental health impacts on students from social media use. It is a balancing act.

Mrs. Barrientos responded to the idea that some students have needs to use their phone as a coping device. She feels that the negative impact of relying on personal devices, as shown in data on teen mental health since the time that cell phones have been prolific, and social media has grown, outweighs any coping service that the phone might offer. Mental health issues skyrocketed when everyone got a phone in their pocket. Phone use is the source of anxiety, not the solution.

Mr. Applegate addressed teachers being able to use cell phones for special projects. They allow it sometimes, but do not encourage it. As for kids going home without a phone, this has not been a problem at his school, but if there is a special situation the administrators adjust to the needs of the student. Digital citizenship is an important issue. They have not embraced this issue at his school.

BREAK OUT DISCUSSION

The task force broke into small groups and went into breakout sessions. At the end of the sessions KSDE staff members reported a quick summary of what was discussed.

Gabrielle Hull: Comments from the group focused on educating students in technology use and defining what a standardized digital citizenship would look like. Students need to be prepared to thrive in a digital environment when they get their first job. Group members mentioned they are from schools that have guidelines that are implemented but most of them are on a case by case basis.

Kaley Taylor: The group clarified what digital citizenship looks like in schools. They discussed page 15 from *The Anxious Generation* which lays out the four foundational guidelines (no smartphones before high school, no social media before 16, phone free schools, and far more unsupervised play and childhood independence). Member Kim Whitman shared information about the phone free school movement. The discussion focused on the role of schools in finding the balance between digital citizenship and recognizing the challenges and harmful effects of personal devices.

Dr. Jake Steel: The group focused on digital citizenship. They talked about the difference between the policy on device bans in schools and the reality. Parent's role was discussed. The prevalence of screens in general was discussed.

Tiffany Littler: One of the main headers was the need for more play time and less structured time. Schools seem to be having less recess. As adults we can train kids on interpersonal relationships, with face to face discussions.

Payton Lynn: The group talked about buy-in as primary, from parents, students and staff. Parents need to understand that even though they have some safety concerns about wanting their kids to have phones in schools, they need to recognize there are many negative effects. Some schools have felt pushback from parents, but other schools did not experience this.

Marissa Seele: There was a question about the research shown and wondering about the context of the study. They discussed digital citizenship and trading screentime for

Break out
discussion
reports
01:23:58

screen time. We must help our kids to succeed in a digital world but is screen time on a laptop or an iPad the same thing. The student in the group expressed that having a phone with her provided a sense of safety, using the example of a teacher who might not be utilizing the video camera in the classroom appropriately, so she was able to share this with her parents and the issue was brought to the school. Taking phones away completely might take away the ability to hold staff accountable. The group wanted to know if the research slides were able to be shared.

Gabrielle Hull answered that KSDE staff could put the research slides onto the webpage, along with the minutes and agendas.

Mr. Houghton thanked everyone for their time and thoughts and he ended the meeting.