Cell Phone School Policies: Implementation, Perceived Impacts, and Student and Parent Beliefs

Data Tables and Methodology

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Introduction

With funding from Overdeck Family Foundation, our work sheds light on how students are experiencing cell phone restrictions in schools across the nation. We examined whether cell phone restrictions are meaningfully decreasing student phone use during the school day, how they are affecting students, and whether students and parents support or reject the newly evolving policies.

We surveyed students and parents in the fall of the 2025-26 school year after more than 30 statewide restriction policies had been recently enacted. We intend to survey again at the end of the 2025-26 school year to see whether student-reported use, or student and parent reported attitudes and opinions, have shifted.

This report includes high-level takeaways from this first round of data collection, and a compilation of data tables showing item-level frequencies for both student and adult results. More data and information, including complete crosstabs by student, adult, and household demographics, can be found on our UAS data pages.

Methods

From September to November 2025 we used the Understanding America Study (UAS) panel, and accompanying UASTeen panel, to survey adults and teens about cell phone policies and cell phone use in their schools. More details about the UAS and UAS Teen panels are available in Appendix A: Study Methodology.

Samples

Both the adult and teen samples, drawn from a nationwide probability-based survey sample, are weighted to be nationally representative. The adult sample for this survey consists of 1,699 adults with school-aged child in the household who attend school in a traditional setting (i.e., adults with homeschooled children are not included). Though we sometimes refer to the adult sample as "parents", the respondent is a non-parent (including grandparent, older sibling, or other family member) approximately 32% of the time. Two-thirds of adults reported that their child has their own device; 85% among those reporting on secondary students.

The teen sample for this survey consists of 364 teens aged 13-17 enrolled in a traditional school setting. Nine in ten teens (91%) reported having their own device. If they did not have their own device, they were not asked questions about phone use during the school day, but still answered questions about their school's phone policy, other students' phone use, and about their attitudes and opinions towards cell phone policies in schools.

Appendix A provides more details and demographics for both samples.

Takeaways and Data Tables

What are the school's phone policies?

- Most teens (78%) report their school has a "no cell phone" rule or ban. Nearly 60% of adults report the same about their child's school.
- Almost half of both groups (48%-49%) say that phones are allowed on school grounds but not allowed to be used at all during the day.
- Another 40% of teens (31% of adults) say that phones are allowed, just not during instructional time.
- Half of teens (50%) say these rules are different from last year and that enforcement of the rules is stricter this year. Adults mostly think the rules are the same, but many more adults than teens just aren't sure.
- Consequences for phone use are firmly established and in place – only one to two percent of respondents replied that "none of the above" in a list of consequences apply when a student breaks the school's rules. Common consequences include verbal warnings (64%), having the phone taken away for the rest of the class period (54%), having the phone taken away for the rest of the day (63%), and notifying parents (60%). Less common are detentions or other disciplinary actions (45%) and requiring a parent to come to school (35%).
- Adults are much less clear on the consequences – more than one-third of parents (37%) reported they do not know what the consequences are.

Q: Does your school/your child's school have a "no cell phone" rule or ban this year?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Teen	78%	20%	2%
Parent of all aged children	57%	24%	19%
Parent of teens	60%	29%	11%

Q: Which of these is true about personal devices (like phones or smartwatches) at your school/your child's school this year?

	Not allowed on school grounds	Allowed on grounds but not to be used during the day	Not allowed during instructional time, but allowed at other times	No rules
Teen	5%	48%	42%	2%
Parent of all aged children	10%	49%	31%	5%
Parent of teens	5%	48%	41%	2%

Q: Are you allowed to have your personal device in your possession during the day or does it need to be "locked away"?

	Allowed in possession	Locked away
Teen	74%	26%
Parent of all aged children	73%	27%
Parent of teens	75%	25%

Q: Are your schools' personal device rules different from what they were last year?

	Same	Different	Not Sure
Teen	38%	50%	12%
Parent of all aged children	44%	30%	36%
Parent of teens	45%	36%	19%

Q: Is your school enforcing the rules differently from last year?

	Less strict	Same	More strict	Not Sure
Teen	7%	36%	51%	6%
Parent of all aged children	3%	55%	35%	8%
Parent of teens	4%	51%	38%	7%

Q: When students break the school's personal device rules this year, what are the consequences supposed to be?

	% yes teens	% yes adults
Verbal warning	64%	36%
Take away device for rest of class period	54%	26%
Take away device for rest of day	63%	32%
Notify parents	60%	42%
Detention or similar disciplinary action	45%	14%
Require parent to come to school to have device returned	35%	19%
None of the above	1%	2%
I don't know	7%	37%

What do teens and parents think about the rules?

- Three-quarters of adults (76%) and 42% of teens believe the phone rules are "just right". Among those who don't, teens think they are too strict or much too strict (48%) while adults think they are too lenient or much too lenient (17%).
- The largest share of teens who believe the cell phone rules are "just right" are those for whom the school policy allows phones during non-instructional time throughout the day (54%).
- While *some* teens do prefer having no restrictions on phone use (24%) many more prefer boundaries, with 68% wanting phones put away during class but allowable during non-instructional time. Very few parents (7%) want no restrictions – half agree with teens that they should be available during non-instructional time (53%) but 41% want them put away/locked away all day.

Q: Do you think the school's rules for personal device use are too lenient or too strict?

	Too lenient or much too lenient	Just right	Too strict or much too strict
Teen	9%	42%	48%
Parent of all aged children	17%	76%	8%
Parent of teens	19%	72%	9%

Q: Do you think the school's rules for personal device use are too lenient or too strict?

	Too lenient or much too lenient	Just right	Too strict or much too strict
Teens in schools with no phones allowed	24%	51%	24%
Teens in schools with phones allowed but no use during the day	5%	31%	64%
Teens in schools with phones allowed during non-instructional time	12%	54%	34%
Parents in schools with no phones allowed	3%	84%	13%
Parents in schools with phones allowed but no use during the day	15%	75%	10%
Parents in schools with phones allowed during non-instructional time	22%	75%	3%

Q: No matter what your school's current rules are, which of these rules would you prefer?

	Put away/locked away all day	Put away/locked away during class/allowable other times	No restrictions during school day
Teen	8%	68%	24%
Parent of all aged children	41%	53%	7%
Parent of teens	33%	60%	7%

How much are teens using their phones during the school day?

- Over half of students reported using their phone for non-academic purposes "a few times" or "often" throughout the day (56%). Adults do not think students are using their phones this much – 32% reported they think their child is using their phone that much (37% among adults reporting on teens specifically).
- Students estimate approximately 47% of students use their phones during class for non-academic purposes. This estimate does not vary much depending upon the school's policy – it ranges from 43% to 51% across schools with different rules.
- When asked directly, one-quarter of teens (25%) say they use their phone "sometimes" or "often" when they are not supposed to. However, 46% report their friends use them when they are not supposed to. More indirectly, comparing teens' reports of phone use in class to what they said their school's policy is, more than half do not follow the school's rules.

- While almost three-quarters of teens use phones during lunch and more than half use during passing periods, 28% say they use their phone in core academic classes. More report using them during electives (45%).
- Teens estimate they use their phone an average of 1.5 hours throughout the day. This estimate does not vary much based on the school's rules (use ranges from 1.3 hours to 1.6 hours across different policies).
- Teachers are still having to police phone use during class, even when school policy states phones are not allowed on school grounds or phones must be locked away all day.
- These reports of teen usage are in the context of quite high consequence enforcement – among those teens who noted a particular consequence for breaking phone policy in place at their school, approximately 50% - 90% are seeing those consequences meted out.

Q: How often do you/does your student use your personal device (like a phone or smartwatch) during the school day? Remember, do not include school-provided devices like Chromebooks.

	Never	Once or twice during the day	A few times during the day	Often throughout the day
Teen - self	23%	21%	31%	25%
Teen - friends	13%	23%	31%	33%
Teen – "students in general"	11%	16%	26%	48%
Adults about child	41%	27%	19%	13%
Adults about teen only	34%	29%	22%	15%

Q: About what proportion of students at your school use their personal device during class? (slider 0 to 100%)

	Average proportion estimate
Overall	47%
Teens in schools with no phones allowed	44%
Teens in schools with phones allowed but no use during the day	43%
Teens in schools with phones allowed during non-instructional time	51%

Q: Do you ever use personal device at school when not supposed to?

	Never	Rarely	Once in a while	Sometimes	Often
Teen - self	20%	31%	24%	16%	9%
Teen - friends	9%	20%	25%	28%	18%

Q: Do you use your personal device (only count non-academic uses):

	% yes
During lunch	71%
During passing periods	56%
During elective classes	45%
During core academic classes	28%

Self-reported policy against self-reported use

Self-reported use	School policy: Bell-to-bell restriction	School policy: Restriction during instruction only
Doesn't use at all	35%	4%
Uses outside class but not in class	23%	42%
Uses in class	41%	55%

Q: How much time do you typically spend using your personal device when you're at school – only count non-academic uses.

	Hours estimate
Overall	1.5 hours
Teens in schools with no phones allowed	1.4 hours
Teens in schools with phones allowed but no use during the day	1.3 hours
Teens in schools with phones allowed during non-instructional time	1.6 hours

Q: How many of your teachers do each of the following?

	None	A few	Most	All
Collect personal devices before class	61%	23%	9%	7%
Remind students not to use their devices	8%	25%	39%	28%
Give penalties (taking devices away, taking off points, sending kids to the office, etc.) when students using devices	11%	34%	33%	22%
Ignores when students use their devices	37%	50%	11%	2%

Q: Have you ever seen a student get any of these consequences this year? (if teen said that consequence was a rule at their school)

	N teens with rule in place	% yes
Verbal warning	228	87%
Take away device for rest of class period	193	80%
Take away device for rest of day	229	65%
Notify parents	206	52%
Detention or similar disciplinary action	154	58%
Require parent to come to school to have device returned	131	48%

How do teens and adults believe the school cell phone policies are affecting them?

- For the most part, both teens and adults don't think these policies have much of an effect. The largest proportion of respondents chose the "no impact" option in all areas when we asked whether phone bans make things "worse" or "better", including sense of community, relationships between teachers and students, the classroom learning environment, bullying, and academic integrity. Among those who did not choose "no impact, adults tended to choose the positive end of the scale while were teens split between the positive and negative ends of the scale.
- Whether the students have or don't have bans currently in place, the majority do not think that bans affect them personally. We asked whether the policies (if they have them) do make them (or if they had the policy, do they expect the policy would make them): more or less happy, stressed, perform better or worse in school, have an easier or harder time making friends, be more or less likely to attend, or be more or less likely to pay attention in class. Again, the plurality of response among teens and adults was "no impact".

Q: How much worse or better are these things because of your school's device rules?

	A little or much worse	No impact	A little or much better
Teens: Sense of community	18%	**54%**	28%
Teens: Relationships between teachers and students	26%	**53%**	22%
Teens: Classroom learning environment	26%	**46%**	28%
Teens: Bullying/fighting	18%	**65%**	17%
Teens: Academic integrity/cheating	19%	**48%**	33%
Adults: Sense of community	5%	**62%**	33%
Adults: Relationships between teachers and students	7%	**58%**	35%
Adults: Classroom learning environment	7%	**51%**	41%
Adults: Bullying/fighting	7%	**71%**	23%
Adults: Academic integrity/cheating	6%	**61%**	34%

Q: Has your school's no-device rule made you:/If your school banned cell phones and other personal devices, do you think you would be:

	A little or much more negative	No impact	A little or much more positive
Teen			
Happier or less happy	**47%**	44%	9%
More or less stressed out	35%	**55%**	10%
Do better or worse in school	18%	**64%**	19%
Easier or harder time making friends	20%	**67%**	13%
More or less likely to go to school	23%	**69%**	9%

	A little or much more negative	No impact	A little or much more positive
Teen			
More or less able to pay attention in class	13%	**56%**	30%
Adult			
Happier or less happy	26%	**54%**	20%
More or less stressed out	17%	**59%**	24%
Do better or worse in school	8%	**57%**	36%
Easier or harder time making friends	9%	**70%**	21%
More or less likely to go to school	9%	**80%**	11%
More or less able to pay attention in class	9%	**46%**	45%

How have schools involved families in setting up and communicating cell phone policies to students?

- Most parents report that schools have indeed communicated with them about these policies – 82% reported at least one method of communication from the list provided.
- Over half (51%) reported that schools communicated about this years' phone policy via email; and 44% through the schools' or districts' website. Between 15% and 24% reported any of the other touch points, including text messages, social media, and in-person meetings.
- Only 16% of parents reported being invited to give input, though almost half (46%) said they weren't sure if the school had reached out in this way or not.
    - Among those whose schools did reach out, 55% reported the school sent a survey or held in-person meetings. Other forms of outreach were much less common.
- One-quarter of adults reported that schools had shared information with them about the harmful effects of child and teen device use. This was not meaningfully different among parents of younger versus older students (27% among adults of elementary-aged students; 26% among adults of secondary students).
- Regardless of schools' outreach, two-thirds of adults reported encouraging their child to follow the rules (even higher [72%] among parents of teens), but teens don't concur. Among teens only 39% report the same.

Q: In which of the following ways has [NAME]'s school or school district communicated about this year's personal device or cell phone policy?

	% yes
Email	51%
School or district website	44%
In-person meeting	24%
Text message	22%
Weekly newsletter	22%

	% yes
Social media post	15%
Flyer or mailer	15%
The school/district has not communicated a device policy	15%

Q: Were parents invited to give input?

	% yes
Unsure	46%
No	38%
Yes	16%
Among those "yes": In what way?	
Survey	55%
In-person meetings	55%
Website	18%
Phone number to call	13%
Volunteer Committee	6%
Unsure	3%

Q: Has [NAME]'s school shared any information with parents/families about the harms of child and teen device use?

	% yes
Yes	27%
No	44%
Unsure	29%

Q: Which of the following have you done at home with NAME in response to the school's personal device rules: (select all that apply)

	% yes teens	% yes adults of teens
Encouraged to follow school rules	39%	72%
Explained importance of following school rules	32%	46%
Discussed harms of device use during class time	21%	28%
Taken away their device(s) (or limited their use/access) because they broke the school's device policy	8%	8%
Other grounding/punishment not involving the device because they broke the schools' personal device rules	6%	5%
None of the above	46%	21%

Appendix A. Study Methodology

The UAS Panel

The UAS is a probability-based Internet panel using Address-based Sampling methods, drawing from US Postal Service delivery sequence files to recruit and retain participants. Established in 2014, it currently includes about 10,500 members and has funding to grow to 20,000 over the next year. Respondents without Internet access receive a tablet and broadband Internet, facilitating representativeness in lower-income and rural areas that would be otherwise difficult to reach.

The UAS administration team makes statistical adjustments – at the time of recruitment, and after responses are collected – to adjust for the varying probabilities that a certain subgroup of individuals will respond to recruitment materials or survey requests. Sample weights are constructed in two stages. First, base weights are calculated to account for unequal inclusion probabilities resulting from the adaptive sampling procedure. Second, post-stratification weights are applied to adjust for differential nonresponse and to align each survey's final sample with the reference population on key demographic variables, including sex, race/ethnicity, age, education, and geographic location (Census region)."

Though statistical adjustments mitigate the risk of non-response bias, the UAS continues to make efforts to recruit from the hardest-to-reach populations and to obtain responses from those less likely to respond. As a result, the UAS provides considerably higher data quality than the approaches of many other surveys (Angrisani et. al, 2019; Hays, Liu, and Kapteyn, 2015), particularly convenience samples in which participants who are easy to locate and recruit opt-in to participate.[1]

When surveying adults about school-aged children, it is common for the adult to have more than one school-aged child living in the household. In those instances, our survey platform randomly selects one for the respondent to answer about. Adult responses can be interpreted as population-level estimates.

UASTeen

Beginning in spring 2025, the UAS team began recruiting teens from UAS households to join UASTeen. After obtaining parent permission, UAS staff reach out to teens themselves with an invitation to join the study. Participating teens gain access to the same UAS platform and infrastructure as UAS adult panel members, responding to texts and emails inviting them to participate in surveys, and receiving monetary incentives independent of the adults in the their households. This introduces some selection factors above and beyond selection into the UAS panel that cannot be completely controlled or adjusted for (e.g., factors influencing parent permission and teen interest).

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[1] UAS documentation provides detailed explanations of the various methods employed to minimize nonresponse bias at the recruitment, data collection, and reporting stages (https://uasdata.usc.edu/page/Methodology).

We constructed sampling weights for teens that use base-weights from household recruitment (which correct for differential probabilities of inclusion of households into the UAS) in addition to weights that correspond to several teen-specific population benchmarks—such as gender, age, race, and geographic location—using estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS). Nonetheless, selection into the panel—either at the household or, conditional on household inclusion, the individual teen level—may hinge on factors that are not captured by these weights. Given the probability-based household recruitment used by the UAS and this weighting strategy, we expect that teen data supports reasonably accurate population-level inferences.

At the time of this writing, approximately 520 teens have joined and are regularly answering surveys. Teen data are linkable to other members of their household who are part of the UAS panel, allowing teen data to be connected to any previously reported household-level or adult-level responses.

UAS Adult Sample

A total of 1,699 adults with a school-aged child in the household are included in the analytic sample. The sample excludes adults whose children are homeschooling or earning their GED outside of a traditional school setting. Approximately two-thirds of responding adults are the child's parent (67%); 22% are a grandparent living in the same household, five percent are a sibling (18 or older), and the remainder are other family members. Table A1 shows how the sample compares demographically to nationwide population parameters.

Table A1. Adult sample demographics compared to population parameters.

	Responding adult sample*	Overall % Nationwide Population (2023 CPS)
Race/Ethnicity		
White	60%	58%
Black	13%	12%
Asian	6%	6%
Hispanic	18%	19%
Other	3%	2%
Household Income		
Less than $25k	21%	14%
Between $25k-$49k	19%	17%
Between $50k-$74k	13%	15%
Between $75k-$150k	28%	29%
Greater than $150k	20%	26%
Household Education		
High school or less	36%	39%
Some college	24%	28%
Bachelor's degree or more	40%	33%

*Note: UAS's survey-specific sample weights make each survey data set representative of the U.S. population aged 18 and older with respect to a pre-defined set of socio-demographic variables.

A bit less than half of adult respondents answered about a male child (46%). Thirty-six percent of adult respondents answered about a child in elementary grades (kindergarten through grade 5) while 64% answered about a child in middle or high school (grades 6 through 12).

UASTeen Sample

A total of 364 teens enrolled in a traditional school setting at the time of the survey are included in the final analytic dataset. Almost 90% were attending a public school, 7% private schools and five percent were attending charter schools. Most were in high school; about one in five (21%) were in grades 6 through 8. Teen respondents were 43% male, 48% female; nine percent identified as other/nonbinary. Three quarters (76%) have one or more adults in their household who are responding in the adult counterpart of the same survey. Table A2 shows how the teen sample households compare demographically to nationwide population estimates derived from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2023.

Table A2. Teen sample households demographics compared to population parameters.

	Responding teen sample	Population estimates (ACS, 2023)
Race/Ethnicity		
White	48%	49%
Black	11%	12%
Asian	5%	5%
Hispanic	25%	26%
Other	11%	8%
Household Income		
Less than $25k	15%	9%
Between $25k-$49k	15%	13%
Between $50k-$74k	12%	14%
Between $75k-$150k	36%	33%
Greater than $150k	22%	31%
Highest household educational attainment		
High school or less	18%	31%
Some college	32%	30%
Bachelor's degree or more	50%	39%

Table note: Household-level population estimates were calculated for the sub-sample of ACS respondents who reported at least one biological or step-child aged 13-17 residing in the household at the time the survey was collected.

Survey Fielding and Response Rates

The UAS team invited 3,263 adults from the UAS panel to complete the survey in October, 2025. A total of 2,201 responded, for an overall response rate of 67%. Ultimately not all invited were eligible to complete the survey, as some invitations included panelists who had not updated information about their child's age or school enrollment at the time the invitations were sent. A total of 1,897 adults were eligible and completed the survey, though the analytic file was limited to those 1,699 enrolled in a traditional school setting for the 2025-26 school year.

Every teen active in the teen panel in October of 2024 was invited to complete the cell phone survey, including new teens as they joined the panel during the fielding window. Thus, the total teen panel ranged during the time of data collection from approximately 350 to 500 teens. A total of 401 teens completed the survey (response rate of approximately 80%), but the final analytic sample was limited to the 364 enrolled in a traditional school setting for the 2025-26 school year.