Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time Report

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BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON STUDENT SCREEN TIME REPORT

Introduction

The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time was established by the Kansas State Board of Education during the board's July 2024 meeting. The task force was charged with providing recommendations regarding the use of personal devices in school, screen time and mental health, and parental oversight of district-owned devices.

Kansans have increasingly shared their perspectives with state board members about the impacts of digital devices on children and adolescents. Members sought to address the use of personal devices being used in schools, the impacts of screen time on students' mental health, and the types of oversight parents or guardians may have over their students' district-owned devices. The board implored the task force to create a set of recommendations addressing these three topics by hearing from a wide variety of experts and thoroughly reviewing research to support their conclusions.

> These recommendations were not created with the intent to mandate district policy, but to provide guidance on research-based practices.

The task force, made up of 36 Kansans (see Appendix A), has created a set of recommendations, informed by research, to support districts' efforts in establishing their policies on the use of personal devices in school, screen time and mental health, and parental oversight of district-owned devices. The following report highlights the task force's research and recommendations for Kansas school systems.

Methods

The Kansas State Board of Education determined the task force should narrow their scope of work to three topics:

1. The use of personal devices in school;

2. Screen time and mental health; and

3. Parental oversight of district-owned devices.

These topics were determined by the state board members through a survey which asked members to choose three of six technology-related topics that have been discussed with and amongst board members in recent years. Each member selected the three topics they wished for the task force to discuss, and topics with the most board member votes were identified to be addressed by the task force.

The task force was comprised of 36 members (found in Appendix A) with representatives including:

- Kansas State Board of Education members
- Superintendents
- Principals
- Teachers
- Students
- Parents
- IT staff
- Local school board members
- Legislators

Two task force members, principal Brian Houghton and student Ava Gustin, were selected to serve as co-chairs. Twenty members of the task force were nominated by the Kansas State Board of Education and 16 were selected through a self-nomination process. To determine the task force members, each state board member was asked to provide three nominations to the task force, and the Kansas State Department of Education selected two of the board members' nominations. An open call was sent to Kansas educators and administrators to nominate themselves to fill the remaining positions, which received 84 responses. Members were selected based on their role, geographic location and expertise.

Meetings took place weekly on Thursdays from 4–5:30 p.m. from Aug. 22, 2024, through Nov. 7, 2024. As part of the task force's work, members read *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, along with supplemental research each week. The task force facilitated panel discussions with experts (found in Appendix B) from education and health fields for the first six meetings, with two weeks dedicated to each identified topic. These meetings also included breakout discussions for task force members to discuss their findings from the week's research presentation, readings and panel discussions. The remaining meetings were dedicated to discussion and voting on recommendations for personal device use in schools, screen time and mental health, and parental oversight of district-owned devices.

Definitions

Bell-to-bell policies:

Personal electronic devices are off throughout the school day, including during lunch and in between classes.

Secure location inaccessible to the student:

Students are required to store their personal electronic devices in a location designated by the school district which is not to be accessed by the student during the bell-to-bell school day.

Personal Electronic Devices:

Student-owned devices capable of cellular, Wi-Fi, and/or Bluetooth connectivity such as cell phones, tablets, smart watches, wireless headphones, or fitness trackers.

Research

A list of references for the following research can be found in Appendix C.

Personal Devices in School

A 2024 study reveals 72% of high school teachers, 33% of middle school teachers, and 6% of elementary school teachers say students distracted by cell phones in class is a major problem (Lin et al., 2024). Students also note the distractions that digital devices can cause, with about 30% of students saying they get distracted by using digital devices and 21% saying they are distracted by other students' digital device use during every or most of their mathematics lessons (Schleicher, 2023). Students may even be distracted by their personal electronic devices unintentionally, as research suggests that cell phone notifications activate an involuntary attention response, reducing cognitive capacity for other tasks (Ward et al., 2017). Beyond just acting as a distraction for students, some studies indicate a link between phone use in school and academic performance, with one study of female students finding that the grade point average of students going to a school with a cell phone ban increased at greater rates than students at schools with no ban (Abrahamsson, 2024).

In a 2024 survey, 9% of parents say they believe the impact of cell phone use on children is mostly or entirely negative, but 46% believe cell phones have a mostly or entirely positive impact (National Parents Union Survey, 2024). While many parents believe their child's digital device generally impacts them positively, 49% of parents from the same survey are worried cell phones use will interfere with their student's learning (National Parents Union Survey, 2024).

While 77% of schools in the U.S. have a policy prohibiting the non-academic use of cell phones during school hours (Percentage of Public Schools with Various Safety and Security Measures, 2021), 97% of teens say that they use their cell phone during the school day (Radesky et al., 2023).

Screen Time and Mental Health

The Anxious Generation analyzes the rise in anxiety and mental health challenges among adolescents, discussing cultural and related technological changes that have contributed to this shift, specifically as it relates to the increase in adolescent cell phone and social media use. Teens report spending nearly seven hours a day of leisure time, not including school and homework, on screen media, with about two hours per day spent on social media (Haidt, 2024). In 2015, one out of four teens said they were online *"almost constantly."* By 2022, that number had doubled to 46% (Haidt, 2024).

According to Haidt (2024), there are four foundational harms caused by increased adolescent screen use. These harms are identified as:

1. Social deprivation
2. Sleep deprivation
3. Attention fragmentation
4. Addiction

Social deprivation manifests as a lack of time spent face-to-face with friends, which has decreased for all age groups, but had the largest decline for individuals aged 15-24 (Haidt, 2024). Additionally, in citing a 2014 survey of children ages 6-12, he asserts relationships between children and their parents are negatively impacted by the presence of cell phones with 62% of survey respondents reporting their parents were *"often distracted"* when the child tried to talk with them (Haidt, 2024). The age and education level of parents also had an impact on these results. Parents under the age of 50 were more likely than parents 50 and older to say they often or sometimes feel distracted by their smartphone when spending time with their children and parents with college degrees or higher, or those with some college experience, were more likely to report they spend too much time on their smartphones than parents with a high school education or less (Haidt, 2024).

Children 11 to 17 years of age may find it difficult to manage their use of technology, with 86% reporting they sometimes or often find it difficult to stop using technology once they start, and 67% of teens say they are sometimes or often short of sleep due to being on their phone or the internet late at night (Radesky et al., 2023). Additionally, 61% of teens report neglecting their school or family obligations because they are using technology (Radesky et al., 2023).

Some studies suggest social media has a particularly harmful effect on adolescents' mental health. Adolescents who spend more than three hours per day on social media have been found to face double the risk of experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Murthy, 2023). Specifically, 46% of adolescents said social media makes them feel worse about their body image (Murthy, 2023) and 59% of teens say they have experienced cyberbullying (Anderson, 2018).

Parental Oversight of District-Owned Devices

As of 2013, 94% of schools were using filtering software on district-owned devices, with the most popularly blocked content being social networking sites, online chats, video platforms, and online gaming (Caldwell-Stone, 2013). Some device management programs available to schools not only allow the school technology administrator(s) to filter content and access controls, but also give parents and guardians the ability to view their student's online activity, set time limits, block websites, and/or restrict certain app usage on the district-owned device. However, there have been reports of students, intentionally and unintentionally, accessing potentially inappropriate content on district-owned devices (Parents Outraged over *"Inappropriate Content"* Found While Using Computer Learning Program, 2018).

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations adopted by the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time regarding the use of personal devices in school, screen time and mental health, and parental oversight of district-owned devices. Minority statements are provided (found in Appendix E) on recommendations that passed, but had a notable number of members who did not vote in support of the recommendation. The process for the adoption of the recommendations can be found in Appendix D.

Personal Devices in School

1. The task force recommends district implement a bell-to-bell personal electronic device policy in K-12 schools.

2. The task force recommends districts implement a policy for K-12 students to store personal electronic devices in a secure location inaccessible to them during the school day.

3. The task force recommends districts develop robust safety and emergency procedures that are not dependent on students contacting authorities or family via personal electronic devices or school-issued devices.

4. The task force recommends districts develop a process for teachers to report gaps in district-provided technology, so teachers do not supplement lack of or insufficient district-issued technology with use of personal devices.

5. The task force recommends districts create a personal device policy for staff members.

Screen Time and Mental Health

1. The task force recommends districts provide digital citizenship education from non-technology industry resources, which incorporate unbiased or independently funded research.

2. The task force recommends districts share peer reviewed research and discuss mental health concerns associated with excessive use of social media, gaming, platforms, and instant messaging with students, families, and district staff.

3. The task force recommends districts develop a robust website and/or other means of communication with parents, students, and the community that is not reliant upon social media.

4. The task force recommends educators have students take regular breaks from screens throughout the school day.

Parental Oversight of District-Owned Devices

1. The task force recommends districts utilize content management tools in such a way the default settings protect students without any parental supervision being necessary.

2. The task force recommends district acceptable use policies be written in age-appropriate language for all grades.

3. The task force recommends districts provide families with clear instructions and access to report problems with district-owned devices or content to the appropriate district staff.

4. The task force recommends districts host educational opportunities for families on district-owned devices and related software.

5. The task force recommends districts share information on parental controls that can be implemented on students' personal devices.

6. The task force recommends districts emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between digital and non-digital learning experiences, and not rely solely on technology-based instruction.

7. The task force recommends districts develop policies that allow families to opt-out of district-owned devices being sent home.

8. The task force recommends districts utilize device management systems that allow parental controls be put in place on district-owned devices.

9. The task force recommends districts allow families to set stricter controls, if desired, on their student's district-owned device.

10. The task force recommends districts allow families oversight of what their student accesses on district-owned devices and for how long.

11. The task force recommends districts ensure families have full access to their student's district-owned device when it is at home.

12. The task force recommends districts utilize device management systems that allow families to access a mirrored version of the student's view on the district-owned device.

13. The task force recommends districts develop systems for families to manage and request additional blocked websites on district-owned devices.

BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON STUDENT SCREEN TIME REPORT

Appendix

APPENDIX A: Membership

The Blue Ribbon Task Force was comprised of 36 members with representatives of the Kansas State Board of Education, superintendents, principals, teachers, students, parents, IT staff, local school board members, and legislators. Each task force member is listed below by their role.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS
- Melanie Haas, District 2
- Danny Zeck, District 1

LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS
- Katie Allen, Manhattan-Ogden USD 383
- Sue Bolley, Topeka USD 501
- Laura Corey, Hutchinson USD 308
- Jackie Gigot, Garden City USD 457
- Trisha Moritz, Attica USD 511

LEGISLATORS
- Rep. Scott Hill, House District 70
- Sen. Chase Blasi, Senate District 27

STUDENTS
- Ananya Agrawal, Blue Valley USD 229
- Jessica Claire, Leavenworth USD 453
- Ava Gustin, Mission Valley USD 330, Co-Chair
- Alexa Hernandez, Dodge City USD 443
- Lane Lamping, Basehor-Linwood USD 458

IT SCHOOL DISTRICT
- Travis True, Topeka USD 501

IT INDUSTRY
- Lyndsay Noble, Rockhurst University, Director of Analytics Programs

SUPERINTENDENTS

- Travis Githens, Cherryvale USD 447
- Brian Huff, Gardner Edgerton USD 231
- Brad Kempf, Jefferson County North USD 339
- Tonya Merrigan, Blue Valley USD 229
- Troy Pitsch, Wabaunsee USD 329

PRINCIPALS

- Kathleen Brennan, Fort Riley USD 475
- Kamiel Evans, Wichita USD 259
- Eric Hofer-Holdeman, Wichita USD 259
- Brian Houghton, Fredonia USD 484, Co-Chair
- John Niehues, Greeley County USD 200

TEACHERS

- Carol Budde, Newton USD 373
- Tawna Hall, Derby USD 260
- Anna Luke, Beloit USD 273
- Connie Martin, Shawnee Mission USD 512
- Jose Martinez, Wichita USD 259

PARENTS

- Lori Barnes, Arkansas City USD 470
- Amy Warren, Wichita USD 259
- Korin Poppe, Republic County USD 109
- Kim Whitman, Shawnee Mission USD 512
- Erika Sheets, Blue Valley USD 229

APPENDIX B: Panelists

The Blue Ribbon task force heard from a panel of experts and educators each week, for the first six meetings, on each of the designated topics. Panel members from each week are listed below:

Week 1 - Aug. 22, 2024

TOPIC: Personal Devices in School

- Katie Barrientos, math teacher, Goddard USD 265
- Ron Barry, superintendent, Halstead-Bentley USD 440
- Tyler Applegate, vice principal, Chanute USD 413

Week 2 – Aug. 29, 2024

TOPIC: Personal Devices in School

- Kelly Bielefeld, superintendent, Wichita USD 259
- Kara Belew, U.S. history and government teacher, Andover USD 385
- Brent Wolf, principal, Derby Elementary School, Derby USD 260

Week 3 – Sept. 5, 2024

TOPIC: Screen Time and Mental Health

- Tracie Chauvin, director of student support programs, Kansas City Kansas USD 500
- Hanna Kemble, elementary school counselor, Topeka USD 501
- Mallory Jacobs, elementary school counselor, Topeka USD 501

Week 4 – Sept. 12, 2024

TOPIC: Screen Time and Mental Health

- Dr. Robert Stiles, program director, pediatric public health,
  University of Kansas Medical Center
- Shelby Burnett, licensed specialist clinical social worker, Basehor-Linwood USD 458
- Dr. Eve-Lynn Nelson, professor, pediatrics and psychiatry,
  University of Kansas Medical Center

Week 5 – Sept. 19, 2024

TOPIC: Parental Oversight of District-Owned Devices

- Richard Culatta, CEO, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
- Phil Elliot, director of technology, Spring Hill USD 230
- Keith Kruger, CEO, Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)

Week 6 – Sept. 26, 2024

TOPIC: Parental Oversight of District-Owned Devices

- Dean Mantz, technology coordinator, Sterling USD 376
- Dr. Beth Rabbitt, CEO, The Learning Accelerator
- Christopher Rinkus, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education

APPENDIX C: References

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APPENDIX D: Recommendation Adoption Process

Motions

The task force was presented all the recommended motions, which were collected through conversations in breakout rooms and task force member submissions. The motions were presented in a specific order to help with efficiency and to avoid potential contradictions or redundancies. Members were called upon by one of the co-chairs to make a motion, and each motion required another member's second.

Voting

After a motion was made and seconded, a maximum of 10 minutes was allotted for discussion. Once the discussion ended or time expired, a poll was presented to members to vote 'yes', 'no', or abstain. Abstentions were recorded, but did not count toward the majority vote requirement. A motion passed if it received a majority of 'yes' votes among the total 'yes' and 'no' votes. For example, if 30 members voted but five abstained, only 25 votes were counted and 13 'yes' votes would be required for the motion to pass.

APPENDIX E: Minority Statements

Minority statements are found on recommendations that passed but had at least 25% of voting members voting opposite of the prevailing opinion. To most accurately express the will of the task force, these statements denote that while the majority of the task force showed support for a recommendation, there were a notable number of members who did not. However, minority statements do not reflect there was a singular or common opinion among the minority position voters.

Personal Devices in School

1. The task force recommends districts implement a bell-to-bell personal electronic device policy in K-12 schools.

   A notable minority of 25% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation regarding high schools.

2. The task force recommends districts implement a policy for K-12 students to store personal electronic devices in a secure location inaccessible to them during the school day.

   A notable minority of 25% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation regarding high schools.

3. The task force recommends districts develop a process for teachers to report gaps in district-provided technology, so teachers do not supplement lack of or insufficient district-issued technology with use of personal devices.

   A notable minority of 37% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation.

Screen Time and Mental Health

1. The task force recommends districts develop a robust website and/or other means of communication with parents, students, and the community that is not reliant upon social media.

   A notable minority of 40% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation.

Parental Oversight of District-Owned Devices

1. The task force recommends districts emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between digital and non-digital learning experiences, and not rely solely on technology-based instruction.

   A notable minority of 29% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation.

2. The task force recommends districts allow families to set stricter controls, if desired, on their student's district-owned device.

   A notable minority of 28% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation.

3. The task force recommends districts utilize device management systems that allow families to access a mirrored version of the student's view on the district-owned device.

   A notable minority of 47% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation.

4. The task force recommends districts develop systems for families to manage and request additional blocked websites on district-owned devices.

   A notable minority of 45% of voting members expressed dissent for this recommendation.

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- Kindergarten readiness
- Individual Plan of Study
- Civic engagement
- Academically prepared for postsecondary
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary success

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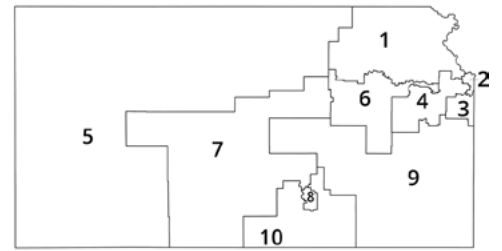
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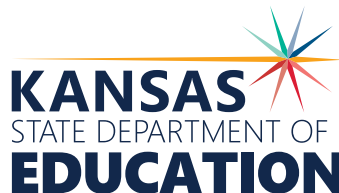Betty Arnold
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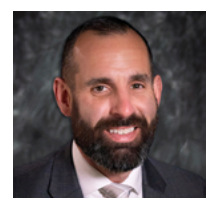Dr. Randy Watson

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