



September 9, 2024

Dear South Orange & Maplewood Parents/Guardians,

Research consistently highlights the growing impact of cell phone use on daily life, with links to social isolation, sleep deprivation, and decreased attention span. For children, these issues can lead to increased mental health challenges and negatively affect academic performance. Alarming national data shows that 1 in 5 children currently **experience mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorders**.

Today, ninety-five percent of children aged 13-17 now have access to cell phones, and students receive an average of 11 notifications per waking hour—about one every five minutes. These devices and their apps are designed to capture attention, disrupting learning and social interactions. Schools across South Orange & Maplewood School District have implemented various strategies to reduce cell phone use during the school day, including classroom pocket charts, storage containers, and charging stations.

With student safety and well-being as our priority, the district is launching a pilot program at 1-2 schools during this school year to limit cell phone use during school hours. This voluntary program will be explored in partnership with **Yondr**, a company specializing in magnetic pouches that lock. Students will place their cell phones inside the pouches at the start of the day and **will carry them** throughout the school day. The pouches will be unlocked at the end of the day, allowing students to access their phones once school hours conclude.

We are eager to see the outcomes of this pilot program and will closely monitor its impact through surveys and conversations to better understand its effects on social-emotional learning and academic performance.

Yours in Education,

Jason Bing
Superintendent of Schools