

CONTOOCOOK VALLEY REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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January 10, 2018

Dear Parents and Guardians,

You may remember that, in my parent letter of October 27, 2017, I shared an article about the use of smartphones (Nicholas Carr, "[How Smartphones Hijack Our Minds](#)," *Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2017).

As the school's educational leader, I continue to be very concerned about the impact that the constant use of cell phones has on the learning and culture of our school and am therefore sharing the following, longer reflection with you.

The Discussion around the Use of Cell Phones in Schools

As an educator in our district for the past thirty-three years, I agree with Richard Freed, a clinical psychologist and the author of *Wired Child: Reclaiming Childhood in a Digital Age*, who observes that "high levels of smartphone use by teens often have a detrimental effect on achievement, because teen phone use is dominated by entertainment, not learning, applications" (quoted in Paul Barnwell, "[Do Smartphones have a place in the classroom?](#)", *The Atlantic*, April 27, 2016).

Daniel Willingham, a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia and author of *Raising Kids Who Read: What Parents and Teachers Can Do*, asks in a *New York Times* op-ed: "Why did 90 percent of teachers say (in a 2012 Pew survey) that students can't pay attention the way they could a few years ago? Why does it feel like our attention spans are shrinking? It may be that digital devices have not left us unable to pay attention, but have made us unwilling to do so."

Willingham continues: "The digital world carries the promise of amusement that is constant, immediate, and limitless. If a YouTube video isn't funny in the first 10 seconds, why watch when I can instantly seek something better on BuzzFeed or Spotify?"

"The Internet hasn't shortened my attention span," Willingham concludes, "but it has fixed a persistent thought in the back of my mind: Isn't there something better to do than what I'm doing?" (Daniel Willingham, "[Smartphones Don't Make Us Dumb](#)," *New York Times*, January 20, 2015).

Growing concerns over what has been termed "phone addiction" have been reported in the news recently (Alice Walton, "[Phone Addiction Is Real -- And So Are Its Mental Health Risks](#)," *Forbes*, December 11, 2017; Jordan Valinski, "[Even the iPhone's designer is worried about phone addiction](#)," *CNN Money*, January 9, 2018; Luke Kawa, "Two Major Apple Shareholders Push for Study of iPhone Addiction in Children," *Bloomberg Technology News*, January 7, 2018). Investment firms are getting worried that phone maker stocks could turn into "sin stocks," similar to those of tobacco companies in the 1990s (Elizabeth Diltz, "[Apple says it looks out for kids, as investors cite phone 'addiction'](#)," *Reuters Technology News*, January 7, 2018).

While Your Student Is At School

For our administrators, our teachers and our students, the pervasive presence and unchecked use of cell phones in our classrooms continues to detract and distract from learning.

We hold that the use of cell phones must be directly connected to a lesson's outcomes in order to be used in the classroom and that cell phones, or indeed any electronic devices, may not be used without the express permission of the classroom teacher. The preferred location of the phone is in a student's bag, set to silent.

While this protocol is clear, the application of this school-wide expectation has been less consistent than we would like to see.

Therefore, beginning with the second semester, we will remind all of our students of the stated, minimal expectations regarding all electronics (*ConVal Regional High School Student Handbook 2017-2018*, p. 56): "**Electronics may be used with teacher permission only and teachers have the right to confiscate the device if used without permission.**" Our disciplinary responses include, but are not limited to, the following:

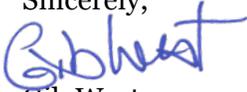
- The teacher takes the device for the block and returns it to the student at the end of class.
- The device is taken to the office and gets returned to the student at the end of the day.
- A parent/guardian is required to pick up the device at the end of the day.

We appreciate your support of these expectations which are designed to help our students learn in an atmosphere that minimizes distractions and maximizes the educational opportunities that are offered to them during the school day.

In your support of this goal, please only communicate with your student during his or her lunch period. If, for any reason, you need to reach him or her at any other time during the school day, please call us at 924-3869 and we will get the message to your student.

As always, feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Gib West

P.S.: We look forward to welcoming you at our semi-annual Celebration of Learning on Thursday, January 11, 2018, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm.