



Home of the Warriors

Dr. Michael Thomas, Superintendent

Shalah P. Sims, West Middle School Principal
Anna Stewart-Birchfield, Assistant Principal
Sandra Seaney, Counseling Coordinator

May 1, 2019

Dear West Middle School Families,

I want to make you aware of a new school policy, which will take effect in the 2019-2020 school year and explain the rationale for such a change. Effective August 14, 2019, student cell phone access and usage in school from the time they enter the building until they leave the building at the end of the school day will be prohibited. I encourage you to read the "Cell Phone Policy FAQ" document attached to this letter for information, which explains more about the specifics of this policy. We acknowledge there can be positive uses of cell phones in the classroom. Our experience working with youth has shown us that the cons outweigh the pros when it comes to cell phone usage in school. We want our students' focus to be on learning while at school. We would like you to know that West Middle School is not alone in making this change. All D11 middle schools have either already switched to not allowing cell phone access during school hours or are also in the process of revising their policies for next year. Also, because we value parents' perspectives, we developed this policy with input from our PTA and School Accountability Committee.

Our two main priorities are school safety and student achievement. The decision to prohibit the use of cell phones at school will help us with each of these priorities. The social-emotional well-being of our students is an important piece of school safety. Research shows that anxiety, addiction, and social avoidance are all issues that increase when adolescents have unrestricted access to cell phones. Our goal at school is to set our students up for success. Look no further than a middle school cafeteria at lunch to see the impact cell phones are having on them and their social interactions. Social avoidance behaviors and reliance on a cell phone are counterproductive to our goal of equipping our students for success in the future. Witnessing first-hand the negative impact cell phones have on our students has resulted in our decision to update our school-wide policy.

Currently, our students have been able to have their phones with them at all times. Many students cannot resist the urge to see what is on their phone during instruction instead of giving their undivided attention to the lesson. Research shows that even when a student is not viewing their phone, they can be distracted by wondering what they are missing on their phone. Access to cell phones increases the amount of time teachers spend redirecting students about inappropriate cell phone use in class, thus affecting the learning time of all students in the room. Here are just a few of the issues we deal with daily when it comes to student cell phone use:

- Students texting during class
- Parents texting or calling students during class
- Students taking pictures or videos of people without permission and posting it on social media
- Cyberbullying
- Students acting like they are doing research for an assignment while doing something else on their phone

I want to make sure you know that we completely understand the legitimate reasons for a middle school student to have a cell phone. It makes sense to want to get a text message or phone call from your student when they leave or arrive at a destination to know they are safe. That part does not have to change for you under this policy. The best thing to do is make a plan by telling your student to send a text or give you a call right before they come into school or just after they leave. If you have an emergency message for your student, call the main office at 328-3900. We have student assistants who can deliver messages to classrooms. The other option is to text your student knowing they will see the message at the end of the school day. Students who stay for after-school events such as tutoring, athletics, and clubs, will be able to use their cell phones to arrange for rides home with the permission of the supervising adult.

I appreciate your support of West becoming as distraction-free as possible and protecting our learning environment. Our goal is your student's success. We are confident this change in policy is a giant step in the right direction based on our research, observations, everyday interactions with students, and the positive impact on the schools that have already taken this step. Thank you for your continued support of the West Middle School community.

Sincerely,



Shalah P. Sims
Principal