
Cell Phone Policy

Porter Hammitt <porter.hammitt@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Apr 23, 2025 at 9:11 AM

PLEASE CONFIRM RECEIPT.

To the Board of Trustees and Superintendent,

I write to you regarding the proposed MCPS cell phone policy for next school year - 2025/26. I attended the last school board meeting where it was discussed on March 11th, and it was my understanding at that time that it was still under consideration. Recent comments from one board member in the newspaper suggest it is still not settled. So I write.

For grades EL-8, you propose to prohibit students from using cell phones and other electronic signaling and listening devices throughout the instructional day. I applaud you on this decisive move.

For high school, you propose to prohibit phone use during instructional time, but you propose to allow their use before and after school, during lunch, and during passing periods.

You have heard from myself and many others, including teachers and parents, about the negative effects of allowing phone use at school, and our desire to see them put "away for the day".

You are aware of the strong consensus among experts in psychology and childhood development that excessive phone use is causing detrimental effects to our youth.

You are aware that numerous other school districts around the nation have taken decisive action in all grades, including high school, to ban phone use throughout the day.

You are aware that our own Gov. Gianforte has come out on record as being strongly in support of a ban on cell phone use at school.

As an educator, the spouse of a MCPS teacher, and with two public high-school kids of our own, I strongly encourage you to take stronger action. Should high-schoolers be allowed to use phones before and after school? Okay, sure, that sounds reasonable, and it may be their legal right. But once they've officially started the school day on school grounds? There is just no good reason for students to have access to their phones. We all survived school just fine without constant access to a phone.

I strongly encourage you to implement a policy of "away for the day". If phones are seen, there is a warning, and if it happens again, the phones are simply taken to the front office for pickup after school.

You propose to allow phone use during passing and lunch - is there some compelling reason for this? Being fairly well versed on the subject, I am not aware of any good reason. Why do you feel that kids need to have access to their phones during passing and lunch?

If you feel there is some compelling reason that a policy of "away for the day" is unworkable, then I urge you to at least limit their use to lunch period only. Let's at least encourage kids to not have their heads buried in their screens and be interacting with their fellow humans during passing as they walk the halls.

I hope you will give this matter further consideration and act in the best interests of our students and teachers.

Thank you.

Porter Hammitt

Request to Reconsider Scheduling of Middle School Track Meets During School Hours

Randy Zschaechner <rjzschaechner@mcpsmt.org>

Thu, May 8, 2025 at 6:26 AM

To: Kate Gammill <kgammill@mcpsmt.org>, Christina Hayes <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Jenny Walsh <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, Megan Meg Whicher <mwhicher@mcpsmt.org>, Keegan Witt <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Members of the Missoula County School Board,

I am writing to respectfully ask that the Board consider encouraging our middle schools to revisit the decision to schedule track meets during the instructional day.

Currently, students involved in track — which at my school includes nearly 25% of the student body — are missing four to five full days of classroom instruction during the crucial fourth quarter. These meets, while important athletic events, result in a significant amount of non-instructional time for both participating and non-participating students. The meets themselves provide only 3–5 minutes of actual athletic activity per student, with the remainder of the day spent away from the classroom. Additionally, there are some classes that only meet for a quarter, these subjects need to modify their curriculum for the shortened window of time. Students in these courses during the 4th quarter lose a full week of instruction in relation to their peers that were scheduled for the class during quarters 1,2 and 3.

Notably, track is the *only* middle school sport that is scheduled during the school day. Other sports are held after school hours, minimizing the disruption to students' academic schedules and allowing them to participate in athletics without sacrificing instructional time.

This scheduling practice also impacts the quality of education for students who remain at school. In one of my classes, for example, 28 students were absent for a meet, leaving only 12 in attendance. It becomes impractical to introduce new content under such circumstances, which leads to a slowdown in academic progress for all.

Additionally, there is a significant staffing strain. Many teachers also serve as track coaches, meaning substitute teachers are required to cover their classes. Given our ongoing substitute shortage, this often results in other teachers giving up their prep periods to fill in — a burden that impacts morale, planning, and instruction school-wide.

It's worth noting that, until recently, these meets were traditionally held outside regular school hours. This previous model allowed students to compete while still receiving their full educational experience and reduced strain on staffing.

I urge the Board to ask our middle schools to reconsider the current scheduling of track meets and explore solutions that uphold both the academic and athletic values of our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Randy Zschaechner
Meadow Hill Middle School
