
Cell Phone Policy

Porter Hammitt <porter.hammitt@gmail.com>

Wed, Apr 23, 2025 at 9:11 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

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

Good afternoon, and first, thank you for everything you do for MCPS,

I am Aderley Rodriguez Murphy, and I am an ELL teacher at Hellgate High School for the current school year. This is a follow up to a public comment made about a month ago by three of my colleagues. I am writing to share my concern about the potential lack of funding and diminishing support for our ELL students and the ELL department for next year. I am working at Hellgate High School this year with Aria Peters to support our ELL population. We have over 50 students that we see each day, sometimes for multiple periods throughout the day based on their needs. We teach English classes where we meet our students where they are at, and help them gain the skills and confidence they need to succeed in their other classes. These classes are necessarily smaller and scaffolded to address these specific students' needs.

Many of our students have recently arrived in the United States and are preliterate due to a halt in their schooling in their countries of origin, or they might read at a lower elementary reading level. Because of this, in addition to supporting students in learning content from their core classes and teaching English classes, we are also doing reading interventions so that they can progress in school and continue to be contributing members to our community. Alongside being in classes and learning content, some students are learning to read simultaneously. This can be overwhelming for teachers. This additional support is essential to our school communities' ability to ensure that all students have the support they need to achieve success.

We strive to create a school environment where our ELL students feel safe and welcome, and many become close with their other classmates throughout the year. In a situation where they are learning a new language and are taking difficult classes, structured English classes that are catered to their individual needs are essential to their success. In addition to helping our students in their academics, we also help ease students and their families' transition to our community in a variety of ways. We help them learn how to check their grades and be responsible for getting work in. There are so many things that happen throughout a school day and our students need support if they are going to graduate and be comfortable in their new home.

Our students are amazing. Every day I am in awe of how well they adapt and how much they want to learn and do well. They come to school most days with a positive attitude and the desire to learn. 50 plus students is too much for one teacher to support, and that is what is currently, potentially planned for next year at Hellgate and CS Porter. To give our ELL students the support and tools that they need to have success at MCPS, we need two teachers at both the Highschool and Middle school levels. This will ensure that class sizes remain smaller, and students can receive the individualized instruction that they need. I am so happy and grateful that the general levies passed. That being said, now that the budget picture is becoming more clear, I hope that MCPS can continue to support the needs of our ELL population. Thank you for taking the time to read. I appreciate your time and thoughtful consideration.

Aderley Murphy

Track schedule

Sarah Greiser <sgreiser@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, May 13, 2025 at 10:36 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Micah Hill <mhill@mcpsmt.org>

I am reaching out as a middle school teacher because the track schedule this year and last year is very disruptive to our learning.

Last year I was a math teacher trying to get through content by the end of the year and this year I am an exploratory teacher trying to get to know my 4th quarter students. In both cases, missing a day in the middle of the week for 5 weeks during the 4th quarter is extremely difficult. Not only are we missing 5 full school days but we lose momentum when it happens in the middle of the week. I do not know the numbers at other schools but at Meadow Hill we have about 1/3 of our students participating in track - in 6th grade the number is closer to 50%.

It seems counterintuitive that we would prioritize an extracurricular activity over learning. I really hope that track can get moved back to an afternoon activity so that we don't lose so many teachable minutes.

Sarah Greiser
Meadow Hill
sgreiser@mcpsmt.org
