

[Mohawk Trail Regional School expanding cellphone policy for students](#)

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BUCKLAND — After a successful implementation in the middle school, Mohawk Trail Regional School is expanding its “Off and Away, All Day!” pilot program to the high school to curb student cellphone use and introduce a consistent policy across the school.

The policy requires students to turn off their phones and put them in their bags from 7:45 a.m. to 2:20 p.m. each day — high school students may use phones during lunch, but middle schoolers cannot — and implements a progressive discipline curve if students use their devices in class.

Principal Chris Buckland said the middle school portion of the program was introduced this year and has been met with great feedback from students, families and staff.

“It has become a more obvious problem, especially coming out of Covid ... Social media driven issues are coming into schools and it’s just increasingly difficult to support students with stuff that starts outside of school,” he said. “We’ve had lots of communications from families saying, ‘Thank you, this is what we needed.’”

He is hopeful the program will help kids learn to not be so reliant on their phones, which can instill good phone habits in school that they then can carry into their adult lives.

An important element of the program is that while students are without their phones, parents and caregivers are always able to communicate with students by calling the main office — just like how things were done before cellphones became commonplace.

“We’ll never say to a kid, ‘you can’t phone your parents,’” Buckland said, noting communication between caregivers and students was a question that came up when the policy was being developed. “With a clear communication system from school to home, that kind of problem goes away.”

Since the program was brought in, the school has seen a reduction in behavior referrals related to technology in classrooms, as well as a reduction in typical bullying and

harassment incidents. With eighth graders making their way to the high school in September, Buckland said it's a "natural progression" to implement it now.

"We've got a group of students that are prepared to navigate school with that expectation," Buckland said.

With the expansion of the program, Mohawk joins several other schools in the area in trying to combat cellphone use in school. Greenfield Public Schools instituted the use of Yondr magnetic pouches for students phones in 2022 and the Pioneer Valley Regional School Committee is in the process of laying out a cell phone policy for the district, which will be detailed at a June 6 meeting.

"Off and Away, All Day!" is still in the pilot phase and change is expected, according to Buckland, especially as the school engages students, staff and families through feedback surveys in the coming year to see what things are working.

"This is a big issue in all schools no matter what size it is," Buckland said. "I think the key to it being successful is in how we have that continual conversations with students."

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