



### The Problem

School districts are grappling with cell phone policies. Racine Unified School District (RUSD) began looking at the issue in the 2023-24 school year and implemented a policy in fall 2024. As many school districts, they struggled with student distraction and disengagement in the classrooms due to cell phones.

### The Solution

A team including district and school administration, teachers, parents, and students worked on the issue. The consensus was that individual schools would set their own policy, taking into consideration the following districtwide expectations: cell phones should not be used during instructional time unless teachers approved it for educational purposes, and the policy would be clearly communicated to students, staff, and families.



Individual schools set policies that work best for their school. Damon Jackson, Principal – Schulte K-8 School says, “The expectation of our students is when they walk in the door they put their cell phone away, in their possession, and that it is on silent for the duration of school day.”

At Park High School students are not permitted to use their cell phones during instructional time unless permitted by the teacher. Students may use their phones during passing time, lunch, and in the office. “We understand our students have needs to use their phones throughout the day, be it jobs or medical appointments,” said Bill O’Malley, Principal – Park High School. “We want to teach students how to responsibly use this technology.”

Both schools were committed to clearly communicating their policy. At Schulte, the school announced the policy at a school assembly at the beginning of the school year and sent the policy home with students. They also emailed parents.

At Park High School, the policy was explained to each class the first day of school and shared with families. The policy document itself was in an attractive layout which O’Malley said made a difference in people reading it.

When sharing with staff, O’Malley made it clear the policy was about student engagement in the classroom. “When a student is on their phone in class and not engaging, it is the same as if they are sleeping or reading a book,” he said.

### Results

Neither Principal is seeing major problems with violations. Both schools have violation policies that start with a warning and escalate to the phone being taken away and a parent having to pick it up. “Generally the violations are from the same students,” said Jackson.

Park High School balances the punitive aspects with rewarding students for adhering to the policy. They do raffles for spirit wear and give passes for school activities and free food to students keeping the policy. They also reset the policy monthly so violations don’t stick with students.

Re-educating parents that the proper way to contact their children is through the school office was something both Principals noted. “So many parents text their children throughout the day,” they both agreed.