

Popping the Rules of Gum Chewing

Administrators and teachers have long argued that students should not chew gum in school. For decades, it has been a standard school rule that no gum is allowed. These adults have argued that students don't dispose of gum properly and chewing can be a distraction. Recently, however, studies have shown that gum chewing can help *improve* attention and focus, and when allowed, students properly dispose of gum. In fact, 65% of professional athletes report chewing gum before or during a game in order to relieve stress. Maybe it is time we re-examine our no-gum-chewing policy.

According to the National Institute of Health, chewing gum can reduce anxiety and tiredness. Students who chew gum report feeling more relaxed and alert. And 65% of professional athletes report chewing gum before or during a game in order to relieve stress. Chewing gum reduces cortisol levels which improves an individual's mood. Improved alertness and a more relaxed state improves memory and student's performance. Through his research, Dr. Kenneth Allen, a professor at New York University, has proven that chewing gum releases insulin, which improves brain function and memory. It's hard to argue against the improved attention and mood that chewing gum can create.

The biggest reason teachers and administrators argue against gum chewing is because they think it is rude, distracting, and messy. If gum were allowed in school, students wouldn't feel the need to be sneaky and stick it on furniture. Students wouldn't have to risk getting in trouble and instead would dispose of it properly. Many teachers have reported seeing a decrease in gum spreading on furniture when they started allowing students to have it in the classroom. Some teachers feel it is rude to chew gum while a student is presenting. A teacher can set rules and an expectation that students will spit out their gum when presenting or participating in a class discussion where they may have to speak often. In order to curb the loud gum chewing or blowing bubbles that might cause a distraction, teachers would just need to set rules regarding the proper way to chew gum. Most students will choose to follow the rules rather than risk losing the privilege of chewing gum.

Given the power that chewing gum has over memory and attention, it seems illogical that we don't allow it in school. The arguments against gum chewing can all be addressed with a few classroom rules, which is how teachers set the limits and boundaries in a number of areas for students. The academic and mood benefits should outweigh the slight risk that a student might cause a distraction by blowing a bubble in class.

Student Cell Phone Use

Teachers and administrators have debated for many years what to do with student cell phones in class. Over 75% of children aged 17 and younger have a cell phone. When cell phones first appeared, many schools adopted a “No Cell Phone” policy and would often take away student phones when they saw students using them. That policy quickly became contested as many parents didn’t want cell phones taken away and teachers found ways to utilize them in the classroom. While there are definite drawbacks to allowing students to have cell phones in class, the benefits are far greater and all schools should allow students to have their cell phones in class.

The initial reaction most schools had was to take the phones away from the students when they saw students using their phones. Many parents did not like this policy because they did not think it is the school’s responsibility to control their child’s cell phone use. Also, they want their children to have the phones in case of an emergency. Parents believe they should be the ones telling their children what they can and cannot do. In addition, many parents use cell phones as a way to get in touch with their child about scheduling and safety. One parent interviewed shared experiences of last minute changes to her work schedule and her need to contact her children through their cell phones. She said, “Cell phones have allowed working parents like me to not worry about how a message is going to get to my child. I know he has received it and knows the changes and how he is getting home.” Parents want to be able to get in touch with their children if they need to make changes to their plans or to communicate any important messages to them.



Many teachers also argue for the use of cell phones in class. Cell phone technology has improved so much that they have essentially become hand-held computers. By allowing students to use their cell phones, they have a research tool at their fingertips. For schools that don’t have enough computers and devices, personal cell phones can supplement what they do have so all students can have access to a computer. In

addition, there are many apps and teaching sites that can be accessed to enhance the learning experiences of the students. Cell phones have become a learning aid for many students, allowing them to keep track of information and have tools like a dictionary and calculator in the palms of their hands. In addition, students can stream videos and slide shows related to the content, bringing the learning to life. If we want students to maximize their learning, many teachers think schools should allow cell phones as we can easily make them the next educational tool.

Lastly, even if schools ban cell phones, students will still bring them to school. Go into any middle school or high school hallway and you will see students on their cell phones. According to the PEW Research Center, 65% of students still use cell phones even when banned. By banning cell phones, schools give teachers more work. They have to monitor student cell phone use and spend their time taking phones away and contacting parents. This time can be better spent preparing for lessons or monitoring more serious behaviors.

Those who argue against the use of cell phones claim they are a distraction and students don't use them correctly, engaging in texting while in class, cyberbullying, and cheating. While these are serious issues that do need to be addressed, these downfalls can be used as an opportunity to teach students about responsibility, consequences, and the appropriate way to use cell phones. Like it or not, cell phones are here to stay and more kids and younger kids are getting them. Therefore, it is essential that schools build cell phone use into their digital citizenship programs. Just like any other tool and content, students can be taught to use them correctly. Teachers can use this as an opportunity to teach students how to be good citizens in the age of technology.

While the debate regarding cell phone use continues, both sides can agree that there are benefits and risks to allowing students to use cell phones. Whichever side you fall on, it is hard to ignore the role cell phones play in our lives.