

No Phoney Business



Silver Lake administration bans use of phones during class

By Ethan Clark
Staff Writer

During the first assembly this year, Principal Brad Womack declared there would be no use of phones during class. A policy disallowing phone use in class was hinted at last May. Womack shared the one-to-one Chromebooks for all junior and senior high students finally pushed him to ban phone use during class.

"...we started talking about it prior to last school year. We wanted to see how the implementation of Chromebooks worked, educationally. So...once we had the Chromebooks in place, we realized that they would satisfy the educational needs of the classroom," he said.

Womack claimed phone use in class has increased over the past few years.

"I think it really has (increased), for a couple of reasons. One, is just, more students have them. Two, is students, and adults too, are so used to that instant communication...that it's kind of hard to separate when it is okay and when it's not. And so...I just think it's more of a societal thing than anything else," he said.

Womack said the increase in phone use was in part caused by him.

"...part of that was probably more from me saying to teachers, 'I'm okay if students are using them for educational purposes.' And I say the hard part for a teacher is knowing that sometimes kids have other things going on in their lives, other than school...you want to be compassionate, to allow that communication.

"And I think the big thing was the amount of issues that would come up in the course of the school year of a student who said or did something inappropriate to another student, and if you look at the time frame, it was happening in class or during school time," he

said.

Womack also said he believes phone use wouldn't have worsened if the administration hadn't implemented the new policy.

"I think it probably would've been about the same. Students are very intelligent, resourceful people, and they'll figure out the next

thing, whether that's communicating in a different way," he said.

According to a study done by Common Sense Media, 50 percent of teens feel addicted to their phone. Furthermore, one out of three families argue about phone use daily.

Junior Dawson Schwarz claimed he didn't feel addicted to his phone.

"...we have become reliant on phones over the past few years, and some people don't know when they need to put them down, but there is a difference from wanting to get a break...and being addicted.

"I have gone months without a phone, and I was okay with it. I just think the phone policy made

"...50 percent of teens feel addicted to their phone."
"...one out of three families argue about phone use daily."
-Common Sense Media



kids not want to go to class even more because the more bland they make school, the less kids are going to want to participate and try in school," he said.

Sophomore Chelbe Johnson said she felt similarly to Schwarz on the issue of phone addiction.

"I wouldn't say I am addicted to my phone...I

don't even touch the thing during school hours

and honestly have never had a desire to during those times..." she said.

Womack discussed the idea of teenage phone addiction and its impact on students.

"Yeah, I do believe it exists. I do believe, though, it exists in different levels. But I do think there are some people that, whether it's all night long or all day long, the vibration or the sound, and that constant- you know, for some people it may be a sweet tooth or a cigarette, they have to have it," he said.

Womack said excessive phone use was bad for everyone, not just teens.

"I think it can be bad for anybody, excessively. Again, I do think it's what you're doing with it, but one of the things that I notice is that in group settings, where there's less face-to-face communication going on even though they're altogether...but they're not really communicating with each other. I don't know if I would say it's 'bad' as opposed to 'sad,'" he said.

Schwarz said he used his phone during school often.

"I would use it quite often in school for entertainment if I had all of my stuff done and had some extra time, or if I needed to ask my dad something," he said.

Johnson said she didn't use her phone much at school, but used it often at home.

"I probably used my phone during school five minutes the entire year and that was to get an important text across. But at home...I use it all the time," she said.

Johnson said the new policy hadn't affected her much because of her limited phone use at school.

"This new rule has affected me pretty much next to nothing. I could care less about this rule, but I honestly might hate it when I need that five minutes," she said.

Womack spoke about the benefits of this new policy.

"My hope is that both students and teachers will focus more on the academics, instead of teachers giving students those last 10 to 15 minutes to work and someone gets on their phone. Hopefully, over time, those students will realize, 'They aren't going to let me do that anymore so I might as well get some work done,' ask the teacher a question, or something like that.

"...I don't have any evidence to say GPA's are dropping or anything like that. I just hope that we can find a renewed interest in certain academic areas because I'm forced to stay on it for longer periods of time," he said.

Womack said he saw little to no

drawbacks in this new policy.

"I don't know that there will be, necessarily, any drawbacks other than trying to get everybody used to it. There's still going to be that habit of reaching down and checking my phone. The big thing for me right now, initially, is I don't want to see students in the classroom using them... If a student pulls out their phone and looks at it really quick and puts it down, I'm not going to get all bent out of shape over that," he said.

Schwarz said he'd already been impacted negatively by the new policy and that it made him feel even more trapped.

"...we are required to be here for seven hours a day, then have extra stuff to do at home, and now we can't have that little bit of freedom that we did have. Having phones gave us a break from the constant cramming of information that we do all day, five days a week," he said.

Kathy Bartels, geometry and Algebra I teacher, previously had a rule where students were allowed to check their phones in the final

"And I hope that at some point it feels freeing..."
Bartels said.

five minutes of class. She said this rule worked, but she was okay with getting rid of it.

"It was interesting to see who was watching for those last five minutes. Most folks went ahead and followed that rule, so it wasn't a problem. Sometimes people were on their phones more than they should have been. So, I wouldn't say 100 percent of the time, but there were some times when people would use their phones when it wasn't really time to use them," she said.

Bartels shared that this new policy wasn't unexpected.

"...at my last school, we did this. So, we did that 13 years ago. So, it wasn't a surprise," she said.

Bartels claimed the switch would be hard to get used to, but the positives would eventually outweigh any negatives.

"I think at first it's gonna be really tough to get used to. But, eventually, I think it really could be positive. And the reason I say that is because I know studies show that you're more present when you're not worried about what's on the phone. That you actually get a break from all the information that you've got and you can truly get involved in what's going on in class. And I hope that at some point it feels freeing..."

"I really do hope that it's going to be positive, that people will interact more with one another face to face. People will be more in tune with what we're talking about in class. So, I'm hopeful that that's going to be, yet again, another positive for us just because we're

Kathy Bartels, high school math teacher, demonstrates the "Vertical Line Test" to a group of freshmen. (Photo by Ethan Clark)



Sophomores Lacey Best and Peyton Crump engage in their phones during lunch. (Photo by Ethan Clark)

paying more attention to what's going on and to each other," she said.

Womack also said students would have a hard time adjusting to the new policy.

"I think students, some, will have a hard time adjusting. Just because again, more of the habit than anything else. And, one of the things I said in the opening remarks...is that teachers will

engage the students at a level in the classroom that they...forget that they haven't checked their phone yet," he said.

Bartels finished by saying this new policy was helping students prepare for college.

"...I know that some students are preparing to go to college. And I know that the entrance exams...don't allow you to use your phones. But then, a lot of colleges and universities don't want you using your phones at all in class. So, for us to have you be so used to the phone calculator, and then not know how to use a calculator that's gonna be allowed outside of Silver Lake High School, I think short-changes the students," she said.

Alan Cunningham, fellow high

playing games or sharing videos. Hopefully, this will lead to more efficient teaching and learning," he said.

Cunningham shared how he planned on communicating with his players from here on out.

"I do use the phone to communicate with my players via texts. They'll be able to read texts during class breaks and at lunch. I don't want to distract them from their classes and teachers," he said.

Schwarz also shared he was shocked by the new policy.

"It was very unexpected. I kind of figured they were already 'banned' but they just didn't have strict rules on it," he said.

Schwarz said the administration's decision to implement the new policy wasn't justified.

"...if a teacher asked a student to

"They didn't need to make a whole new rule for it,"
Schwarz said.

put their phone away, 95 percent of the time they would. The other five percent of the time they would just take it away. They didn't need to make a whole new rule for it," he said.

Johnson also said the news was shocking.

"The new policy in regard to no phone use in class was, to be honest, shocking. As a student, I didn't see the problem to be too out of control, for it was a norm for our school and honestly probably across the US. The fact that phones were the equivalent to having snacks in class, it seemed a little off for the school to all of a sudden take that privilege away from students," she said.

Johnson admitted to being opposed to this rule, despite not using her phone at school.

"Even though I am not affected by this rule whatsoever, I know that this new rule is a little over the top. ...I know this has affected students' everyday routine, and I believe students should be given a little more of an answer besides, 'We don't want you on them,'" she said.

school math teacher and head boys' baseball coach, expressed a similar belief to Bartels' in terms of positives.

"I believe it will have a positive impact as it takes away a persistent source of distraction. In theory, students will be more engaged than if the phone distraction was present.

"My class will be impacted by the fact that students won't be