

## **NEA Member Polling Results: Social Media, Personal Devices, and Mental Health**

June 20, 2024

Social media and personal device use play a major and increasingly important role in the education environment. To explore their implications, including the impact our members have observed in school settings and what concerns them the most, the National Education Association conducted a survey of 2,889 members working in elementary, middle, and high schools in the spring of 2024. The survey identified concerns in four main areas: student mental health, student safety and behavior, social skill development, and learning environments. The survey also identified the policy solutions NEA members support.

As noted in more detail in the attached memo from GBAO, the firm that conducted the poll on behalf of NEA:

- **Over 90 percent of educators feel students' mental health is a serious issue at their school, and a majority say there has been a significant increase in concerns related to student mental health in the past few years.** Top contributing factors to incidents or concerns related to student mental health include social media, personal device use, and lack of mental health staffing in schools. Bullying was a particular concern in middle schools.
- **The vast majority of NEA members say that students cannot concentrate, are acting out, and are frequently absent from school.** NEA members see a lack of student motivation and negative student behavior both toward peers and educators.
- **The negative impact of student social media use troubles NEA members.** NEA members worry that student social media use leads to cyberbullying and underdeveloped social skills. The NEA polling results are consistent with recent findings by the American Psychological Association (APA), whose own concerns related to social media rest in part on youths' neurological hypersensitivity and susceptibility to social media feedback, praise, and harmful content.<sup>1</sup>
- **Educators who work in schools that allow personal device use find it very disruptive.** An overwhelming majority of NEA members—90 percent—support school policy prohibiting cell phone/personal devices during instructional time, and 83 percent support prohibiting cell phone/personal device usage during the entire school day with exceptions for things like medical or assistive-technology needs. NEA members identify educators and parents as important to the process of developing local policy on personal device use in schools, and members show little support for the federal government developing such policy.
- **NEA members voice broad support for the federal and state governments requiring social media companies to make changes to protect student safety and privacy.**

The NEA survey’s findings underscore the importance of developing strong local policies on personal device usage in schools, continuing to bring attention to the harms of social media, advocating for actionable strategies to protect the health and safety of Pre-K-12 students, and bolstering learning environments. NEA will continue to do so based on these three principles:

1. Social media companies must stop prioritizing profits over the safety and privacy of children. We are well past the time when social media companies can be trusted to do so on their own. We need federal and state laws to protect children, including an end to excessive data collection, disruptive notifications and nudges, design choices that encourage excessive use and doom-scrolling, the promotion of extremism and violence, and the facilitation of predatory behavior. For these reasons, NEA supports the federal Kids’ Online Safety Act and state-based [Age Appropriate Design Code](#) initiatives.
2. Social media companies must be transparent when it comes to the impact of their products on minors. Federal support for independent research and federal oversight of social media companies’ algorithmic practices will help protect children's health, wellbeing, safety, and privacy.
3. Educators should promote through collective bargaining and other labor-management engagement strong school-wide, locally crafted policies restricting access to personal devices during the school day. Policies should be developed in consultation with educators and parents/guardians and factor in appropriate exceptions for concerns including medical and disability-related needs. Enforcement must not be left up to individual educators and should never rely on policing or other actions that criminalize student behavior. School districts should adopt and enforce policies and clearly communicate the reasons and enforcement mechanisms to help build consensus.

For additional information, please contact the Health and Safety Program within NEA’s Education Policy and Implementation Center (EPIC): [healthandsafetyprogram@nea.org](mailto:healthandsafetyprogram@nea.org).

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<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association, “Potential risks of content, features, and functions: A closer look at the science behind how social media affects youth,” April 2024. Available at: <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/psychological-science-behind-youth-social-media.pdf>. NEA access: June 20, 2024.

To: Interested Parties

From: GBAO

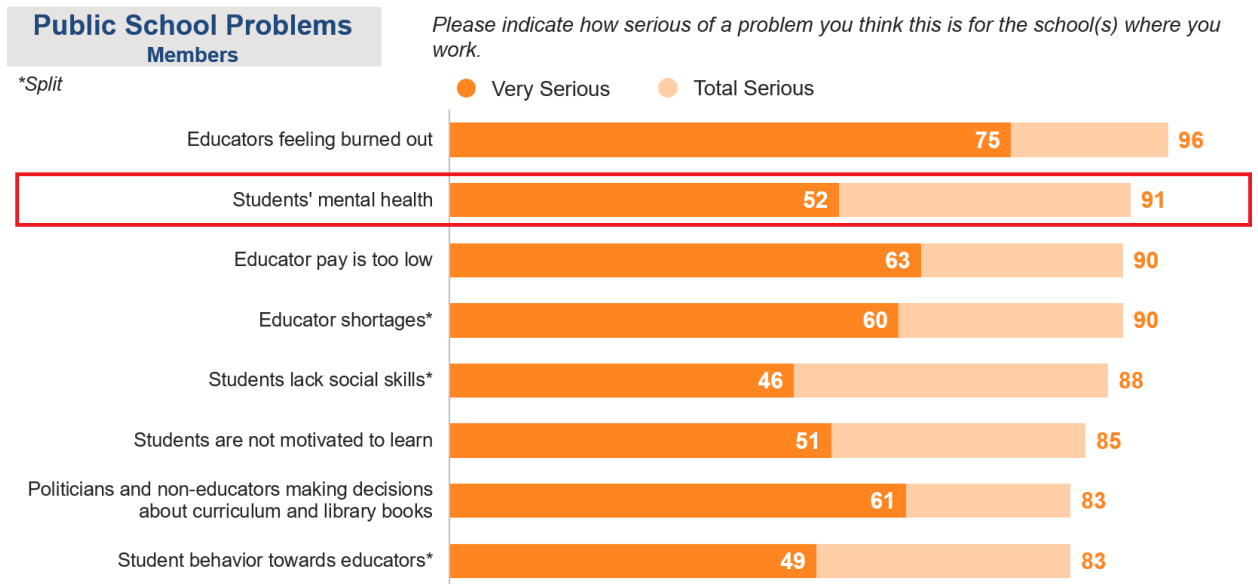
Date: April 24, 2024

### Poll Results: Student Mental Health And Social Media Use

A new survey of National Education Association members reveals that educators are very concerned about student mental health and the role of electronic devices and social media in public schools. The following are key findings from a nationwide poll of 2,889 educators who are members of the National Education Association.

#### Key Findings

- Over 90% of educators feel students’ mental health is a serious issue at their school, and a majority say there’s been a significant increase in concerns related to student mental health in the past few years.** Students’ mental health is a top concern for educators, with 52% reporting it is a very serious problem for their schools and 91% reporting it is a very or somewhat serious problem. General burnout, low pay, and educator shortages are also significant issues.



Nearly nine-in-ten educators report an increase in incidents or concerns related to student mental health in their school in the past few years, and 59% report a significant increase.

## Mental Health Direction

Darker shade = Stronger intensity

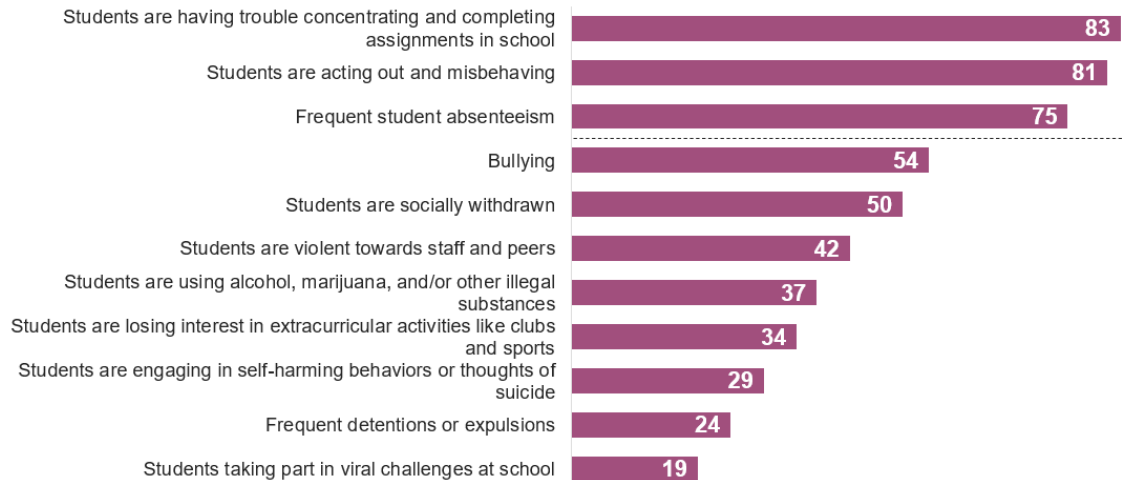
Over the past few years, has there been an increase or decrease in incidents or concerns related to student mental health in the school(s) where you work?



- The vast majority of educators say that students can't concentrate, are acting out, and are frequently absent from school.** Educators observe several different challenges facing students in school, including students having trouble concentrating and completing their assignments in school (83% say they see this), students acting out and misbehaving (81%), and frequent student absenteeism (75%).

## Student Issues

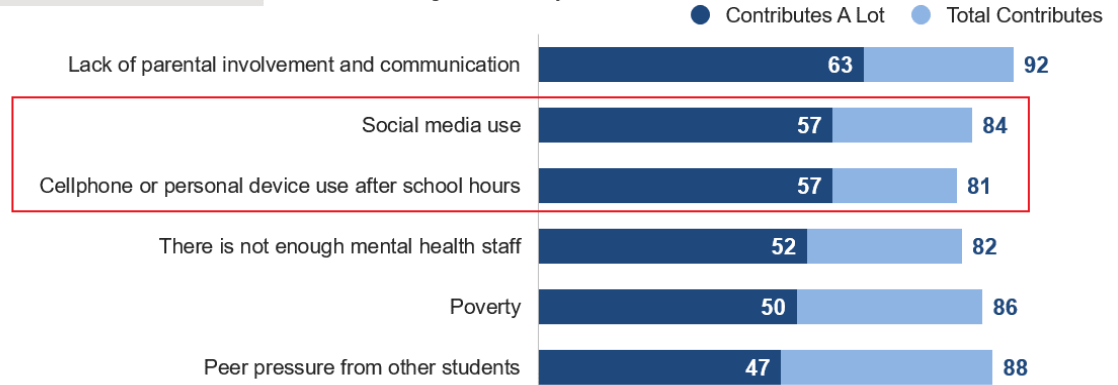
Which of the following do you see among students in your school? Please select all that apply.



- Educators cite several factors contributing to mental health issues among students in their school.** Lack of parental involvement/communication, social media and cellphone use, lack of mental health staff, poverty, and peer pressure are top contributing factors. Social media and cellphone use are top contributing factors among middle and high school educators.

## Mental Health Factors

Please rate how much each of the following factors contribute to mental health issues among students at your school.

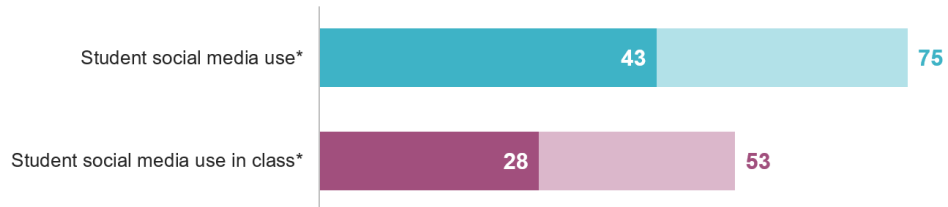


- Student social media use is also very concerning.** Three-quarters of members report that social media use is a serious problem at their school. Educators who work in middle and high schools or in schools where 50% or more of students use social media, find it even more concerning. Social media use in class is a much bigger concern among those who work in schools where students are allowed to use their cellphones between classes or where teachers set their own rules about student cellphone use or when there is no cellphone policy in the school.

## Public School Problems

Very serious Total serious

\*Split

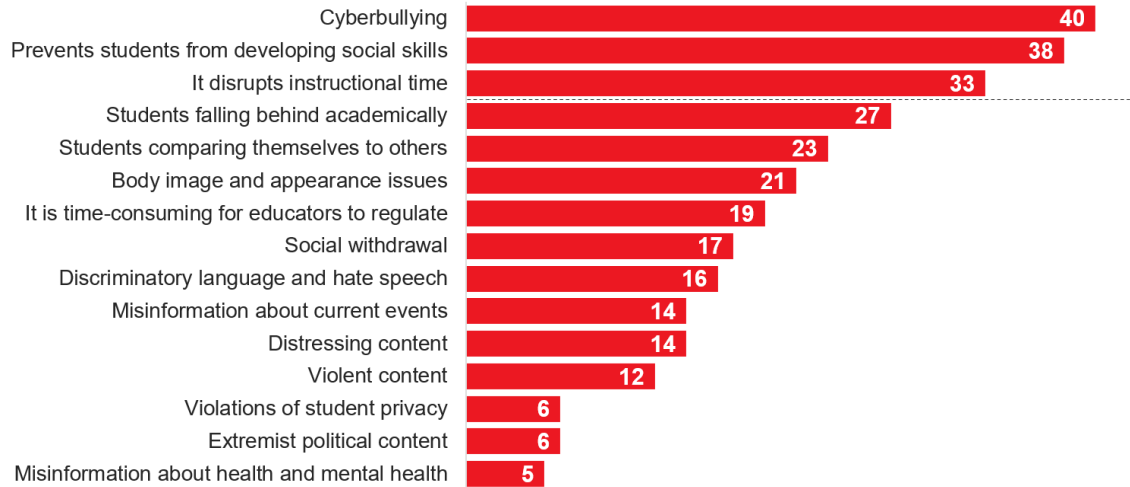


% Total Serious	% of students who use social media					School cellphone policy				
	Elem	Middle	High	Under 50%	50% or more	Store phones away	Keep phones, can't use	Use outside of class	Teachers set own policy	No policy
Social Media	59	88	90	54	89	66	78	84	83	95
Social Media In Class	27	58	82	26	70	35	49	72	74	76

Educators' biggest concerns around students using social media are cyberbullying (40%), that social media use prevents students from developing social skills (38%), and that it disrupts instructional time (33%).

## Social Media Concerns

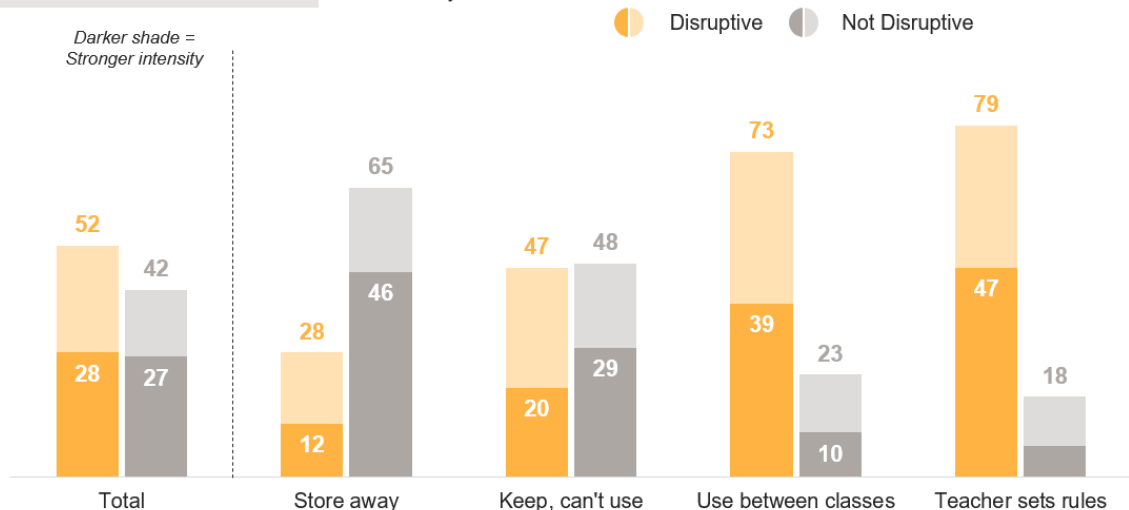
(if social media use serious problem) Which of the following concerns you most about student social media use? Please select up to three.



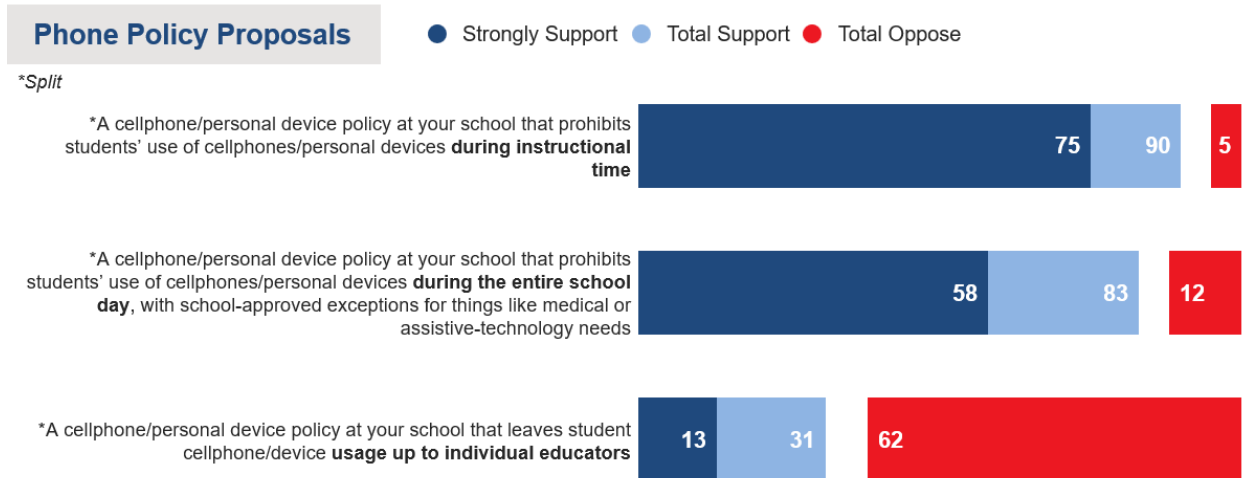
- Educators who work in schools that allow cellphone use find it very disruptive.** Educators who work in schools where students are allowed to use their cellphones between classes or where teachers set their own rules about student cellphone use are much more likely to report that devices are very or somewhat disruptive during instructional time (73% to 79% disruptive) than educators at schools where students must store their phones where they cannot access them (28% disruptive) or where students can have their phones but are not allowed to use them at any point during the school day (47% disruptive).

## Disruptive

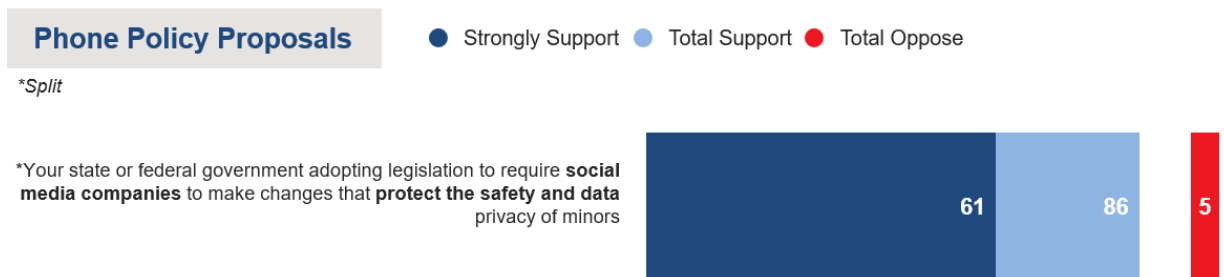
How disruptive is student use of cellphones/personal devices *during instructional time* for you?



- Members support prohibiting phones during instructional time and during the entire school day and do not want policies to be left to individual educators.** When given a list of possible school cellphone policies, members are most supportive of a proposal that prohibits students' use of cellphones/personal devices during instructional time (75% strongly support, 90% total support), followed by prohibiting cellphones/personal devices during the entire school day with school-approved exceptions (58% strongly support, 83% total support). Members are less supportive of leaving cellphone/personal device usage up to individual educators (31% total support, 62% total oppose).



- There is broad support for government requiring social media companies to make changes to protect student safety and privacy.** Educators support their state or federal government adopting legislation to require social media companies to make changes that protect the safety and data privacy of minors (61% strongly support, 86% total support).



## Methodology

On behalf of the National Education Association, GBAO conducted the nationally representative online survey of 2,889 non-retired NEA members March 4-15, 2024. The sample is subject to a +/- 1.8 percentage point margin of error at the 95 percent confidence level.