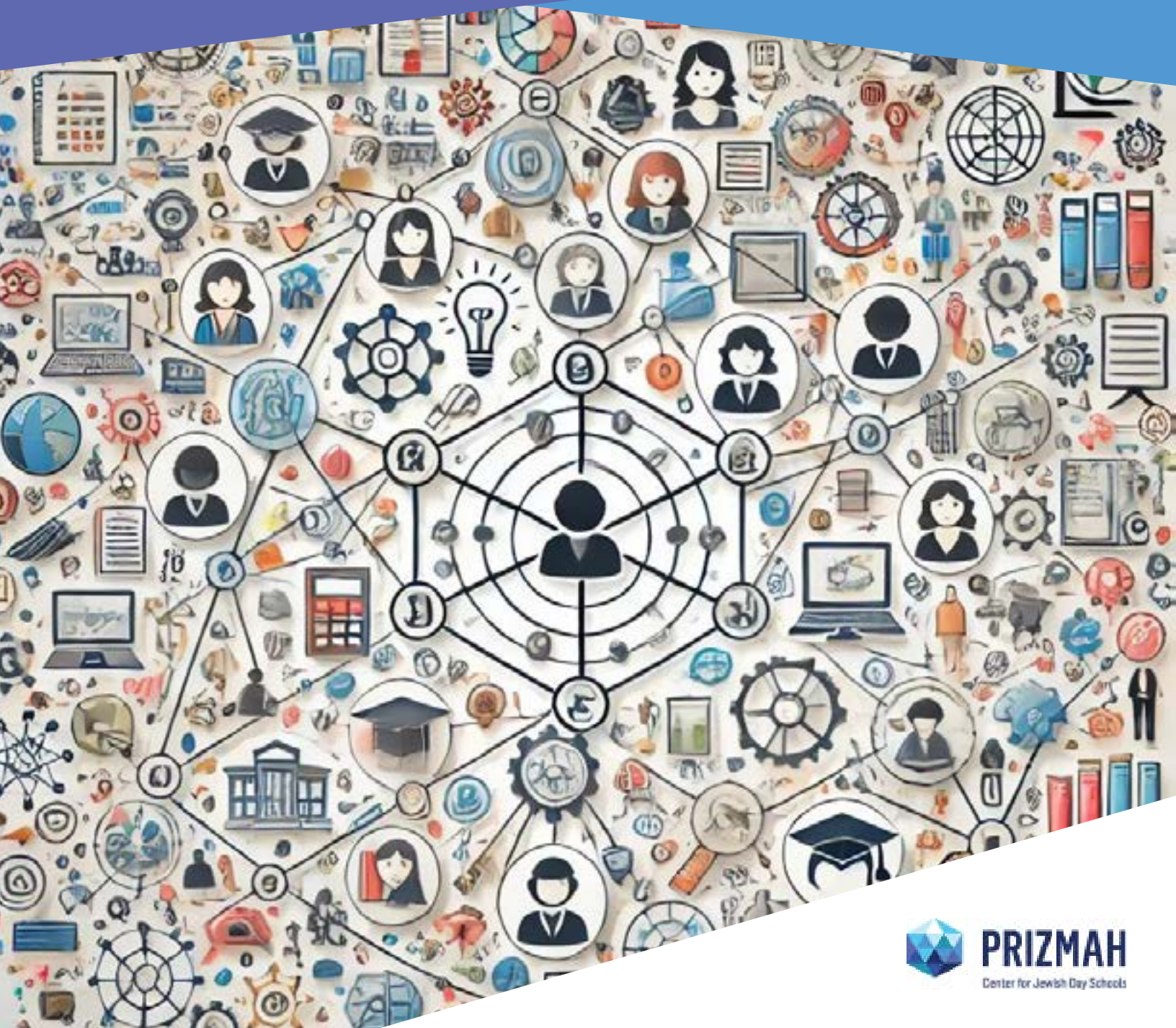


Student Cell Phone Use Trend Report

Fall 2024

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OVERVIEW

Over the past year, and particularly after the publication of Jonathan Haidt’s book, *The Anxious Generation*, student cell phone use policies in K-12 education have become a prominent topic of discussion as increasing research highlights the negative impact of smartphones on youth.

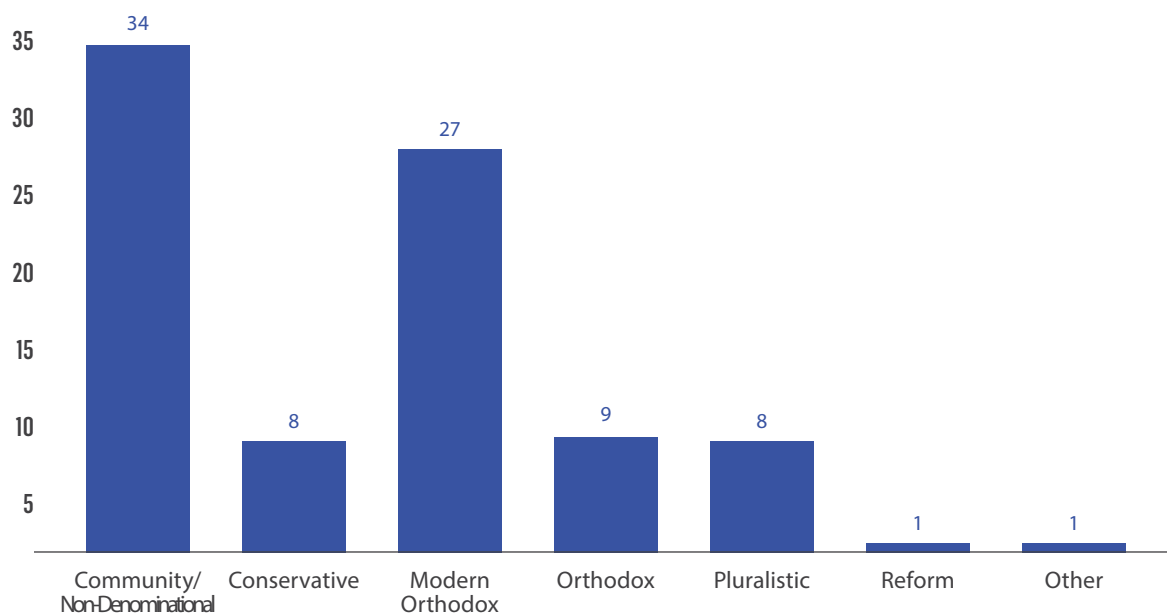
The Jewish Parents Forum, a project of the Tikvah Fund, Prizmah, and the Shefa Center, have been working together to support school leaders and community decision-making on cell phone and social media policies.

As a part of that effort, Prizmah conducted a pulse survey to gather insights into the prevalence of student cell phone policies and to understand what specific measures schools are implementing. As you will see, schools with student cell phone policies have implemented systems that reflect a spectrum of options available, from no restrictions, to limiting access to certain apps, to locking up phones during the day, to strict no phones allowed on campus, to pledges to restrict cell phone access at home.

METHODOLOGY

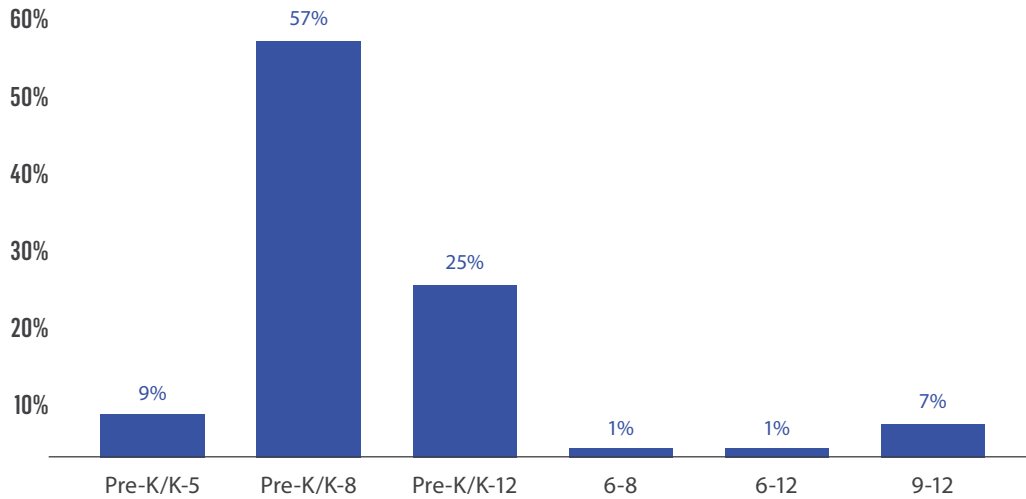
Between August 1 and August 19, Prizmah sent out an online survey to heads of school who are on Prizmah’s head of school reshnet (online community) and ed tech directors reshnet. Out of 212 schools represented in these two reshnets, we received responses from 88 schools, resulting in a 42% response rate.

School Affiliation



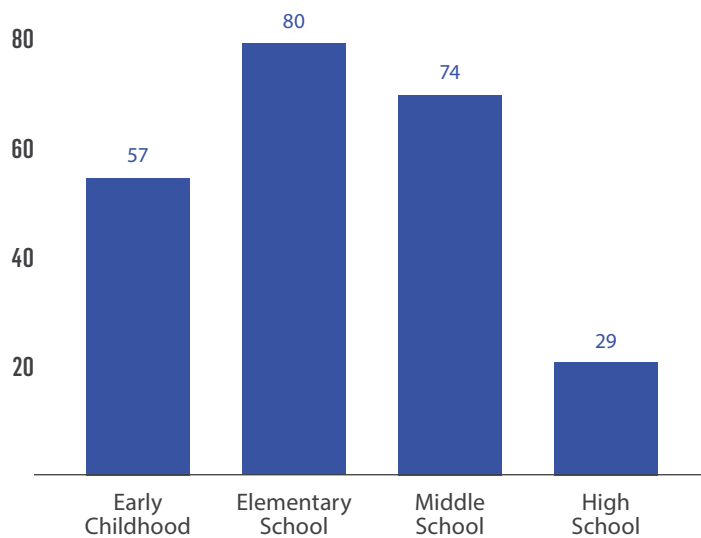
Responding schools are located across all U.S. regions and Canada, covering various enrollment sizes. Fifty-one schools (59%) identify as community, conservative, reform, or pluralistic, while 36 schools (41%) are orthodox/modern orthodox.

Grade Levels



Respondents represent a range of grade levels: More than half, 57%, serve Pre-K/Kindergarten-8th grade (50 schools) . A quarter extend from Pre-K/kindergarten-12th grade (22 schools).

Grades Served

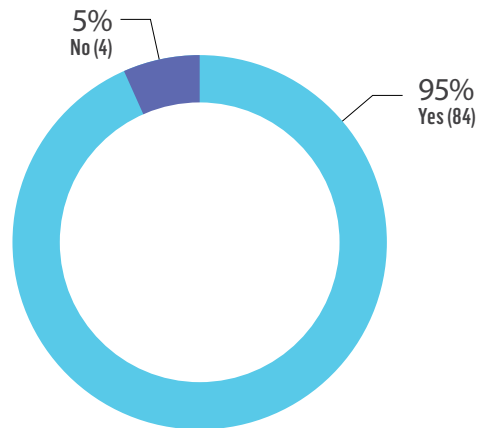


Respondents were asked to select which sections their schools serve from the above categories. The majority of respondents serve the elementary school grades and middle school grades.

The following report reflects the data as of August 2024. Schools with cell phone policy restrictions are more likely to participate in a survey on cell phone policies. These findings are specific to the 88 schools that responded and are not representative of all Jewish day schools, so they should not be generalized to the entire field. They do, however, represent the facts on the ground in the 88 schools that responded.

FINDINGS

Does Your School Have a Policy That Restricts Cell Phone Use?

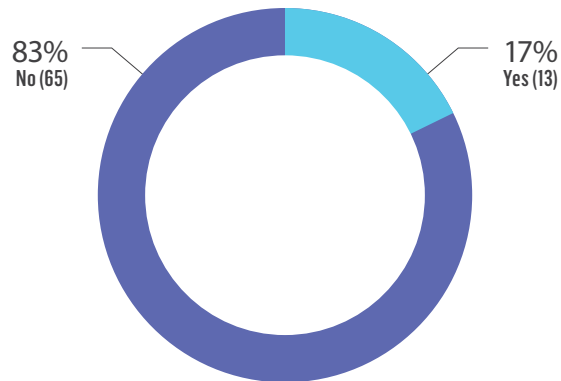


Nearly all respondents, 95% of schools, reported that they have a school policy that restricts cell phone use. As stated above, schools with such policies were more likely to respond to the survey, so this does not mean that 95% of all Jewish day schools have similar policies.

Of the schools that reported to have a policy, 60% restrict students from having their cell phones while they are on campus, and 15% are permitted to use phones at specific times. The remainder reported that students can bring their cell phones to school but must keep them in their backpacks, and/or they have different policies for their middle school students and high school students.

Notwithstanding early childhood centers, 95% of schools that reported to have a policy have it in place for their full school system from their lowest grade to highest grade. Though some schools did report having different policies for elementary school, middle school, and high school. The remaining 5% of schools reported to only have a policy in place for their oldest section of students, whether that be the middle school in a K-8 or a high school in a K-12.

Does Your School Have a Parent Pledge to Delay Access to Smart Phones Until a Certain Age or Grade?



Seventeen percent of respondent schools reported having a parent pledge to delay access to smart phones until a certain age. Three in four schools that reported a parent pledge are orthodox/modern orthodox.

Policies vary for different age groups.

THEMES FROM THE SURVEY RESPONSES

Survey responses surfaced a range of policies, decisions, and challenges. Schools reported being at different stages in the process: Smartphone policies have already been implemented, new policies will be implemented this school year, schools are considering policies, and there are those with no plans yet.

A common method among schools is to collect phones at the start of the day and return them at dismissal. Schools mentioned multiple approaches to collecting and storing phones during class and/or for the full school day. For example, one school collects phones from middle and high school students when they enter the building, storing them in a secure storage box until dismissal. Another school uses a shoe bag system in homeroom to collect phones each morning. These methods are designed to ensure that students do not have access to their phones during the school day. The [Yondr Pouch](#) was specifically mentioned as a tool for storing student cell phones.

Some schools allow limited access to phones during specific times, such as lunch breaks. For instance, 9th- to 11th-graders at one school can use their phones during lunch but must return them afterward, while 12th-graders can keep their phones all day but are restricted from using them during class without permission. Another school plans to require students to place their phones in lockers in the morning, with access allowed only during lunch. One respondent reported they used [kPhone](#) as an option to filter iPhones, restricting access to a allowlist of apps and blocking browser access.

Parent Pledges and Partnership

While parent pledge programs are not widely adopted across respondents, a few schools mentioned plans to launch these programs in the 2024-25 school year. These programs often include parent education initiatives, such as recommending resources like *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt.

Challenges

Enforcing these policies, however, has not been without challenges. For instance, one school mentioned that their middle school policy is not effectively enforced, and they are now looking at a more formal program for prohibiting cell phones in both middle and upper schools. Another high school expressed difficulty in enforcing a strict no-phone policy, noting that it is challenging to expect students to avoid using phones entirely. Conversely, some schools have found success, such as one that instituted a no-cell-phone policy last year and reported it as a “BIG success,” despite acknowledging that students still bring phones, with infractions occurring if they are seen using them.

Respondents expressed concerns about the practicality and difficulty of enforcing these policies, especially in the context of changing school culture. For example, one school noted that their new initiative might be “very difficult and possibly very messy,” particularly at the beginning. The challenge of changing an entrenched school culture around phone use is significant and requires careful consideration.

There is a growing recognition that smartwatches need to be included in broader technology policies. Some responses noted the importance of extending phone policies to cover these devices, which are increasingly used by younger students as alternatives to smartphones.