



Written Testimony

Education Policy Committee

Regarding SF508: SCHOOL CELL PHONE POLICY

7 February 2025

Chair Steve Cwodzinski and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the critical issue of device use in schools. My name is Katherine Myers, and I am a former educator of 25 years and the Executive Director and Co-Founder of LiveMore ScreenLess, a Minnesota-based organization dedicated to promoting digital wellbeing for and with young people and educators. We commend the Committee's efforts to address the challenges that smartphones present in learning environments and to extend public awareness to promote healthy use at home and in our communities. All of us desire policies that support student success and enhance wellbeing. Let's ensure we do so with fidelity and with a broad enough scope to sustain the policy and enhance the school culture.

Creating device use policies that are robust and do not further burden educators is a necessary and prudent step. However, we urge the Committee to consider a broader approach that not only limits distractions but also equips students with the knowledge and skills to practice, promote, and lead digital wellbeing practices for themselves and the community. We believe that policies should extend beyond restriction to include education, empowerment, and peer-led initiatives that foster digital wellbeing: balanced, intentional, and responsible use of technology.

Measuring Impact is Necessary

We urge the committee to consider robust evaluation of school implementation of device use policies. Let us ensure that the plans we put in place are effective, soundly measured, do not overburden educators and administrators to implement, and show desired impact on student learning and wellbeing.

Digital Wellbeing: A Necessary Foundation

Research continues to highlight the impact of digital media on youth mental health, sleep, academic performance, and social-emotional development. However, policies that focus solely on restriction without providing students with the opportunity to share their experiences and to become leaders of change are missing an opportunity to foster lasting, positive behavior change.

A digital wellbeing framework incorporates:

- **Policies & procedures** that elevate the why of the policy beyond the removal of a device



- **Facilitated Conversations** that use a researched-based strategy to provide a brave space for young people to share their experiences, to learn from their peers in community, and to allow student insights and leadership to blossom
- **Education** that supports conversations and activities, preferably peer-led for young grades, on technology's impact on wellbeing: social, emotional, mental, cognitive, & physical
- **Skill-Building** to help students develop strategies for a balanced relationship with technology that are done in partnership with peer, adults and the community
- **Peer Leadership** that equips and supports the creativity, character-development, and leadership of young people to amplify digital wellbeing in their school and community
- **Supportive Environments** that names and defines digital wellbeing as balanced, intentional, and responsible use of technology; encourages adults to be role models; and sets an aspirational goal of all young people thriving in a digital age.

Digital Wellbeing Clubs: A Peer-Led Solution

To amplify the impact of digital wellbeing efforts, we propose the establishment of Digital Wellbeing Clubs in secondary schools across the state. These student-led clubs serve as hubs for peer-to-peer education and support while creating a school culture that promotes intentional tech use.

Digital Wellbeing Clubs:

- Equip educators with digital wellbeing activities and resources to **advise** the clubs
- Provide a **structured space** for students to discuss and reflect on their digital habits.
- Train student leaders to be **digital wellbeing ambassadors**, equipping them with tools to educate their peers and younger students.
- Partner with school staff and parents to create a **holistic digital wellbeing culture** that reinforces positive behaviors beyond the classroom.

ISD 197 and Two Rivers High School has an active Digital Wellbeing Club. At a recent School Board Meeting, one of the board members commented to the club leaders who were presenting:

"My daughter came home very excited the day the Digital Wellbeing Club students visited her class. She was telling me all the ideas the high school students shared. I have been telling her those same ideas for years. But she heard it as if for the first time from her peers!"

A Whole Community, Whole School, Whole Child Approach

We are glad to see the Committee considering how best to create a statewide campaign about the effects of screen use. However, in light of the US Surgeon General's August 2024 report on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Parents, we urge the Committee to consider a campaign that is



actionable for parents and not overwhelming, anxiety-producing, or shame-based. We offer the LiveMore's Digital Wellbeing parent framework as a consideration: Listen, Limit, Lead, and Love.

MDE School Library Media Specialist Digital Wellbeing Certification

Over the past two years, MDE has funded scholarships through a federal grant for School Library Media Specialists to receive LiveMore ScreenLess Digital Wellbeing Training. This training and the resources provide a whole community digital wellbeing support: students, educators, and families. This training is a complement to a school device use policy as it provides educators and families with the background, resources, and activation to play a role in supporting young people. Secondary School Library Media Specialists serve a unique role within the school ecosystem fostering information literacy, digital competency, and lifelong learning among students, which puts them in a strategic position to expand to include digital wellbeing. In their role, they serve as educators, instructional partners, information specialists, leaders, and program administrators, ensuring that students and teachers have access to the tools and resources needed for today's digital world.

We urge the committee to consider a broader reach at the school that can sustain a policy through offering continued professional development and onboarding of new staff. A Library Media Specialist is one such way a school can support a more comprehensive digital wellbeing school culture beyond a device policy.

We believe that a comprehensive approach—one that combines thoughtful restrictions with proactive education, aspirational goals of young people thriving, and peer-led initiatives—will create sustainable change and equip young people with the lifelong skills needed to navigate the digital world in a healthy, intentional way.

Thank you for your time and consideration. LiveMore ScreenLess continues to stand ready to collaborate with policymakers, educators, and students to ensure that the approach to technology in schools prioritizes a comprehensive digital wellbeing approach alongside sound policy. We welcome any questions. Thank you for the work of this committee to support students and teachers, especially so that all young people can thrive in a digital age.

Respectfully submitted,

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P.S. Please see this WCCO news segment about a Digital Wellbeing Club.

