



Fact sheet – Cell phone rules

ERO looked at the impacts of cell phone rules. These are a few key data points from our review that may be useful for school staff discussions.

Removing cell phones benefits students

- There is increasing evidence that simply having a phone nearby can reduce attention and performance in cognitive tasks. Studies have shown that just having a phone nearby can reduce 'working memory' capacity.
- In New Zealand, removing cellphones from secondary schools has led to:
 - students being better able to focus on schoolwork (reported by around eight in ten leaders and teachers), and improved student achievement (reported by nearly two-thirds of teachers)
 - improved classroom behaviour (reported by more than three-quarters of teachers and leaders) and decreased bullying (reported by more than two-thirds of leaders).

"I love using my phone. It has everything on it. It's efficient. But with this ban, it taught me some restraint, and I would say that I am able to focus better because I can't use it. I've got to do my work now. It just taught me how to prioritise things better." – Secondary school student

Consistency from teachers matters

- Overall compliance with cell phone rules increases when schools enforce the rules across all year levels, in all areas, at all times of the day. Secondary teachers and leaders are twice as likely (2.0 times) to say their students follow the rules consistently when rules are enforced to a great extent.
- 56 percent of secondary schools report high compliance from senior students when rules were enforced in bathrooms or other out-of-sight places.
 - Schools that did not enforce the rules in those areas had 30 percent compliance.
 - There are similar differences in compliance when schools enforce the rules when moving between classes, or at break times.
- Schools that issue warnings or ask students to put phones away without confiscation see significantly lower compliance. When secondary schools tell senior students to put away their phone in response to rule-breaking, it halves the compliance of Year 12-13 students.

"Some teachers let students use their phones when the students don't have chrome books. This is very frustrating for the teachers who tell students they can't use their phones as it creates a situation where teachers are pitted against each other. Some teachers are 'nice', 'cool', or 'chill' and let students use their phones, it makes those that don't let them seem too strict." – Teacher