

Dear Middle School Parents and Students,

I am writing to let you know of a change in middle school at Webb this fall regarding cell phones. Every year in June, the entire faculty meets to discuss things that worked well during the past school year and map ideas we want to re-evaluate to better serve our students the next year. This year the decision to remove cell phones from middle school students (among full-time middle school teachers) was unanimous. As you know, two years ago, we asked students not to bring their phones to lunch or chapel. Unfortunately, building self-control in middle school is sometimes a difficult task to master and often takes years to accomplish.

We have seen cell phones become a distraction in middle school. Texting and messaging have taken away valuable class time and have led to Honor Council cases. We want to teach self-control and self-discipline in middle school so when these students are allowed to have phones in upper school they will effectively use the phone as a tool and not a classroom distraction. This was not an impulsive decision. We have discussed this decision as a faculty for two years. We have researched what other schools (both independent and public) are doing to ensure phones are not a distraction. Almost all the middle schools we researched do not allow phones during the academic day. We firmly believe in the importance of technology in the classroom and will continue to educate your children on how to safely and effectively research online for education purposes. We will do so through devices other than cell phones.

This fall we ask that your child either not bring a phone to school or leave it in his or her backpack from 8:00 a.m.-3:05/3:10 p.m. daily. If phones are out they will be taken by any Webb faculty member and returned at the end of the day. A second offense will result in losing their phone for the remainder of the week. A third offense will result in Saturday work crew. Further, middle school students are not to use upper school students' phones during the academic day. We ask that if you need to get in touch with your child that you send an email or call to the school offices of Melissa James or Mrs. Sullens. If your child needs to get in touch with you, he or she may come to our offices to make a call or email.

As you know, the author of *Unselfie*, Michele Borba, is coming to speak this fall. In her book, she explains how the addiction to cell phones has reduced empathy among adolescents. We want our middle school culture to be a caring community where students know how to talk with each other face-to-face. In Advisory, we will have monthly themes all supporting our focus for the school year, empathy. We are taking a proactive approach to educate the students with time-management, self-discipline, and empathy by removing the cell phone distraction during the day. Borba explains in her book that even the best students struggle to concentrate more than two minutes without checking their social media (p.101). Much research supports the decision to allow phones to be returned after middle school. We also aspire for the face-to-face conversations to build stronger relationships in middle school. We know some students will be upset at first, but we firmly believe that the benefits outweigh the negatives regarding this decision. We really appreciate your support. Please talk about this decision with your child at home. We also hope that you will make plans to attend Mrs. Borba's talk on September 19 at 7:00 p.m.

Our goal is to create a secure environment, advantageous to learning, and free of all distractions that hinder the learning process. I am attaching two articles you may find of interest.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cris-rowan/10-reasons-why-handheld-devices-should-be-banned_b_4899218.html

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-freed/why-phones-dont-belong-in-school_b_9666730.html

Please feel free to call me or Mr. Broadhead with any questions you have. We look forward to a wonderful year! See you in August.

Respectfully,
Tabetha Sullens '94
Middle School Head