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November 24, 2021

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Re: New Cell Phone / Smartwatch / Wireless Earbuds Policy

In an effort to ensure that we are creating optimal learning conditions for our students to reach their academic potential here at St. Thomas Aquinas Middle School, we have made the decision to implement a new school wide cell phone/smartwatch/earbuds policy. Although we recognize that cell phones have become an important component of our lives, we have noticed that cell phones have become a huge distraction to our students. In addition to the disruption to learning that cell phones are causing for our students, our administration team is growing increasingly concerned by the high number of discipline situations that we are being forced to deal with as a result of the inappropriate use of cell phones. To support our goal of creating a safe, caring and welcoming school community that is focused on academic excellence we have made the decision to ban the use of mobile phones/smartwatches/earbuds between the hours of 8:45am-12pm and 1pm-3:23pm.

This decision was not made lightly. We have done significant research into the topic to understand the issues. For example, in a recent survey (link to this survey on attached third page) in 2001, no schools banned mobile phones. By 2007, this percentage had risen to 50%, and by 2012 some 98% of the schools surveyed either did not allow mobile phones on the school premises or required them to be handed in at the beginning of the school day. Additionally, it is important to note that the high school that many of our students will attend in grades 10-12 (St. Joseph) has recently made similar changes to their cell phone policy.

Despite our efforts to help students engage in appropriate cell phone use, including digital citizenship lessons and working through various solutions, these devices continue to cause significant distraction to the point where their presence has an addictive quality. Our experience at St. Thomas is that these devices are highly distracting, are being used inappropriately, and are creating confrontations between students as well as confrontations between students and staff. Additionally, our counselling team is concerned with the negative impact that the inappropriate use of mobile devices is having on our students' mental health. The situation is further complicated by many of our students making the assumption that it is their "right" to have constant use of a device.

It is important to note that in an effort to prepare for this change in policy, we have recently purchased and put into circulation 58 new chromebooks that students and teachers are able to access on a consistent basis. These chromebooks combined with our significant supply of school owned laptop computers, desktop computers and Ipads has us well positioned to continue to meet the academic needs of your child through the use of educational technology. In fact, we now have 9 fully equipped chromebook carts in circulation within our school community.

Recently, numerous teachers within our school conducted action research projects where they asked their students to record the number of times they received notifications on their cell phone during a 47 minute period. The results that our teachers found were truly eye opening. The 8 teachers who completed this activity with their students found that a class of 25 students received an average of 1500 notifications during a

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single class period. When we consider that each notification interrupts student learning, it becomes very clear to us that this level of distraction within our classrooms needs to be addressed. As such, we will be implementing our new cell phone policy on Tuesday, November 30. On Monday, November 29th (first day of Term 2) all students will learn of our policy change through a comprehensive teacher led presentation that will explain all of our new expectations. During this class presentation, students will be provided with the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on all facets of our new policy. The basic principles are listed below, and our school website will be updated to reflect the new procedure.

### Policy

1. Mobile phones/smartwatches/earbuds should be **'off and away in lockers'** during the hours of 8:48am-12pm and 1pm-3:23pm. If any device is seen or heard during these times, the student will be asked to take their mobile phone/smartwatch/earbuds to the office. This will include devices tucked in clothing, in bags, or in binders.
2. Delivered devices will be returned to students at the end of the day in the first and second instances. Should there be a third occurrence, a call will be made home requiring a parent/guardian to collect the child's device.
3. After three offences, should this continue to be a challenge, further discipline will follow.
4. Students are still able to use their devices prior to school, during lunchtime, and after school. We would appreciate it if you would contact your child during these times.
5. In the case of any special needs or family emergencies, we have a landline that is answered from 8:00am-4:00pm.

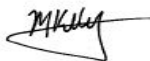
Ultimately, school is a microcosm of our wider society. Just as most workplaces have mobile phone policies in place to ensure minimal distractions during work hours, so will be our expectation within our classrooms. Knowing that certain behaviour is acceptable in some places, but not in others is an important component of growing up. Helping our students acquire this understanding will enable our students to continue to grow into socially responsible young adults. Moderation is key to enjoying the advantages that we have as citizens of Canada, and in our opinion practicing moderation is important. In fact, self-control is one of the qualities that the Holy Spirit produces in the life of a believer ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). When we are not living in moderation—when we lack self-control in a certain area of our lives—it can indicate that we are not allowing God fully into that area. Let's work together to help our children find that all things should be practiced in moderation and that includes the use of mobile phones.

Thank you for your support and if you would like to discuss this topic in more detail, feel free to reach out to any member of our school administration team.

Yours in Christ,



Ian Stang  
Principal



Mike Kelly  
Vice-Principal



Kristie McCullough  
Vice-Principal

***“High levels of smartphone use by teens often have a detrimental effect on achievement, because teen phone use is dominated by entertainment, not learning, applications,” Wired Child: Reclaiming Childhood in a Digital Age***

**USEFUL LINKS:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0xYCy2eft8>

[How Smartphones Create Distractions in the Classroom](#)

<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/18/research-shows-that-cell-phones-distract-students--so-franc-e-banned-them-in-school--.html>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/04/do-smartphones-have-a-place-in-the-classroom/480231/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/may/16/schools-mobile-phones-academic-results>

<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/691462>

<http://my.aasa.org/AASA/Resources/SAMag/2019/Jun19/Twenge.aspx>

[Majority of Teens Admit to Excessive Cellphone Usage](#)

[Harmful effects of mobile phones on students](#)