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DRAFT Minutes

Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time September 12, 2024

The fourth meeting of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time began at 4:00 p.m. on September 12, 2024. The meeting was virtual.

Co-Chairs: Principal Brian Houghton and Student Ava Gustin.

Purpose

Develop guidance/recommendations, based in research, on:

- students' personal device use in school,
- screen time and mental health, and
- parental oversight of district-owned devices.

These recommendations will be presented to the state board for consideration by November, with final action possible in December.

Introduction

Dr. Watson welcomed everyone and thanked them for the time they are giving to this critical issue.

Welcome
00:02:15

Co-Chair Ava Gustin announced that they are going to start sharing resources. Members should send items to the KSDE staff, and they will make up a resource list and send it out weekly.

Breakout groups from last week

Miss Lynn went over the breakout groups from September 5, 2024.

- Recommendations will not be a one-size fits all. Their implementation will look different based on a variety of factors, including student age, location, staff response and will require viable alternatives.
- Several groups discussed what cellphone free schools might look like in practice, and

specifically discussed what bell to bell policies would look like through implementation and enforcement.

- Screen time needs to not only be addressed by students, but by teachers and parents evaluating their own use as well. This was also discussed as a potential partnership role with bringing in the community on encouraging healthy norms for home and school.
- Several groups also discussed the implications of student devices as it relates to the recent shooting in Georgia. Some noted that students having their cell phones may cause adverse responses such as emergency lines being flooded with calls and parents rushing to school and inadvertently blocking traffic.
- Several groups also discussed *The Anxious Generation*; the loss of childhood freedom was specifically discussed.
- Recommendations need to include options – for example, one group discussed recommendations based on grade level and another group discussed making several levels of policy for a graduated approach (least to most strict).

Research on Social Media impacts based on girls/boys

Miss Lynn focused on the separate ways social media impacts girls vs. boys. Female students in middle and high school, spend much more time on social media than male students. A study from monitoringthefuture.org found starting in 2015, fifteen percent (of girls used social media more than forty hours per week. This dropped a few points in the following years but has stayed consistent. In contrast, five percent of the boys were “super-users.”

For girls, social media is connected to body image and disordered eating behaviors, and girls are more likely to be cyberbullied. Boys tend to have issues with addictive video gaming. Mental health is affected for both sexes, but more for girls. There may also be higher susceptibility in boys to radicalization and belief in conspiracy theories. Boys also are more likely to watch pornography, with one study showing that 25% of boys watch pornography daily. In addition, most teens have seen pornographic materials, one in seven children between nine and twelve shared a nude photo of themselves in 2020. This access affects both girls and boys.

Panel on Mental Health and Screen Time

- Dr. Robert Stiles, Program Director, Pediatric Public Health, University of Kansas Medical Center

Research
00:08:30

Panel
introduction
00:14:07

- Shelby Burnett, Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Worker, Basehor-Linwood School District
- Dr. Eve-Lynn Nelson, Professor, Pediatrics and Psychiatry, University of Kansas Medical Center

Dr. Stiles explained his program and how he collaborates with schools in Kansas. He believes parents and schools are strongly interested in students and the time spent on digital devices. He gave an example of a student who had his phone taken from him and he was so upset that he dropped out of school. The student felt a sense of panic not having his phone with him. Dr. Stiles explained that phones are the primary social connection. Kids have not developed pro-social behaviors and in our present culture personal devices are a replacement for in-person connection. When television first came into our modern lives, there were similar issues. The difference is that the phone/device is omnipresent. It is always with the student. Also, the images are often unexpected and inappropriate. Cyber-bullying and online relationships impact the mental and behavioral health of our children. It is always in their lives. It is extremely hard to control because a phone is in their pocket and always present.

Shelby Burnett is a clinical social work and a doctoral candidate at KU. She has worked with PreK-12. She believes a major issue with social media is that it is designed to push the attention span forward, with the viewer motivated to watch the next reel and scroll to the next post. This has changed the ability to focus, and students now have much shorter attention spans because of these fast and addictive content that they experience all the time. She also mentioned that school provided devices can be used by students in diverse ways at home, where they can log onto an “open” system.

Dr. Eve-Lynn Nelson, child psychologist at KU Medical Center, shared that from her perspective, children who have mental health concerns, from trauma, or other sources, these children are very vulnerable to the issues that personal devices can cause. How do we protect young children? How does content affect children and teens? How can we equip parents and other adults with the skills to help the child adapt, and not be overwhelmed? If a family is used to having many hours of screen time, what tools can we offer to help them use less hours?

Questions from the Task Force

Board Chair Melanie Haas asked about families handing off responsibility by using the device to parent, for instance, having a child go onto their laptop or tablet when they get home to keep them entertained. Dr. Nelson agreed this is problematic and noted that if

Discussion
with task
force
00:28:31

there are many hours a day spent on social media, there is not enough other time in the day to develop healthy practices and increase social in person skills. Dr. Stiles noted that as a nation we are struggling with developmental delays.

Parent Kim Whitman asked what the five Cs are and how to help regulate screen time for kids. Dr. Nelson answered there are many strategies to reduce screen time. Schools may help to teach these skills, and practice those during school time, but she knows in clinic if there is a family that is not used to setting limits, they try to work with those families and partner to set limits. Replacement behaviors such as family game night and outdoor activities are helpful. Change is slow, and parents need to model those changes and not spend hours on their phones. Also, if a child is not accustomed to screen time limits, a parent needs to be prepared for situations in which the child will be very resistant. The five Cs are: Child, Content, Calm down, Crowding out, and Communication.

Parent Amy Warren asked Dr. Stiles about the student who left school because his phone was taken away. She referenced collective action and feels that this needs to be extremely broad. Dr. Stiles answered that she is on the right track. All the kids needs to have similar limits and consequences. How do we create an atmosphere where less technology is accepted and supported? He stated that digital skills are important, but can we balance the other skills that are also important for student's future success. How can we prepare kids for the current world, but also balance that with skills that are not technology based, cooperative learning, music, social skills. Ms. Burnett added screentime is hard to measure, but having students collectively earn screentime together can be positive. Technology can be used as a motivator. She noted there is a lack of in-person connection between students and having constant access to screens can be damaging. However, some social media and use of the phone for social time can be connection to friends and family. Dr. Whitman noted that *social media literacy* is a vital role that parents/adults can teach as they help the child look at various online sites. With their child, they can help analyze how the site is manipulating the viewer, and help the child understand what is affecting them as they watch.

Teacher Tawna Hall asked about pornography and its mental health impact, especially on young men. She feels her male students are oddly comfortable talking in class about pornography and what they are watching. Dr. Stiles agreed this is common and noted that girls are being pressured and manipulated to do sexual things early and to send naked pictures. This access to pornography is a big change from an earlier era when it was only for people over 18. In addition, it is not just present on official pornography sites, but it is on many sites in accessible ways. There is a public health problem with the omnipresence

of pornographic imagery. In terms of mental health, being exposed to things a child is not developmentally ready for will cause harm. Dr. Stiles expressed that he is surprised that society has not pulled the alarm on this because pornography online is so omnipresent. He shared that some young men are becoming predators, in some cases they are competing to see how many naked pictures they can collect.

Student Ananya Agrawal noted we are in an era of constant screentime. How is that affecting us? Mrs. Burnett noted that many teachers do add in time for pencil and paper, but she is not aware of how that screen time is affecting students because it is so different in each classroom, and in different schools/districts. We are currently teaching through technology and the schools have been discussing limiting screentime but there are no firm guidelines.

The group then moved into the breakout rooms.

Discussion questions for all groups:

1. In what ways could school policies around personal devices be modified to better mitigate social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and addiction?
2. What should state guidance on screen time and mental health state if anything?

The notetakers will compile the suggestions and main points from the breakout room discussions and present some of those back to the whole group at the beginning of the next meeting.

Principal Houghton thanked the group and noted that the next meeting is September 19, at 4:00 – 5:30. Thank you all for being here again this week! We will see you at our next meeting on September 19th, when we will begin our discussion on parental oversight of district-owned devices.

