

Meeting Notes: Collaborating to Enhance Mental Wellness & Academic Focus in Clayton Schools

Date: July 25, 2024

Attendees:

- School District of Clayton representatives (SDC)
 1. Dr. Nisha Patel, School District of Clayton Superintendent
 2. Dr. Dan Gutchewsky, Clayton High School Principal
 3. Dr. Jamie Jordan, Wydown Middle School Principal
 4. Dr. Cameron Poole, Director of Equity and Inclusion
 5. Patrick Fisher, Meramec Elementary School Principal
 6. Luke Heitert, Chief Communications Officer/Safety & Security
 7. Jeff Puls, Chief Technology Officer
- Parent Group representatives (PG)
 1. Andrew Choquette (2 WMS, 1 GES)
 2. Anna Ives (2 WMS)
 3. Saaba Lutzeler (1 CHS)
 4. Brendan O'Malley (2 CES)
 5. Ann Marie Mohr (1 CHS, 1 WMS)

Notes:

Dr. Patel:

1. Stated that she recognizes that social media is an issue and that the school district is working to craft developmentally appropriate approaches for students.
2. BOE requested at June 5th BOE meeting that Dr. Patel study the issues presented by the Phone Free Clayton group and will make a formal recommendation at the October 9th BOE meeting.
3. In the interim, SDC will be sending out surveys, hosting focus groups, and leadership team meetings to craft an appropriate response. In September, a survey will go out to all parents, teachers and staff.
4. PG requested that a parent representative(s) be added to the survey authorship and distribution about to be undertaken by the district. PG offered to assist SDC in encouraging families to respond to the survey as PG desires to be a productive partner to SDC. PG asks that SDC to reach out to the Clayton parent community to show evidence of their intent to partner by including parents in their efforts to address this issue. Will contemplate the offer to have parent representatives be part of this effort in design, though noted efforts are already in progress.
5. At the start of the school year, clear communication of expectations will go out to parents, teachers and students from principals reinforcing the current policies and committing to enforcement of those policies.
6. Asked whether 905 signatures of petition were community members given the Change.org tracking noted percentage outside the area. Mr. O'Malley clarified that IP location where the person signed the petition is tracked, rather than where the person actually lives. For

example, if you sign the petition while in Chicago, the petition tracking will state Chicago. PG will provide the full list signatories and can confidently report that a majority are Clayton families. The remaining signatures are likely community members.

7. Indicated K-8 will have similar approach while CHS is likely different. There are different needs in each age group. Elementary students are fully supervised and devices are not an issue. WMS students start to have more autonomy. In CHS, allows the students more freedom including Greyhound Time and open campus.
8. Mac Book use by high school students was discussed. PG noted that the subtleties to any policy will need to be authored by the schools, who are intimately familiar with their day-to-day technology uses. PG highlighted that current district policy requires all Internet access to run through district-provided networks during the school day so enforcement of any personal device use needs to be monitored for compliance to the network policy.

Mr. Heitert:

1. SDC did not sign the Joint Statement signed by 44 schools in the St. Louis community because SDC did not know of it prior to its release and is not familiar with the language so is being sure it understands background on the language. Also indicated Joint Statement started as a private school initiative. SDC will continue to learn more about the statement and the background on the language to see if it is something they can sign.
 1. PG noted that the Joint Statement is a publicly available document that can still be signed via the link in the statement and that any school or school district can sign.
 2. PG also noted the inherit value in having the SDC explicitly ask for partnership from the parent community to help reduce the problem of phone distraction in classrooms.
2. Any policy adjustment needs to be vetted by considering feedback from the complete school community. Mr. Heitert noted that the survey feedback presented by PG group were not verifiable and important to be sure have objective data. PG noted that the back-end data is available and that the full database of feedback is available publicly on the website.

Dr. Gutchewsky:

1. Noted that it may be short-sighted to treat all student age groups the same and noted several concerns related to the way that students come and go from campus. PG noted that we believe students should have complete control of their devices any time they leave campus.
2. Expressed perspective that at CHS teachers do not have a major problem with the current policy. Noted that consistency of enforcement does vary. Certain teachers are very strict while other teachers are less strict, but overall does not have a classroom issue.
3. Certain subjects like digital photography and some science classes incorporate the use of phones in class, but noted that it is unlikely that teachers are telling students they need phones for school (which is a common student counterpoint to parents when delaying/not giving smartphones). PG asked if there were similar actionable items to WMS that could assist at CHS and how to reconcile the ask to reduce phone access from parents while still examples of use in class. A student without a phone can utilize their lab partner's phone in

science. The school has several SLR cameras for students in art to use if they do not have a phone for the very popular digital photography class.

Dr. Jordan:

1. Views the middle school as the crutch/fulcrum on phone use for students. Embracing a “know better, do better” process.
2. Noted that WMS has been evolving its policies. Students keep their phones in their backpacks for most of the day already. This fall, WMS will be removing the use for instructional purpose option with the exception of art class where students use their phones to document work.
3. Requested partnership from parents in reducing student use of social media and group texting (with the latter especially important for 6th graders) via Wait Till 8th like efforts in delaying students even having phones at all. Even though students will not be able to use their devices during the day, there is still a significant impact of these two activities from the time outside of school. PG noted already working to educate the parent community and willing to assist immediately with this more emphatically within the Clayton parent community.
4. Asked which schools and at what level of leadership were PG’s case study best practices summarized. PG noted local school principal or vice-principal level conversations as well as leadership conversations in other Midwest city school districts. PG intent was to collect elements of success case studies vs citing any particular school as one to fully mimic.

Dr. Poole:

1. Asked how PG ensuring that all perspectives are being contemplated. Noted that under-represented populations need to be included in all information gathering. PG open to additional suggestions. PG email for comment went to every teacher and every parent that lists contact in directories in the district so each family has been contacted. PG intention was to gather both supporting and dissenting opinions on the subject prior to this meeting in order to be informed and to give SDC confidence in narrative being presented. Going forward, PG will assist SDC in reaching out to all families to encourage response to SDC own surveys once surveys are released.

Mr. Fisher:

1. Noted that has not had issues at Meramec as elementary level is less common age when students have been given phone access.
2. Noted that social media is the subject of much of the research and data that has been collected on student wellbeing, not phones, and asked how PFS would address social media. PG focus on phones at school is to keep the subject narrowly focused on distraction from learning during the school day and its impact on academic performance and wellbeing. If phones are not allowed, social media is not accessible at school. PG is committed, as noted previously, to educating and advocating among the parent community to wait to give access to social media until at least the end of 8th grade.

PG:

1. Noted that our attending group was intentionally kept small and cohesive in our communication with CSD to avoid an influx of hundreds of emails and calls that would disrupt and frustrate the administration.
2. Noted that parents rising through elementary and middle school are committed to this idea in large numbers already, and these children will be coming through high school in a few short years. Change is necessary to support good habits gained through the first two stages of education.
3. Noted that there is no data showing the negative impact of removing phones from schools. If all of the current data is wrong, there is no harm done in removing phones. If, on the other hand, the data is correct then we cannot delay in protecting our children in their formative years from significant documented negative effects.
4. Noted that Yondr has been implemented in 2,500+ schools and the Yondr website already provides solutions to implementation concerns raised in today's conversation for schools with similar scenarios as SDC: public schools, open campus, implementation, emergency protocols, etc. These can also be referenced on the phonefreeclaytonschools.com website.
5. Stated phone-free schools should not be framed as a punishment or lack of trust of students to manage themselves. Phone free schools are the gift of space in the day where students can connect with other students/teachers and gain the most benefit from the resources of SDC. This outcome is evidenced in case studies from across the region and the country.
6. Noted that parent efforts will continue to focus on parent education and support of SDC policy adjustment for all schools.