



## Submission to review into the non-educational use of mobile devices in NSW schools October 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important topic. Our submission has been prepared by our President, Professor Elizabeth Handsley of Flinders University, with significant input from our Board members, especially Beth Blackwood of the Australian Heads of Independent Schools Association and Michael Nuttall of the Australian Primary Principals Association.

ACCM is a peak not-for-profit national community organisation whose mission is to support families, industry and decision makers in building and maintaining a media environment that fosters the health, safety and wellbeing of Australian children.

**ACCM membership** includes ECA (Early Childhood Australia), ACSSO (Australian Council of State Schools Organisations), APPA (Australian Primary School Principals Association), AHISA (Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia); AEU (Australian Education Union), Parenting Research Centre, Council of Mothers' Union in Australia, NSW Parents Council, SAPPA (South Australian Primary Principals Association), and other state-based organisations and individuals.

**ACCM's core activities** include the collection and review of research and information about the impact of media on children's development, and advocacy for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.

### BACKGROUND

In recent months, the issue of mobile phone usage by children has been the subject of a large amount of media coverage and commentary. Particularly focusing on the impact of mobiles on student learning, the debate offers contrasting perspectives. On the one hand, mobile phones are thought to distract students, have an impact on sleep and wellbeing, and harm relationships with family and friends; on the other, mobile phones are seen as an integral part of modern communication that can provide a valuable tool for supporting student learning.

There is no doubt that mobile phones are ubiquitous in modern times, with many children of all ages having one all day, every day. According to the June 2017 Child Health Poll, 67% of primary school-aged children and 36% of pre-schoolers and toddlers owned their own mobile screen-based device.<sup>1</sup> As children progress through school their access to mobiles devices increases. It should be noted though that, anecdotally at least, there appears to be a connection between family background (education, means, size), the age at which children have regular access to mobile phones and the capacity of those phones.

In relation to the school setting, mobile phones crept in some 15 years ago. Schools generally responded by banning their use at any time during the school day; in some places they would be left with teacher, in others they were delivered to and picked up from the office where they were securely kept throughout the day. Today, the decision as to how to manage mobile phones remains a school decision.

Some students may use a mobile phone in the context of a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) policy, though it is unlikely to be the only device on which a student works. We note that such uses of phones are outside the purview of this Review, but we suggest it is important to bear in mind that they do exist.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rchpoll.org.au/polls/screen-time-whats-happening-in-our-homes/>

## **BENEFITS AND RISKS**

Mobile phones are powerful computers providing students with access to the world wide web and all it contains. In the classroom setting and at home, they are calculators, compasses and maps; they provide the means for students to communicate internationally; they provide a ready camera, video recorder and microphone; they deliver the latest news instantaneously.

Phones also have a role to play in family and social relationships. At a time when parents are increasingly concerned with their children's welfare, mobile phones provide a ready means to communicate at any time of the day or night. In a world which many parents consider presents (daily) danger to their child, they are comforted in the knowledge they can be easily reached and can readily respond. Safety is a prime motivator and one hard to refute despite it being generally based on an unrealistic understanding of the world. Also, for some children and parents, mobile phones allow monitoring of a child's health issues. This will no doubt become more common and, again, is hard to argue against.

Questions arise, however, as to whether the corresponding instant availability of parents to their children inhibits the potential for a child to develop personal responsibility and decision-making skills, resilience in the face of danger and confidence to operate in the world in which he or she lives. There is a problem when the fears of parents fall onto the shoulders of children.

There are also suggestions that many parents themselves model sub-optimal use of phones to their children: over-use, distraction (including from engagement with the child) and 'zombie-checking' to name a few issues. Parents also report using screen-based devices to occupy their children so they can get other things done: 85% of those with children under 6.<sup>2</sup> All of this needs to be taken into account when considering the appropriate role of schools in the lives of young mobile-owners, and the role of mobiles in schools.

The best friendships are developed over time and in person through shared activities. Neighbourhoods and schools provide healthy environments in which to get to know someone or a group, build connections and share experiences. Over-reliance on mobile devices raises a risk of closing oneself off from interpersonal interaction and a concomitant loss of opportunities to play, build and ride. Communication through a device can mean that the nuances of voice, face and positioning are also lost. School policies and practices that bring children together in the classroom and on the playground are not always found in the home, particularly when the home doesn't allow wandering, a trip to the park or a long bike ride. Too often it seems that devices – mobile phones particularly – are dominating the lives of our children.

Mobile devices also raise a risk of harm to children's healthy development from social media, in which many children, unable to self-regulate, engage relentlessly. Some kinds of content, such as gaming and gambling, raise real risks of an addiction-like effect. The impact of this is significant, with studies showing increased depression, mood swings, loss of self-esteem and reduced personal empathy. Moreover, with excessive time 'jumping' from one screen or view to another in the pursuit of gratification, questions arise regarding the impact on attention span and self-regulation.

Connected with above is the solicitation and grooming that can occur through chat sites and the like. As the tragic case of Carly Ryan shows, these present considerable danger to children.

A balanced approach to life – possibly with a healthy scepticism towards some of what we see and hear through the media – helps an individual to maintain good mental health and wellbeing. There is a level of discernment required in order to manage exposure to online content. Children, particularly young children, are not always in a position to judge what is and isn't healthy; yet mobile devices make it impossible for adults to mediate children's engagement with such content. With mobile phones, parents are often in the dark about their children's usage in both time and content terms.

---

<sup>2</sup> Child Health Poll, above note 1.

Over-use is a problem in a number of ways. According to the Child Health Poll mentioned above, Australian children spend a staggering 32 hours per week on screens at home. In addition to the problems mentioned elsewhere in this submission, over-use of mobile (and other screen-based) devices can limit children's physical activity, and this is particularly problematic in a school setting, where the presence of other children presents enhanced opportunities for the energetic play that growing children need.

There may also be risks to children's development associated with electromagnetic radiation from mobile devices. This is a controversial field and varying views are held in the scientific community. However, the fact that WHO has been actively considering the impact of radiation on matters such as brain cancer<sup>3</sup> suggests that a cautionary approach may be justified.

Possibly the most unfortunate by-product of mobile phone usage is the readily available exposure to, and normalising of, anti-social and at times abhorrent behaviour. Pornography is one such experience that should not be within the realm of childhood. Where sexual practices found in pornography fall outside the range of healthy relationships, their normalisation can create risks to the wellbeing of individuals of both sexes but particularly girls and women. There are also strong concerns about hate speech, violence, animal cruelty, advertising for inappropriate products and 'thinspiration' sites, among others.

Another issue is that of cyberbullying, one that has been widely explored at academic, school, media and political levels. This will not be covered in this submission given the ready availability of resources through, for example, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and the *Bullying. No way!* website.

Finally, the protection of children's privacy when they are engaging in unsupervised online activity is a major challenge.

Having said all the above, mobile phones allow children to learn about themselves and the world. Particularly in the case of children working through their own sexuality, engagement in online communities can be a great help. Similar can be said about cultural, religious, physical and intellectual differences. While risk is real, mobile devices allow children connect with others or at least know they are not alone. Moreover, devices provide learning opportunities for classes and children to explore 'difference' so that all learn to accept and work with others no matter their background.

As to the education of children more generally, mobile phones have numerous benefits. They can effectively connect the school with home, thereby allowing the home to support the child's learning and the school to remain informed in real time about the child's progress at home. As a teaching tool mobile phones are effective, efficient and available. In addition, they allow for the student voice to be heard. Although a challenging concept this is one that supports the notion of students being fully engaged in their learning. In a classroom where the teacher manages activities with clear direction and sound expectations, individual lessons can be enhanced. However, the opposite is true where this does not happen.

There is little doubt that time on phone has an impact on learning opportunity. Concentration is necessary to work through complex and challenging problems, and phones can distract from the task at hand. There is also the propensity for children to spend too much time on their phone at home, thereby influencing study habits, play time and, most significantly, sleep habits. Lack of sleep and sleep disturbance are seen to have a detrimental effect on health and wellbeing.

Given the complex matrix of advantages and disadvantages described above, it is no surprise that schools have adopted and continue to adopt different approaches to managing mobile phone use. These range from free use to outright banning during school hours. Many primary schools require that children hand in their mobile at the beginning of each day. In some circumstances, such a policy is more in writing than in

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.who.int/peh-emf/research/children/en/index4.html>

practice, and collecting mobiles each day requires the allocation of administrative resources that might better be used for other things.

As with any question about schools, families need to figure in the picture. We mentioned above the challenges that families face, be it allowing children to explore and learn self-reliance in a world perceived to be dangerous, managing their own use of mobile devices to provide a good role model, or moderating the content that children are accessing. In addition to all that, children are growing in a world that is changing so quickly, it is difficult to be confident of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. At what age, for example, can children have unlimited access (if ever)? What are realistic levels of privacy? This, in turn, raises questions for this Review, relating to how schools can best support parents in working through such issues. They can do so at many levels, for example by inculcating healthy attitudes to mobile phones and by sending both explicit and implicit messages to all family members about what kinds of behaviour are appropriate.

Connected to this, considering the ubiquity and dominance of mobile phones in modern society, schools have a role in educating children as to how such devices should and should not be used. This role could be likened to their role in teaching children community values or interpersonal skills and manners. If children and especially teens are deprived of their phones while they are at school, they may well see the relative freedom of other situations (for example tertiary studies) as a free-for-all. Free access to, and unlimited use of, phones become equated to maturity and vice-versa. It would be better for all if young people learnt to self-regulate their phone use for their future lives, as they do with so many other behaviours in the course of their schooling.

ACCM commends to the Review the *Statement on Young Children and Digital Technologies* recently released by Early Childhood Australia (ECA).<sup>4</sup> Although it focusses, understandably, on early childhood, it is the product of an exhaustive process of research and consultation and can provide valuable insights into the actual and desirable role of technology in the education of all young people.

## **CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS**

The foregoing discussion demonstrates the multiple considerations that need to be taken into account in determining the appropriate position on mobile phone use and availability in schools. These considerations will be due different weight in different schools at different times, and talk of a total ban on mobiles in schools across the State fails to recognise this need for contextuality. One size does not fit all given the diversity there is in schools in New South Wales. This is particularly so considering the resources that would need to go into policing a ban, and the variety of other uses to which such resources could be put in different environments.

At the same time, there are a number of serious issues associated with mobile use by children generally, and particularly in schools. School communities and families should be supported to make wise and informed choices, and for that purpose ACCM recommends the Government develop the following:

- i. A simple chart with recommendations on the frequency, duration, place and time of children's engagement in different activities across a day / week, including use of a mobile phone;
- ii. Clear and practical guidelines for schools and families in managing mobile phone usage across all age groups 0 – 18yo;
- iii. Facilitated access to resources and links to materials that support families and schools dealing with cyberbullying issues, including how the bullied individual should respond; and
- iv. A parent education and awareness program.

All of the above would be helpfully supported by:

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-work/submissions-statements/eca-statement-young-children-digital-technologies/>

- v. A review of relevant research literature (we attach an appendix with references to selected recent learnings (APPENDIX A));
- vi. Collection of data on mobile phone use across age groups; and
- vii. Endorsement from key stakeholders and influencers, for example education / health ministers, e-Safety Commissioner, national principals' bodies including APPA and AHISA, professional organisations and unions.

Finally ACCM makes the above recommendations on the presumption that individual school responses to the issue would be informed by:

- viii. A full and proper consultation with the whole school community including staff, students and families.

## APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF RECENT RESEARCH

### Usage, benefits and risks

---

- Yan, Z., 2018. [Child and adolescent use of mobile phones: an unparalleled complex developmental phenomenon](#). Child Dev 89, 5–16.
- Coyne, S.M., Padilla-Walker, L.M., Holmgren, H.G., 2018. [A six-year longitudinal study of texting trajectories during adolescence](#). Child Dev 89, 58–65.
- Eisenhart, M., Allaman, E., 2018. [Text messaging in the school lives of American high school girls](#). Ethnography and Education 13, 235–253
- Vernon, L., Modecki, K.L., Barber, B.L., 2018. [Mobile phones in the bedroom: trajectories of sleep habits and subsequent adolescent psychosocial development](#). Child Dev 89, 66–77.
- Kabali, H.K., et al 2015. [Exposure and use of mobile media devices by young children](#). Pediatrics 136, 1044–1050
- Radesky, J.S., Schumacher, J., Zuckerman, B., 2015. [Mobile and Interactive Media use by young children: The good, the bad, and the unknown](#). Pediatrics 135
- Besoli, Gloria; Palomas, Nuria; Chamarro, Andres [Mobile phone use in parents, children and adolescents: Beliefs about risks and benefits](#) Volume: 36 Issue: 1 Pages: 29-39 Published: 2018
- Ibrahim, NK; Baharoon, BS; Banjar, WF; Jar, AA; Ashor, RM; Aman, AA; Al-Ahmadi, JR [Mobile Phone Addiction and Its Relationship to Sleep Quality and Academic Achievement of Medical Students at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia](#) JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN HEALTH SCIENCES Volume: 18 Issue: 3 Published: SUM 2018
- Scheroni, G., Ólafsson, K., 2016. [The mobile Internet: Access, use, opportunities and divides among European children](#). New Media Society 18, 1657–1679.
- Rice E, Winetrobe H, Holloway IW, Montoya J, Plant A, Kordic T. [Cell phone internet access, online sexual solicitation, partner seeking, and sexual risk behavior among adolescents](#). Arch Sex Behav. 2015 Apr;44(3):755-63. doi: 10.1007/s10508-014-0366-3. Epub 2014 Oct 25.
- [Prevalence of problematic mobile phone use in British adolescents](#). Lopez-Fernandez O, Honrubia-Serrano L, Freixa-Blanxart M, Gibson W. Cyberpsychol Behav Soc Netw. 2014 Feb;17(2):91-8. doi: 10.1089/cyber.2012.0260. Epub 2013 Aug 27.
- Gallimberti L, Buja A, Chindamo S, Terraneo A, Marini E, Rabensteiner A, Vinelli A, Gomez Perez LJ, Baldo V. [Problematic cell phone use for text messaging and substance abuse in early adolescence \(11- to 13-year-olds\)](#). Eur J Pediatr. 2016 Mar;175(3):355-64. doi: 10.1007/s00431-015-2645-y. Epub 2015 Oct 16.
- Smetaniuk P. J [A preliminary investigation into the prevalence and prediction of problematic cell phone use](#). Behav Addict. 2014 Mar;3(1):41-53. doi: 10.1556/JBA.3.2014.004. Epub 2014 Feb
- Davidson HC, Lutman ME. [Survey of mobile phone use and their chronic effects on the hearing of a student population](#). Int J Audiol. 2007 Mar;46(3):113-8.
- Roser K, Schoeni A, Foerster M, Rösli M. [Problematic mobile phone use of Swiss adolescents: is it linked with mental health or behaviour?](#) Int J Public Health. 2016 Apr;61(3):307-15. doi: 10.1007/s00038-015-0751-2. Epub 2015 Oct 8.
- Bruni O, Sette S, Fontanesi L, Baiocco R, Laghi F, Baumgartner E.J [Technology Use and Sleep Quality in Preadolescence and Adolescence](#). Clin Sleep Med. 2015 Dec 15;11(12):1433-41. doi: 10.5664/jcsm.5282. [Free PMC Article](#)

Chu MK, Song HG, Kim C, Lee BC. [Clinical features of headache associated with mobile phone use: a cross-sectional study in university students](#). BMC Neurol. 2011 Sep 26;11:115. doi: 10.1186/1471-2377-11-115. [Free PMC Article](#)

Bailin A, Milanaik R, Adesman A. [Health implications of new age technologies for adolescents: a review of the research](#). Curr Opin Pediatr. 2014 Oct;26(5):605-19. doi: 10.1097/MOP.0000000000000140.

Smith PK, Thompson F, Davidson [Cyber safety for adolescent girls: bullying, harassment, sexting, pornography, and solicitation](#). J.Curr Opin Obstet Gynecol. 2014 Oct;26(5):360-5. doi: 10.1097/GCO.0000000000000106. Review.

[Peter K. Smith](#) [Jess Mahdavi](#) [Manuel Carvalho](#) [Sonja Fisher](#) [Shanette Russell](#) [Neil Tippett](#) Cyberbullying: its nature and impact in secondary school pupils First published: 19 March 2008 J Child Psych and Psychiat <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01846.x>

A Bianchi, [JG Phillips](#) [Psychological predictors of problem mobile phone use](#) - CyberPsychology & Behavior, 2005 - liebertpub.com ... Computers in Human Behavior, Vol. 51. The Effects of Student's Stress and Personal Relationship on Smart Phone Addiction. Journal of the Korea Society of Computer and Information, Vol. 20, No.9.

C Augner, GW Hacker [Associations between problematic mobile phone use and psychological parameters in young adults](#) - International journal of public health, 2012

### **Negative and positive effects of using mobile technologies in educational setting/ with educational impacts**

---

Grover, K., et al 2016. [Effects of instant messaging on school performance in adolescents](#). J Child Neurol 0883073815624758.

David, P. et al 2015. [Mobile phone distraction while studying](#). New Media Society 17, 1661–1679.

Uncapher, Melina R.; Lin, Lin; Rosen, Larry D.; et al. [Media Multitasking and Cognitive, Psychological, Neural, and Learning Differences PEDIATRICS](#) Volume: 140 Supplement: 2 Pages: S62-S66 Published: NOV 2017

[umoke Soyemi](#); [Oloruntoba S.A.](#); [Blessing Okafor](#) [Analysis of Mobile Phone Impact on Student Academic Performance in Tertiary Institution](#). January 2015 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308412938\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Mobile\\_Phone\\_Impact\\_on\\_Student\\_Academic\\_Performance\\_in\\_Tertiary\\_Institution](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308412938_Analysis_of_Mobile_Phone_Impact_on_Student_Academic_Performance_in_Tertiary_Institution)

[Karlins M](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Hargis E](#), [Balfour A](#). Student ethics in an era of personal entitlement. [Psychol Rep](#). 2012 Feb;110(1):144-8.

Zheng F, Gao P, He M, Li M, Wang C, Zeng Q, Zhou Z, Yu Z, Zhang L. [Association between mobile phone use and inattention in 7102 Chinese adolescents: a population-based cross-sectional study](#). BMC Public Health. 2014 Oct 1;14:1022. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-1022.

K Clayton, A Murphy [Smartphone Apps in Education: Students Create Videos to Teach Smartphone Use as Tool for Learning](#). Journal of Media Literacy Education, 2016

### **Students' perceptions of phones in schools**

---

Torbjörn Ott Therese Haglind Berner Lindström [Students' Use of Mobile Phones for School Work](#) [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-13416-1\\_8](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-13416-1_8)

## **General views about schools' mobile phone policies**

---

[LP Beland, R Murphy III communication: technology, distraction & student performance](#) Labour Economics, 2016

Q Gao, [Z Yan](#), C Wei, Y Liang, L Mo [Three different roles, five different aspects: Differences and similarities in viewing school mobile phone policies among teachers, parents, and students](#) - Computers & Education, Vol 106 March 2017 13-25

KC Janssen, [S Phillipson](#) [Are we ready for BYOD? An analysis of the implementation and communication of BYOD programs in Victorian schools](#) - Australian Educational Computing, 2015 - researchgate.net

## **Risks of mobile phone use (from electromagnetic radiation)**

---

Foerster, Milena; Thielens, Arno; Joseph, Wout; et al. [A Prospective Cohort Study of Adolescents' Memory Performance and Individual Brain Dose of Microwave Radiation from Wireless Communication ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVES](#) Volume: 126 Issue: 7 Article Number: 077007 Published: JUL 2018 Mohammed, B., et al, 2017. [Evaluation of children's exposure to electromagnetic fields of mobile phones using age-specific head models with age-dependent dielectric properties](#). IEEE Access 5, 27345–27353.

Deniz OG, Kaplan S, Selçuk MB, Terzi M, Altun G, Yurt KK, Aslan K, Davis D. [Effects of short and long term electromagnetic fields exposure on the human hippocampus](#). J Microsc Ultrastruct. 2017 Oct-Dec;5(4):191-197. doi: 10.1016/j.jmau.2017.07.001. Epub 2017 Jul 13.

## **Teaching children to use phones well**

---

Moreno, M.A., 2017. [Your child's first cell phone](#). JAMA Pediatr 171, 608–608.



## **APPENDIX B: LINKS**

[French ban on smartphones and tablets at school](#)

[Is mobile phone use affecting children's memory?](#)

[How some Canadian teachers are dealing with mobile phones in schools](#)

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/06/24/secondary-schools-introducing-strict-new-bans-mobile-phones/>

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/31/europe/france-smartphones-school-ban-intl/index.html>

<https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/mobile-phones-in-the-classroom-what-does-the-research-say>

<https://psychopaedia.org/learning-and-development/mobile-phones-in-the-classroom-a-helpful-or-harmful-hindrance/>

<http://www.nea.org/tools/56274.htm>

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/views/analysis/great-debate-should-mobile-phones-be-banned-in-schools-851851.html>

[https://cellphones.lovetoknow.com/Cons\\_of\\_Cell\\_Phones\\_in\\_School](https://cellphones.lovetoknow.com/Cons_of_Cell_Phones_in_School)

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/2158423/combat-screen-addiction-hong-kong-schools-should-ban-mobile-phones>

<http://www.mobiletips.org.au/pages/Mobiles.in.Schools>

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-mobile-phone-ban-doesnt-make-for-draconian-tyranny/>

<https://pasisahlberg.com/kids-smart-phones-and-what-to-do-with-them/>

<https://ie-today.co.uk/Article/should-schools-ban-mobile-phones>

<http://norwaytoday.info/education/helleland-supports-mobile-phone-free-schools/>

School policies in Australia

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/mobilephones.aspx>

<http://www.whs.sa.edu.au/school-information/mobile-phone-policy>

<http://www.amta.org.au/articles/amta/Mobile.phone.guidelines.for.schools>

Overview of countries' policies

<https://ehtrust.org/schools-banning-cell-phones-classroom/>