



Engagement on Cellphone Use in Schools

Survey and stakeholder discussion analysis

May 2024

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1 - Executive Summary

From April 16 to May 3, 2024, Alberta Education engaged with parents/guardians, teachers, principals, school staff, and education partners on the role cellphone use should play in Alberta elementary, junior high and senior high schools. A total of 68,136 respondents answered the Engagement on Cellphone Use in Schools survey, and 65,505 were analyzed.

The difference between the total number of respondents and the total analyzed cases relates to a respondent's (self-identified) primary role. Since comparing results by role is a key component of the results analysis, the 2,631 respondents who did not provide an answer to this question were excluded from the analysis provided in this report. These represent 3.9% of the initial respondents.

Education partners, represented by eight stakeholder associations, also participated in virtual discussions with Alberta Education on April 22 and 23, 2024.

The primary objectives of this engagement are to provide the Government with information that will inform:

- whether students should be allowed to use cellphones in class;
- the different approaches to cellphone use that might be applied for students in different grades; and
- how potential restrictions on cellphone use might be implemented in schools.

Key observations from the survey

Cellphone usage is widespread among children, since **56.9%** own or share a cellphone. Only **37.2%** of parents/guardians are aware of the presence of a cellphone policy at their child's school.

Most respondents think students should never or rarely (**67.0%**) be allowed to use cellphones in school.

A greater number of respondents are concerned by cellphone use at school (**88.1%**). Among the concerns related to cellphone use, they are seen as negatively impacting the following:

- Academic achievement, **85.4%** of respondents.
- Number of bullying incidents, **81.3%** of respondents.
- Mental health, **92.4%** of teachers/principals/school representatives and **58.6%** of parents/guardians.
- Physical activity, **87.6%** of teachers/principals/school representatives and **64.3%** of parents/guardians.

Teachers/principals and school representatives mentioned the following about using cellphone for educational purposes:

- **63.0%** think it does not enhance students' learning experience.

The perception of the respondents on what is an acceptable level to which cellphones are used is influenced by the students' grade.

- Two thirds (**66.9%**) believe there should be different approaches to cellphone use in schools for students in different grades.
- When students reach higher grades, cellphone usage in class should be less restrictive according to respondents. **11.0%** believe it should never be used when in Grade 10 to Grade 12, compared to **59.3%** for kindergarten to Grade 3.

Those who teach deal most directly with issues related to cellphone use. We note that:

- **75.0%** never or rarely allow students to use cellphones in the classroom.
- **74.6%** never or rarely ask students to use cellphones for educational purposes.
- **78.1%** agree or strongly agree that cellphones impact their ability to teach students.
- **75.1%** agree or strongly agree that cellphones impact their ability to manage their class.

Managing cellphone use seems to be a more difficult for those teaching higher grades, compared to lower grades. This shows a tension between the general perception that the use should be more liberal as students get older and that challenges increase with age.

- Cellphone policy has to be enforced more often for higher grades. Having to enforce it at least once a day increases from **67.8%** in kindergarten to Grade 3 compared to **91.6%** for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Going forward, it will be important for policy decisions to consider the following:

- As students mature, educators and school administrators often face escalating challenges in rule enforcement; and
- Educators and administrators frequently grapple with a perceived lack of authority to implement these rules (based on stakeholder comments in the virtual discussions).

Key observations from the virtual discussions

In terms of key takeaways from the virtual discussions with stakeholders:

- Several mentioned the importance of board autonomy and flexibility in applying restrictions on cellphone use since context varies from school to school.
- However, it was also mentioned that clear guidelines and parameters coming from the province could give legitimacy and authority to schools and teachers when comes the time to enforce cellphone usage policies.
- Stakeholders also noted that restrictions could have a positive impact on students' learning and class management since it allows student to be more focused in class.
- If codes of conduct needed to be amended following a provincial policy on cellphones, some stakeholders are of the opinion that boards should be given enough lead time (3 months to a year) to make the change.

2 - Background

Currently, Alberta school authorities have the autonomy to set their own policy on how students use cellphones in schools. Policies on cellphone use vary widely across school authorities, across the country, and internationally.

Cellphones can be used as a research and learning tool, to stay up-to-date on practice or club schedules, and to keep in touch with family in case of emergency. However, cellphones can also be a distraction within an educational environment, and can sometimes be used inappropriately within a classroom or school. In recent years, Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia have all announced restrictions or bans on cellphone use in schools, with certain exceptions.

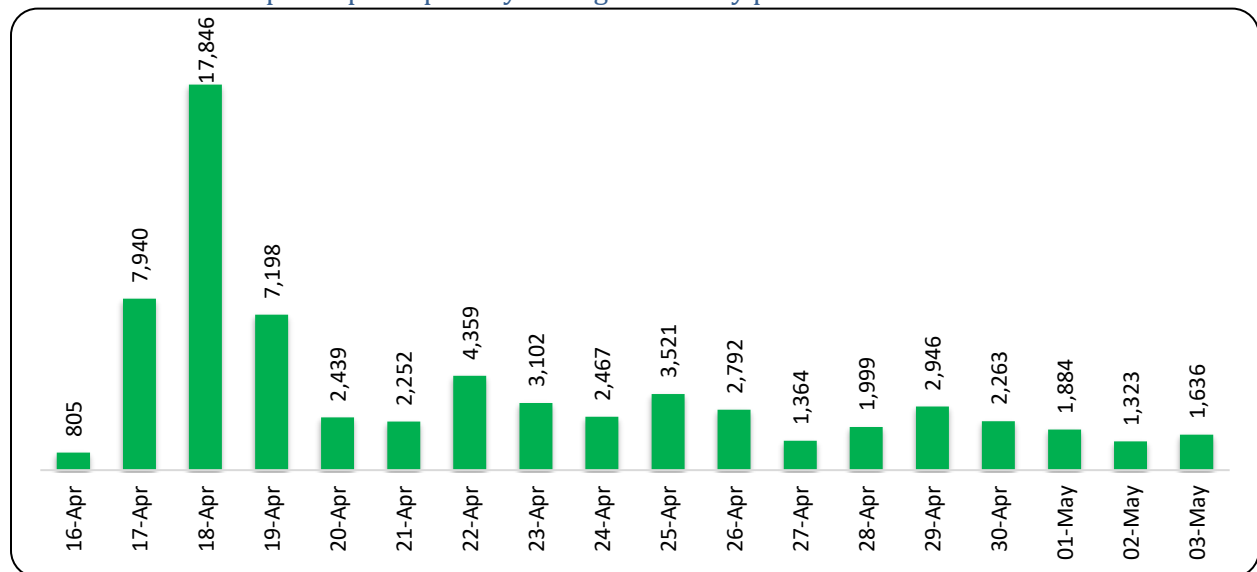
From April 16 to May 3, 2024, Alberta Education engaged with parents/guardians, teachers, principals, school staff, and education partners on the role cellphones should play in Alberta elementary, junior high and senior high schools.

- **Parents/guardians, teachers, principals and school staff** shared feedback through an online survey between April 16 and May 3, 2024. The survey included approximately 40 questions to capture information on current usage as well as perceptions on potential uses and restrictions.
- **Education partners**, represented by approximately 10 stakeholder associations, participated in virtual discussions with Alberta Education on April 22 and 23, 2024. The discussions focused on the implementation of potential restrictions or a ban on cellphone use in schools.

The primary objectives of this engagement are to provide the Government with information that will inform:

- whether students should be allowed to use cellphones in class;
- the different approaches to cellphone use that might be applied for students in different grades; and
- how potential restrictions on cellphone use might be implemented in schools.

Chart A: Number of participants per day during the survey period



3 - Limitations

Advanis, an independent market and social research firm, was contracted to analyze quantitative and qualitative input from the online survey and stakeholder discussions.

It is important to note that the data presented in this report does not aim nor pretend to present an accurate view of all Albertans. The aim of this research is to convey the diversity of views present in the target population (parents/guardians, teachers, principals, school staff, and education partners) to better understand the landscape of opinion. Results are not generalizable to the Alberta population.

4 – Method of Analysis

4.1 - Quantitative survey analysis

A total of 68,136 surveys were completed between April 16 and May 3, 2024. A breakdown of participation by self-reported role is included in Table A.

Table B: Total number of answers to open-ended questions

		Total	Language of survey	
			English	French
Parent or guardian of school aged (K-12) children		47,480	46,985	495
Teacher or Principal		10,382	10,228	154
These two categories are referred throughout this report as: School representatives	Central office administration (e.g., superintendent, central office staff)	397	364	33
	School support staff (e.g., educational assistant, counsellor, librarian, office staff)	3,213	3,197	16
	School board trustee	156	155	1
Interested Albertan		3,877	3,862	15
Not answered		2,631	2,622	9
Total		68,136	67,413	723

Question 16: Please choose the role that represents the opinions you would like to provide (e.g., your perspective as a parent or a teacher).

Those who self-reported as ‘interested Albertans’ were asked a limited number of questions, based on the survey design. Additionally, since comparing results by role is a key component of the results analysis, the 2,631 respondents who did not provide an answer to this question were excluded from the analysis provided in this report. These represent 3.9% of the initial respondents. The total number of respondents kept for analysis was 65,505.

It should be noted that the total number of responses to each question in the quantitative tables presented in this report can vary since respondents were not required to answer all questions in the survey. All the numbers presented in this report are unweighted.

4.2 - Open-ended question analysis

The online survey contained three open-ended questions, generating 107,997 qualitative responses. In consideration of the unexpectedly high volume of feedback the online survey generated, a stratified random sampling approach was applied to the qualitative analysis. This process involved selecting a random sample of 5,000 responses per open-ended question, with stratification ensuring that sufficient sample sizes were selected within each respondent role (i.e., parent or guardian, teacher or principal, central office administration, school support staff, school board trustee, interested Albertan) to support subgroup analysis.

Table C: Total number of answers to open-ended questions, by role

Role	Open-ended questions		
	Q12	Q45	Q46
Parent or guardian	47,480	<i>Not asked</i>	19,897
Teacher or Principal	10,382	10,237	5,307
Central office administration	397	381	187
School support staff	3,213	3,187	1,411
School board trustee	156	144	81
Interested Albertan	3,877	<i>Not asked</i>	1,638
Total	65,505	13,949	28,521

Question 16: Please choose the role that represents the opinions you would like to provide (e.g., your perspective as a parent or a teacher).

Question 12: Are there any other situations where students should be allowed to use cellphones in schools?

Question 45: Are there any other situations where students are allowed to use cellphones during class time?

Question 46: Is there anything else you would like to share about student cellphone use in schools?

The threshold was defined at 400 responses for each role. If the total number of responses for a subgroup did not reach this threshold, all responses were included in the analysis. If the total number of responses surpassed the threshold, responses were selected randomly, and the number of responses selected was made to represent the proportion of responses for the role. Table A presents the total of available open-ended answers and table B presents distribution of responses coded for each open-ended question by role. Given the context of the questions Q12 and Q45, respondents who were asked the question but did not provide an answer were assumed to have responded 'No'.

Table D: Randomly selected responses for coding

Role	Q12	Q45	Q46
Parent or guardian	2,942	0	2,942
Teacher or principal	705	3,453	705
Central office administration	397	381	397
School support staff	400	1,022	400
School board trustee	156	144	156
Interested Albertan	400	0	400
Total	5,000	5,000	5,000

Question 12: Are there any other situations where students should be allowed to use cellphones in schools?

Question 45: Are there any other situations where students are allowed to use cellphones during class time?

Question 46: Is there anything else you would like to share about student cellphone use in schools?

4.3 - Qualitative analysis

The qualitative part of this report is based on the transcripts of virtual discussions with the education partners and Alberta Education. The stakeholders represented by eight associations. The discussions focused on the implementation of potential restrictions or a ban on cellphone use in schools.

To extract the most important points of discussion, the discussion transcripts were divided into themes. These were analysed and paired to the quantitative data were relevant. The topics that were not covered in the quantitative survey are presented in a dedicated section.

5 - Detailed analysis

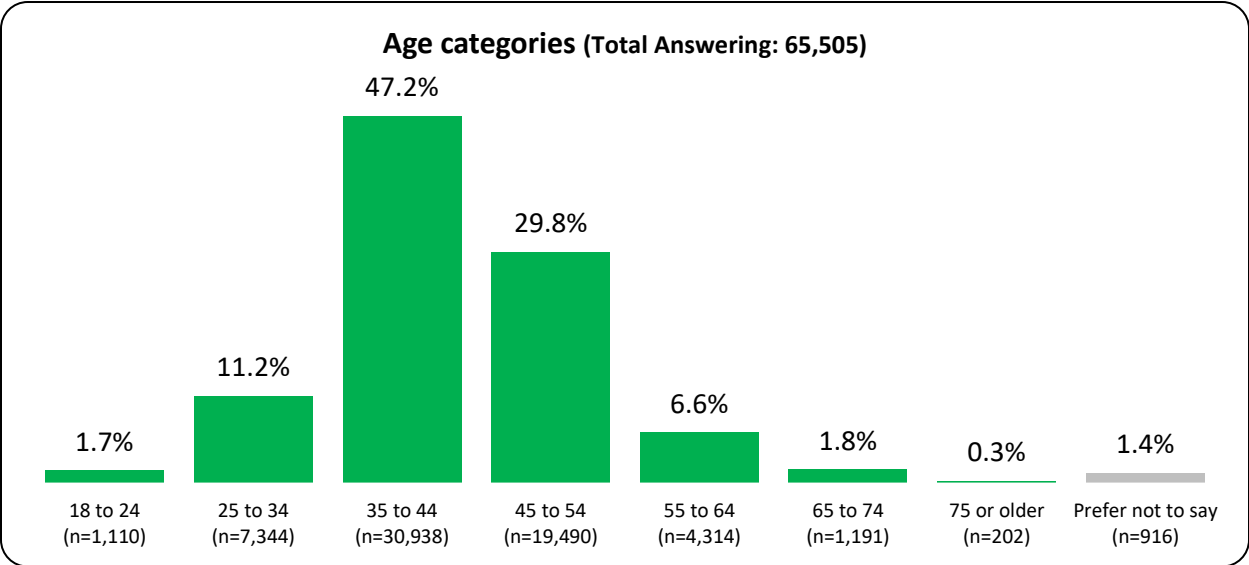
5.1 - General results

5.1.1 - Participation and respondent characteristics

A total of 68,136 surveys were completed between April 16 and May 3, 2024. Excluding the 2,631 surveys respondents who did not indicate a role with which their opinions represented, a total of 65,505 surveys from the Engagement on Cellphone Use in Schools were analyzed.

A proportion of 12.9% of respondents were between 18 and 34 years old, 77.0% were between 35 and 54 years of age, and 8.7% were older than 54.

Chart 1: Respondents by age groups (all respondents)



Question 2: How old are you?

The Calgary area is the most represented region in the survey (42.2%), followed by the Edmonton area (25.5%), Northern Alberta (11.4%), Southern Alberta (11.7%), and Central Alberta (9.2%). Though participation numbers by region are relatively aligned with the population proportions by region, it cannot be inferred that responses to this survey are representative of the Alberta general population.

Table 2: Area of residence (all respondents)

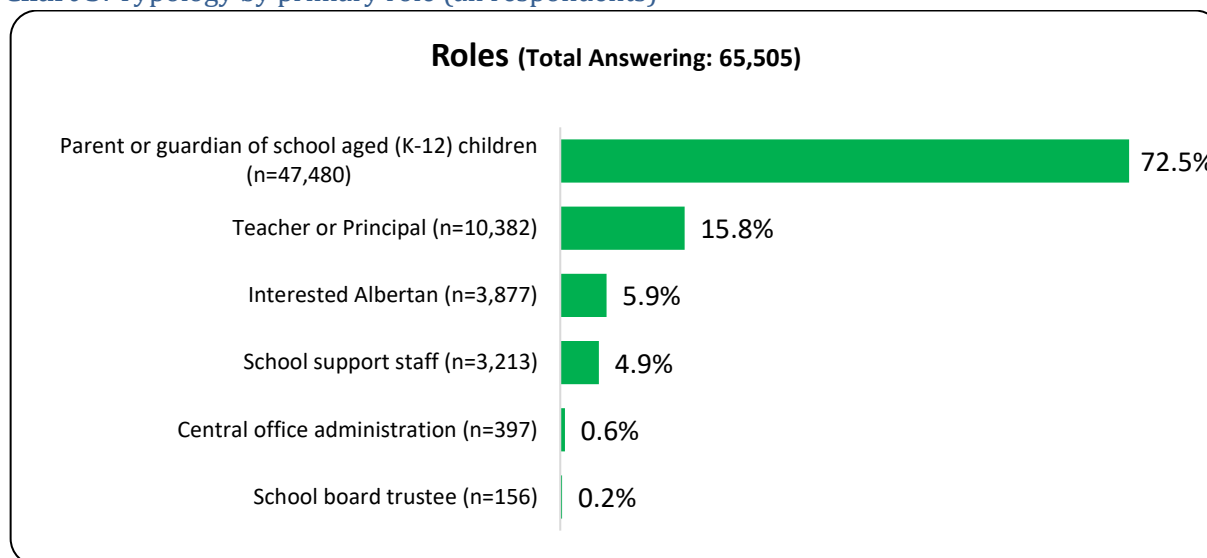
Region	Numbers of respondents	Percentages	Alberta Population ¹
Calgary area	27,318	42.2%	38.2%
Edmonton area	16,509	25.5%	34.6%
Northern Alberta	7,358	11.4%	9.5%
Southern Alberta	7,601	11.7%	8.3%
Central Alberta	5,961	9.2%	9.4%
Total Answering	64,747		

Question 1: What are the first 3 characters of your postal code?

¹ Source : Statistics Canada, Canadian census, 2021

Responses were collected among parents/guardians of school-aged children (72.5%), teachers or principals (15.8%), school support staff (4.9%), people working in central office administration (0.6%), school board trustees (0.2%), and interested Albertans (5.9%).

Chart 3: Typology by primary role (all respondents)



Question 16: Which of the following best describes your primary role?

Among the 72.5% of respondents who self-reported as parents/guardians of school-aged children:

- 46.7% indicated they had a child/children in kindergarten to Grade 3,
- 43.0% indicated they had a child/children in Grade 4 to Grade 6,
- 40.7% indicated they had a child/children in Grade 7 to Grade 9, and
- 29.6% indicated they had a child/children in Grade 10 to Grade 12.

In Table 4, the enrolment data is presented in the last column. This data gives the reader an estimate of the number of children in school in Alberta per grade. It is important to note that the parents/guardians could answer for more than one child, hence the sum of all grades exceeds 100%.

Table 4: Grade(s) of children in school (among parents/guardians)

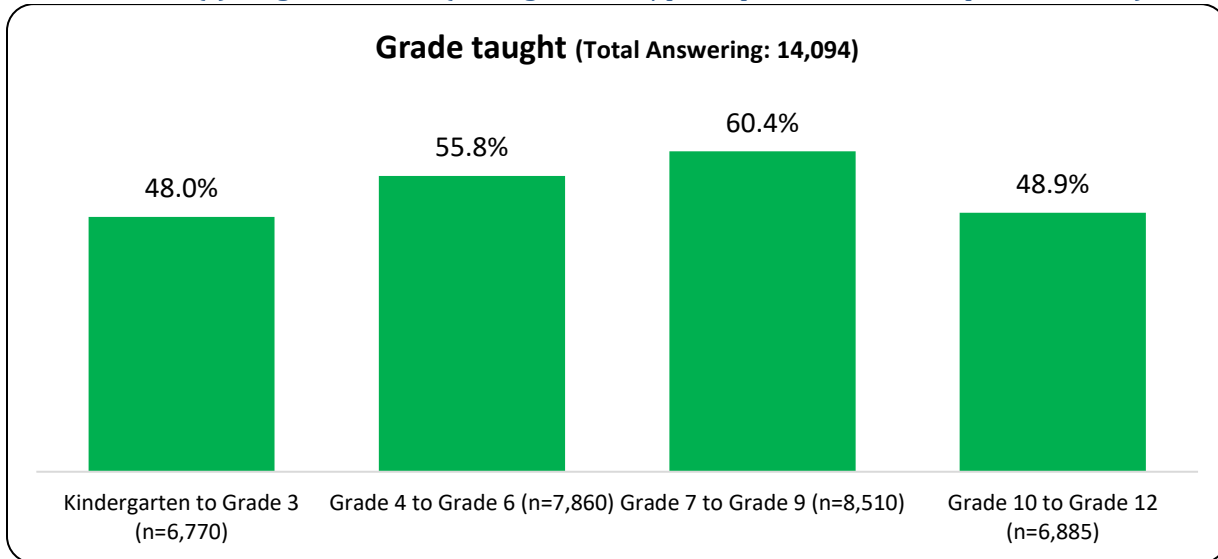
Grade of child	Numbers of respondents	Percentages	Enrolment count ²
Kindergarten to Grade 3	22,169	46.7%	247,238
Grade 4 to Grade 6	20,408	43.0%	180,236
Grade 7 to Grade 9	19,298	40.7%	179,649
Grade 10 to Grade 12	14,053	29.6%	192,915
Total Answering	47,424		808,038

Question 17: I am a parent or guardian to children in grades:

Among educators (teachers, principals, administration, support staff, school board trustees), 48.0% are in schools that teach kindergarten to Grade 3, 55.8% are in schools that teach Grade 4 to Grade 6, 60.4% are in schools that teach Grade 7 to Grade 9, and 48.9% are in schools that teach Grade 10 to Grade 12.

² Source: <https://www.alberta.ca/student-population-statistics>

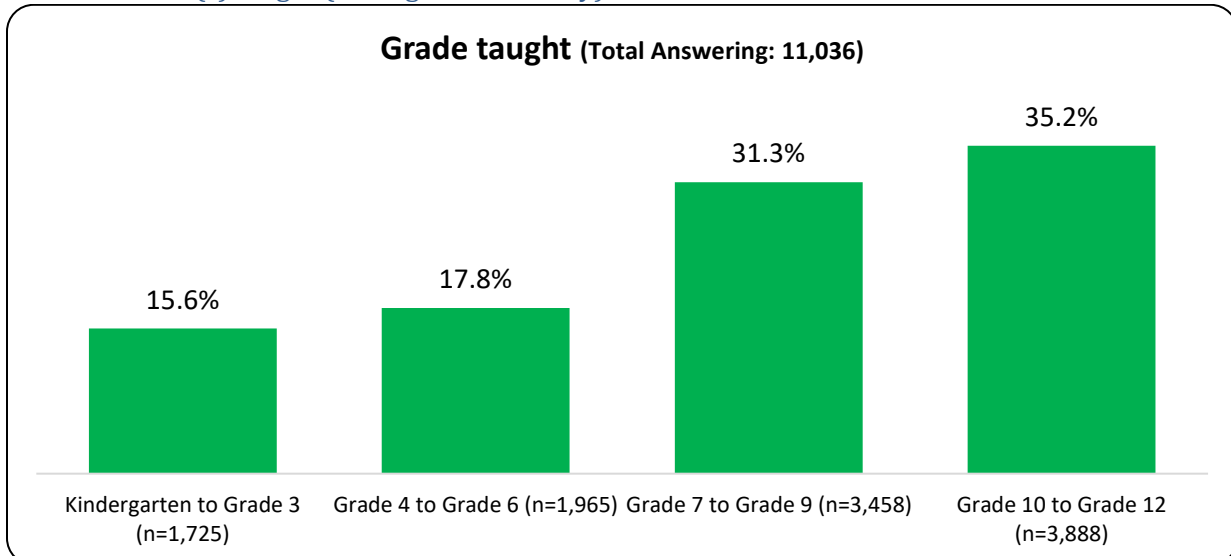
Chart 5: Grade(s) taught in school (among teachers/principals and school representatives)



Question 28: What grades are taught in your school(s)?

Among those who teach, 15.6% teach kindergarten to Grade 3, 17.8% Grade 4 to Grade 6, 31.3% Grade 7 to Grade 9, and 35.2% Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Chart 6: Grade(s) taught (among teachers only)

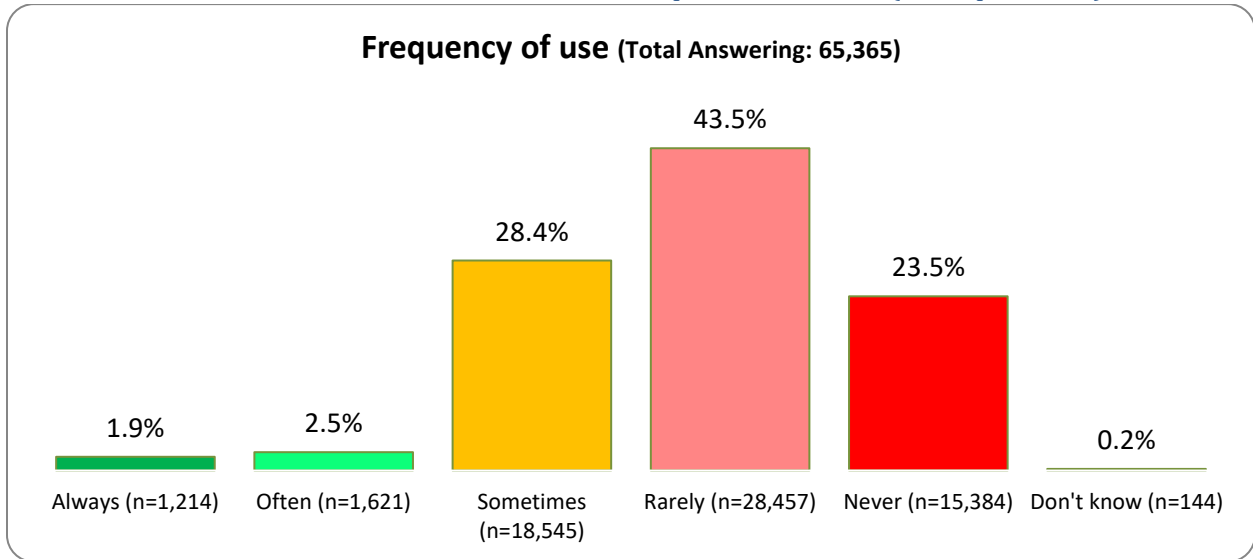


Question 36: What grade(s) do you teach (amongst those in class)?

5.1.2 - General perception of cellphone usage

Almost all respondents believe there should be at least some restrictions on cellphone usage by students in school. Most think students should never (23.5%) or rarely (43.5%) be allowed to use cellphones in school, while only a small proportion believe they should be allowed often (2.5%) or always (1.9%).

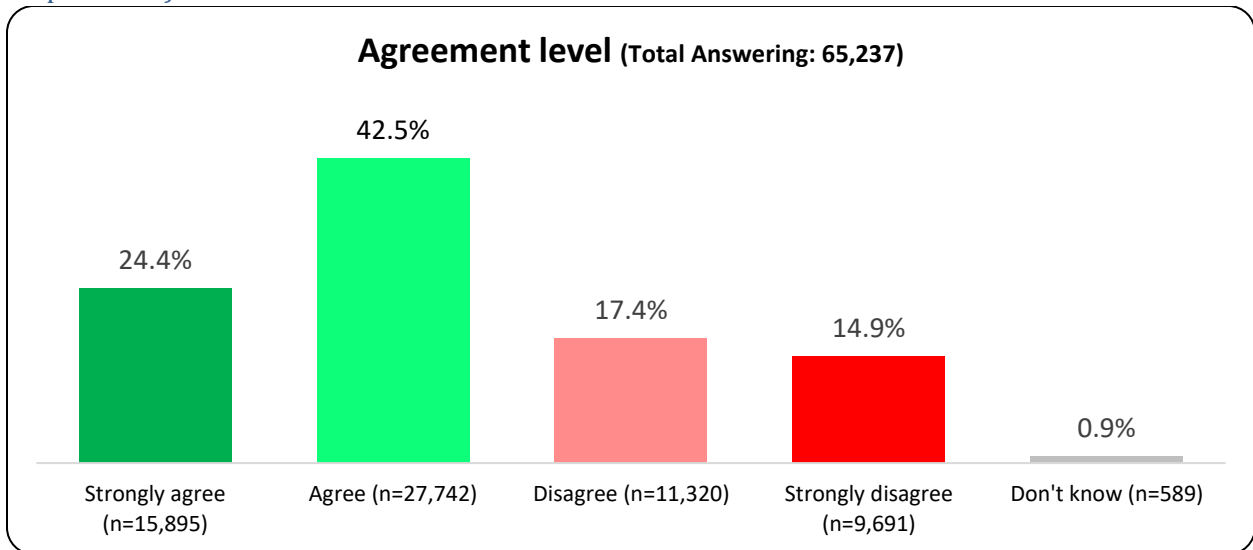
Chart 7: When should students be allowed to use cellphones in school (all respondents)



Question 5: When should students be allowed to use cellphones in schools?

A majority of respondents believe the grades students are in should be taken into account when enforcing rules, since two-thirds (66.9%) agree that different approaches to cellphone use should be used depending on the grade.

Chart 8: There should be different approaches to cellphone use for students in different grades (all respondents)



Question 7: There should be different approaches to cellphone use in schools for students in different grades.

The idea that different rules should be applied depending on the grade is reflected by the fact that when students reach higher grades, respondents tend to be more permissive of cellphone use for different situations, whereas the proportion thinking cellphones should never be used decreases as students get older.

Irrespective of grade, cellphone use in emergency situations (31.9% in kindergarten to Grade 3, up to 62.6% in Grade 10 to Grade 12) and for health or medical purposes (29.6% in kindergarten to Grade 3, up to 55.1% in Grade 10 to Grade 12) have the highest level of approval. Of note, allowing cellphone use during breaks or free time rises from a small proportion (4.5%) for kindergarten to Grade 3 to more than half in Grade 10 to Grade 12 (58.1%).

Even though both parents/guardians and teachers/principals are more tolerant of cellphone use for higher grades, teachers/principals tend to be more restrictive of cellphone usage. For example, 20.8% of teachers/principals think students should be allowed to use cellphones in emergency situations in kindergarten to Grade 3 and 48.5% believe they should be allowed in Grade 10 to Grade 12. Among parents/guardians, these numbers go from 34.1% to 66.7%.

Table 9: Situations when cellphones should be allowed (all respondents)

Reason or period that cellphone should be allowed	Kindergarten to Grade 3	Grade 4 to Grade 6	Grade 7 to Grade 9	Grade 10 to Grade 12
Never	59.3%	42.1%	19.7%	11.0%
In emergency situations	31.9%	45.3%	59.6%	62.6%
For health or medical purposes	29.6%	39.6%	52.0%	55.1%
To support special education needs	19.4%	25.9%	36.0%	40.8%
During class (directed by a teacher)	6.2%	11.5%	24.0%	32.5%
During breaks or free time	4.5%	11.0%	38.6%	58.1%
For any reasons	0.8%	1.3%	3.5%	8.5%
Total Answering	65,389	65,333	65,336	65,375

Question 8 to 11: Should students be allowed to use cellphones at school? (By grades)

- More than 50% agree with usage in this situation
- More than 40% agree with usage in this situation

Table 10: Other situations when cellphones should be allowed (5,000 randomly selected responses among all respondents)

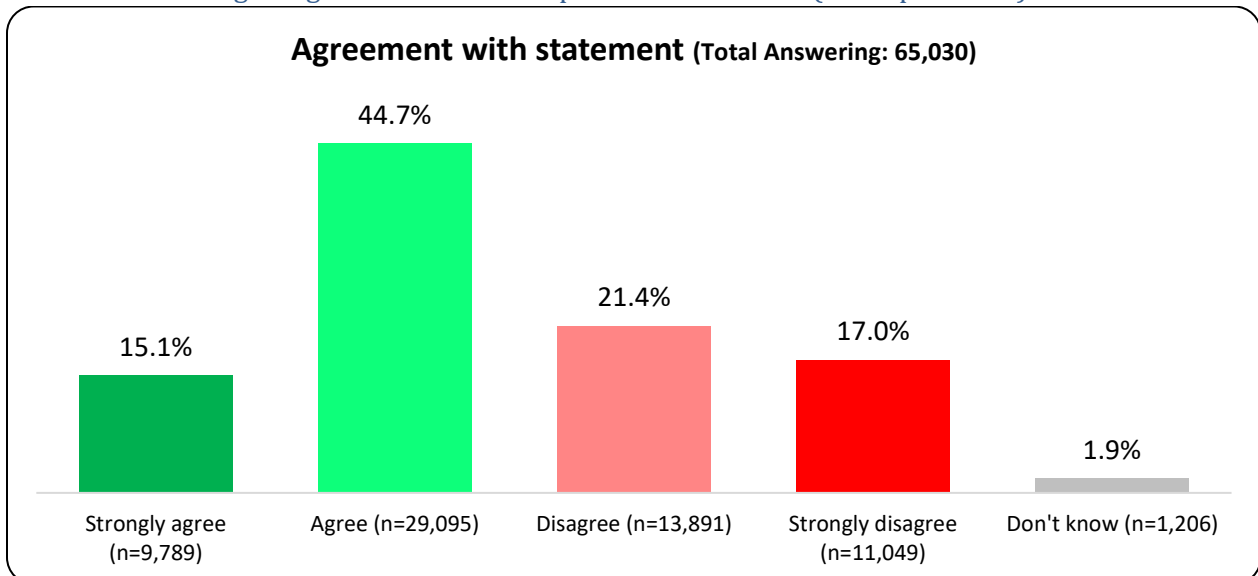
	Numbers of respondents	Percentages
No other new situations	4,557	91.1%
To contact parents/guardians	175	3.5%
Outside of school (before or after school)	135	2.7%
As tools for educational purposes/academic tasks, excluding special education needs (e.g., research, translator, calculator, dictionary)	132	2.6%
From a certain age	59	1.2%
Related to mental health (e.g., anxiety, feeling unsafe)	41	0.8%
If shortage of other technologies (e.g., shortage of laptops)	39	0.8%
During activities outside the classroom (e.g., field trips)	38	0.8%
Students must be taught/encouraged to use cellphones appropriately	27	0.5%
For special school projects (e.g., film or photography projects)	26	0.5%
For specific class activities (e.g., class polls, quizzes, Kahoot!)	25	0.5%
To listen to music when appropriate	18	0.4%

To record audio, take pictures, take videos (practical use) (e.g., take photos of work to submit to the teacher)	16	0.3%
Cellphone policy should be decentralized (e.g., let individual schools/school divisions decide)	11	0.2%
Other	48	1.0%
Total Answering	5,000	

Question 12: Are there any other situations where students should be allowed to use cellphones in schools?

Having designated areas where cellphone use is allowed outside of the school is considered a good idea by a slight majority of respondents (59.8%), but almost 4 out of 10 (38.4%) disagree with this concept.

Chart 11: Allowing designated areas for cellphone use in school (all respondents)



Question 6: There should be designated areas in schools where cellphone use is allowed outside of the classroom. (e.g., common areas, etc.)

Key observations of the “General perception of cellphone usage” section include:

- Almost all respondents believe there should be restrictions on cellphone usage by students in school.
- Two-thirds believe there should be different approaches to cellphone use in school for students in different grades.
- When students reach higher grades, respondents tend to be more permissive of cellphone use for different situations.
- Teachers/principals tend to be more restrictive when presented with situations where students could be allowed to use their cellphones.

Key observations from the stakeholder discussions about restrictions on student cellphone use:

One of the key takeaways from the online survey was that the policy should manage cellphone usage differently depending on the age of the student.

Beyond the perception that cellphone usage should be more permissive with students in higher grades, the stakeholders that participated in the online discussion mentioned that they need to be empowered, to be given authority in order to be able to manage cellphone usage at school.

“But I think one of the advantages of a restriction is that it establishes a baseline. and then I think we can look at mechanisms for empowering exceptions, as the case may be.”

Restrictions contribute to the students being more focused, without being disturbed by cellphones in class. Most stakeholders agree that cellphone usage in class is an issue. Some seem to have first-hand experience since they have observed that students are more focused and engaged in school with cellphone restrictions.

“Students are much more focused. There's a lot more engagement in terms of instruction.”

Screen time is also perceived an issue by various health authorities, including Health Canada³. Parents have an important role to play in managing their child’s screentime outside of school.

“Kids having too much screen time. These are probably generated through being much of their work that they do outside of the school.”

For these reasons, many stakeholders consider that applying restrictions can be challenging since school authorities are expected to enforce cellphones policy during school only and have limited influence on the parent’s behavior towards screen time outside of school.

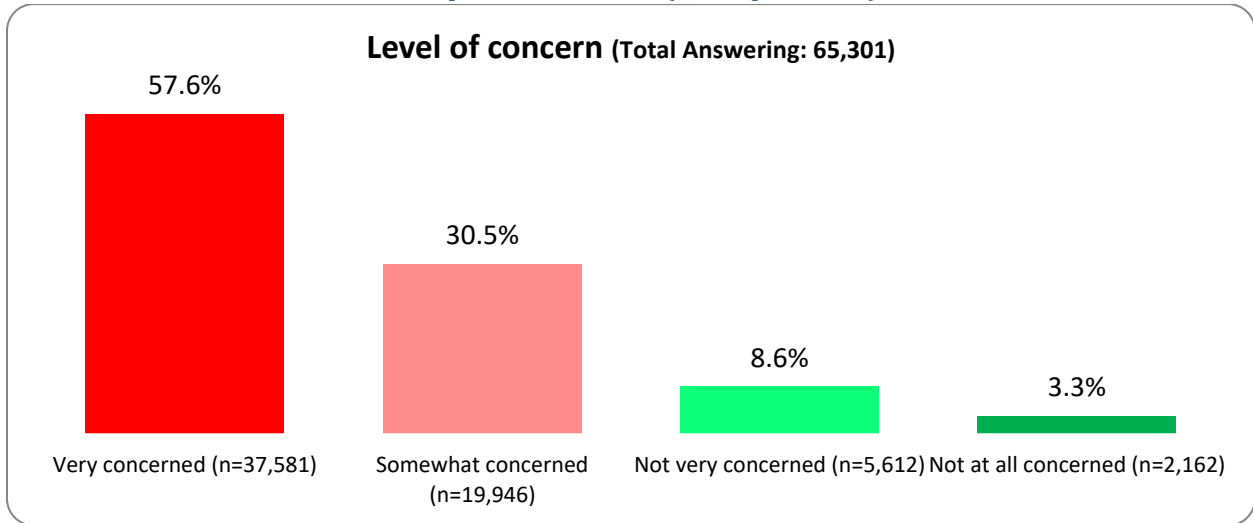
“Parents are sort of the primary educators of their children. (...) So you'd want to be very careful to consult with parents on this as well.”

5.1.3 - Concerns about cellphones in school context

Student cellphone use in school is considered an issue by most, with 88.1% of respondents being somewhat or very concerned about it. Compared to all other roles, a higher proportion of teachers/principals are ‘very concerned’ (71.4%) about this issue. For example, parents/guardians were ‘very concerned’ in a proportion of 54.3%.

³ Source : <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/screen-time-nobodys-perfect.html>

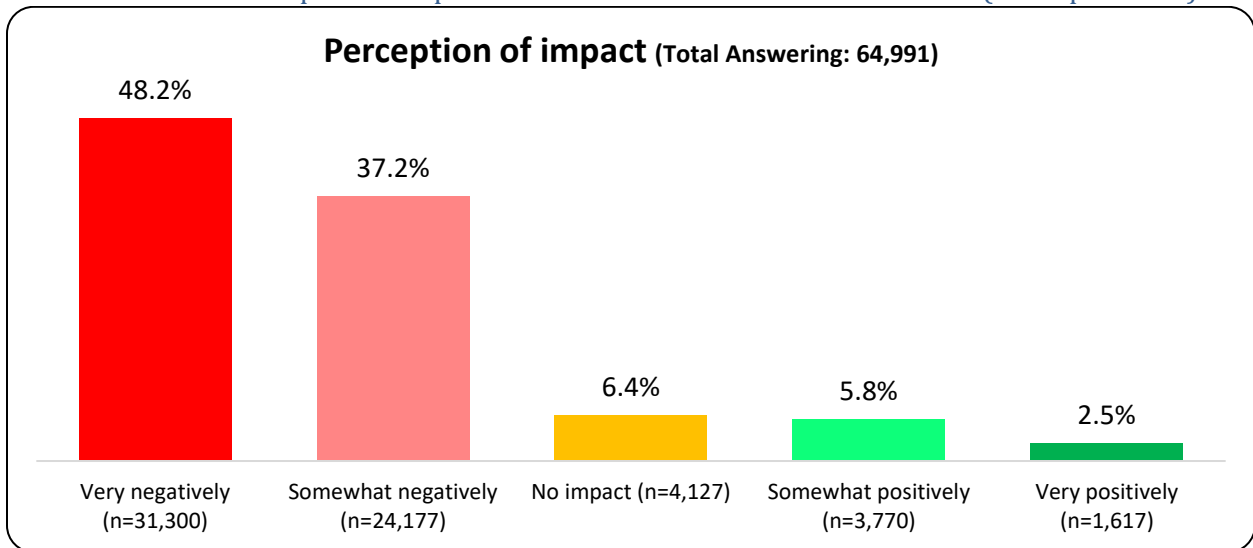
Chart 12: Overall concern with cellphones in school (all respondents)



Question 15: What is your overall level of concern about student cellphone use at school?

Cellphones are seen as negatively impacting academic achievement by 85.4% of respondents. This number rises to 93.4% when looking at teachers/principals only.

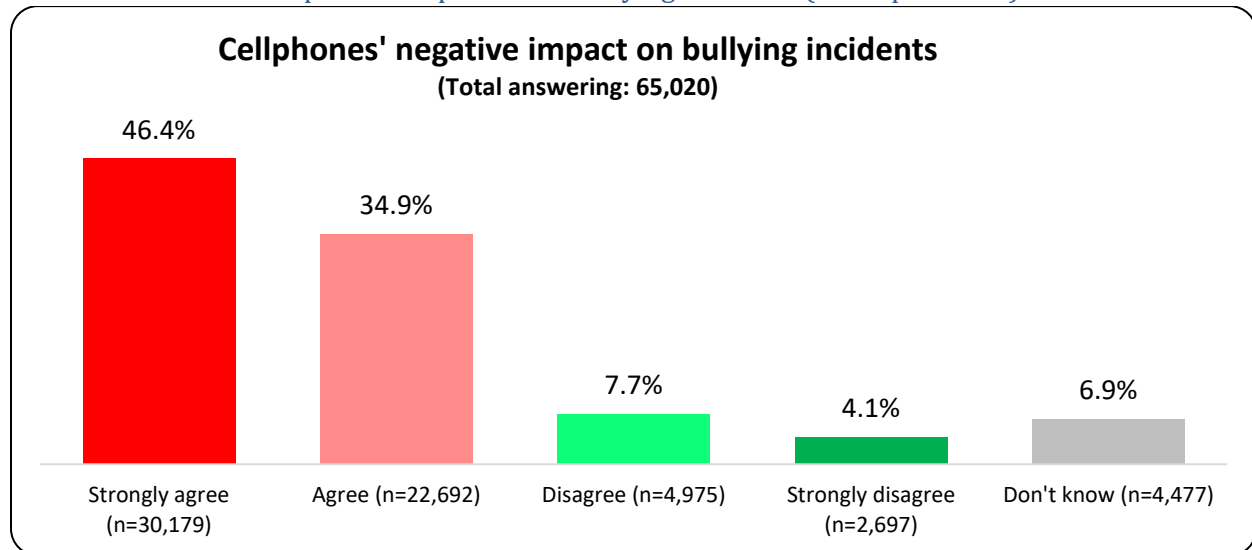
Chart 13: Perceived impact of cellphones on students' academic achievement (all respondents)



Question 13: Cellphones in schools impact students' academic achievement:

The use of cellphones in school is also perceived as increasing the number of bullying incidents. More than 8 respondents out of 10 (81.3%) share this view. Teachers/principals agree in a higher proportion than all other roles (90.4%).

Chart 14: Perceived impact of cellphones on bullying incidents (all respondents)



Question 14: Cellphones in schools increase the number of bullying incidents that occur.

Key observations of the “Concern about cellphones in school context” section include:

- Most respondents are concerned about student cellphone use in the school context.
- Cellphones are seen as negatively impacting academic achievement.
- The use of cellphones in school is perceived as increasing the number of bullying incidents.
- Teachers/principals tend to be more concerned than respondents who have other roles about the impact of cellphone usage by students in school.

Key observations from the stakeholder discussions in terms of concerns about cellphones:

The issue of addiction and mental health was brought up by stakeholders. One of the key elements that is perceived as having an influence on mental health is cyberbullying.

“Another [concern] would be regarding the impact on mental health given cyberbullying occurrences which mainly seem to happen outside of the school, but certainly do trickle over into the school.”

Indeed, many stakeholders commented on the challenge of addressing cyberbullying. The fact that it can occur outside of school limits the school’s ability to address the issue.

“Does it really solve the challenge that we're faced with, like the bullying that occurs outside the school?”

“I don't see banning the cell phones solving a problem of bullying because it's going to happen after school. And we're still going to be with the same problem.”

However, stakeholders believe that restrictions can contribute to increasing safety and reduce cases of cyberbullying.

“[With restrictions] there's less issues of cyber bullying and safety”

As mentioned previously, stakeholders consider that cellphones have a negative impact on academic achievement. Cellphones are mentioned as being disruptive to learning when used in a classroom for non-educational activities. For example, they can lead to situations where parents call students during class:

“Sometimes parents also call students during class which can be disruptive because students feel that they need to be responsive to parents and do take those calls.”

Concerns about privacy (students recording teachers, taking photos) have also been raised:

“They may be recording teachers (...) So certainly, there's a concern there, especially if the recording or photos can be altered using AI and manipulated in ways that are harmful.”

Beyond the concerns raised, stakeholders also perceived some potential benefits of cellphone usage by students in school. If used appropriately, they are seen as a tool that can help teachers pedagogically.

“They are a powerful learning tool when used appropriately as they have that capability.”

“There are a lot of apps, and a lot of ways for us to be able to connect with kids in a way that we wouldn't be able to if they didn't have access to a phone.”

Some stakeholders believe that schools have a role to play in teaching how to properly use these devices and how to develop good habits.

“I do worry that if we completely ban them, it's not going to be teaching them. How do you use it, how to use it to keep yourself organized?”

“Why would we not allow them to have that advantage, or learn how to use it appropriately when they're with us?”

A stakeholder also mentioned that cellphones can be an empowering and powerful tool that can be used for educational purposes; for example, in a fieldtrip context. But mainly, this stakeholder sees the teacher as being the best suited to make decisions.

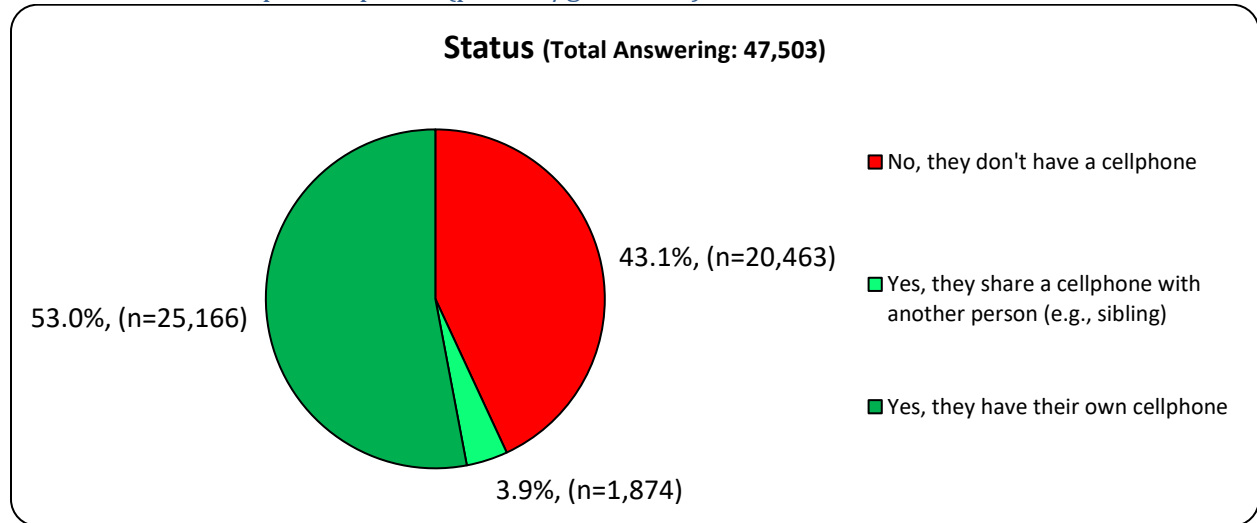
“We really believe in the professional judgment of the teacher, at times identifying some of those opportunities.”

5.2 - Perception of parents or guardians

5.2.1 - Portrait of cellphone usage

More than half of parents/guardians have a child who owns a cellphone (53.0%), whereas 3.9% have a child who shares a cellphone with someone else, like a sibling. Owning a cellphone is more frequent for children in higher grades. For example, 23.5% of parents/guardians with a child in kindergarten to Grade 3 mentioned their child owns a cellphone, while the same applies to 90.2% of parents/guardians with a child in Grade 10 to Grade 12.

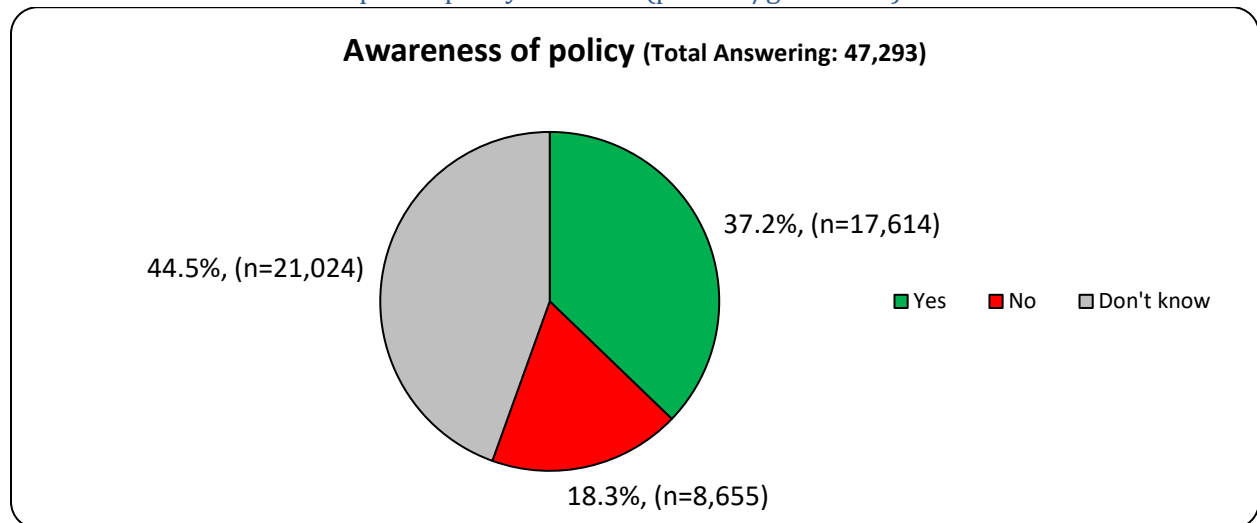
Chart 15: Ownership of cellphone (parents/guardians)



Question 20: Does your child have a cellphone?

More than one-third (37.2%) of parents/guardians mentioned that their child's school has a cellphone use policy and 18.3% mentioned it does not have one. Many (44.5%) do not know if there is a policy in place at their child's school.

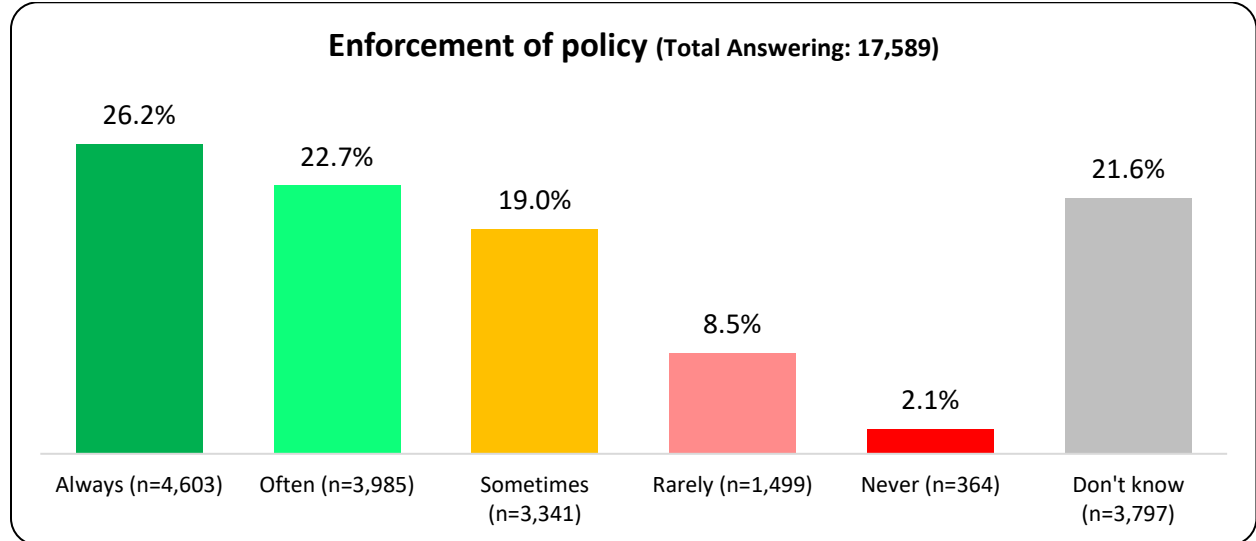
Chart 16: Awareness of cellphone policy at school (parents/guardians)



Question 18: Does your child's school have a cellphone use policy in place?

Among those who mentioned that their child’s school has a cellphone use policy, less than half (48.8%) mentioned that the policy is often or always enforced, while 10.6% mentioned it is never or rarely enforced. One in five (21.6%) parents/guardians who mentioned that their child’s school has a cellphone use policy say they don’t know if the policy is enforced.

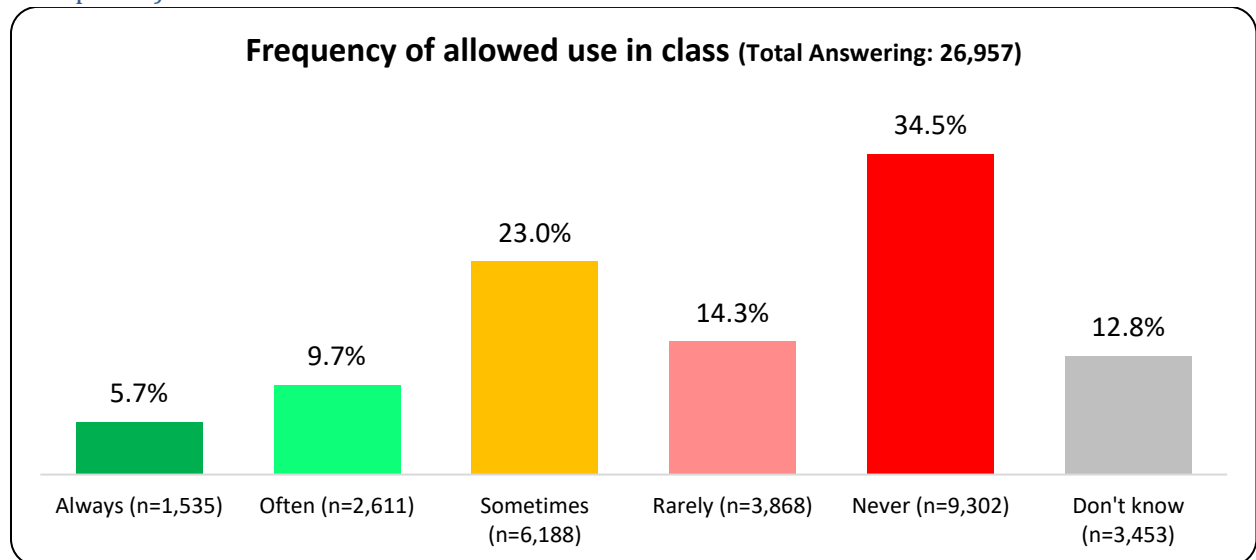
Chart 17: Enforcement of cellphone policy at school (parents/guardians aware of cellphone policy)



Question 19: To your knowledge, is the cellphone use policy consistently enforced?

Overall, 34.5% of parents/guardians’ children are *never* allowed to use their cellphone in the classroom. From kindergarten to Grade 3, the proportion is 49.6% and it decreases as children reach higher grades. Once they are in Grade 10 to Grade 12, the proportion lowers to 18.0%.

Chart 18: Frequency of allowed use cellphone in the classroom (parents/guardians of children with a cellphone)



Question 21: My child is allowed to use their cellphone in the classroom.

Key observations of the “Portrait of cellphone usage” section include:

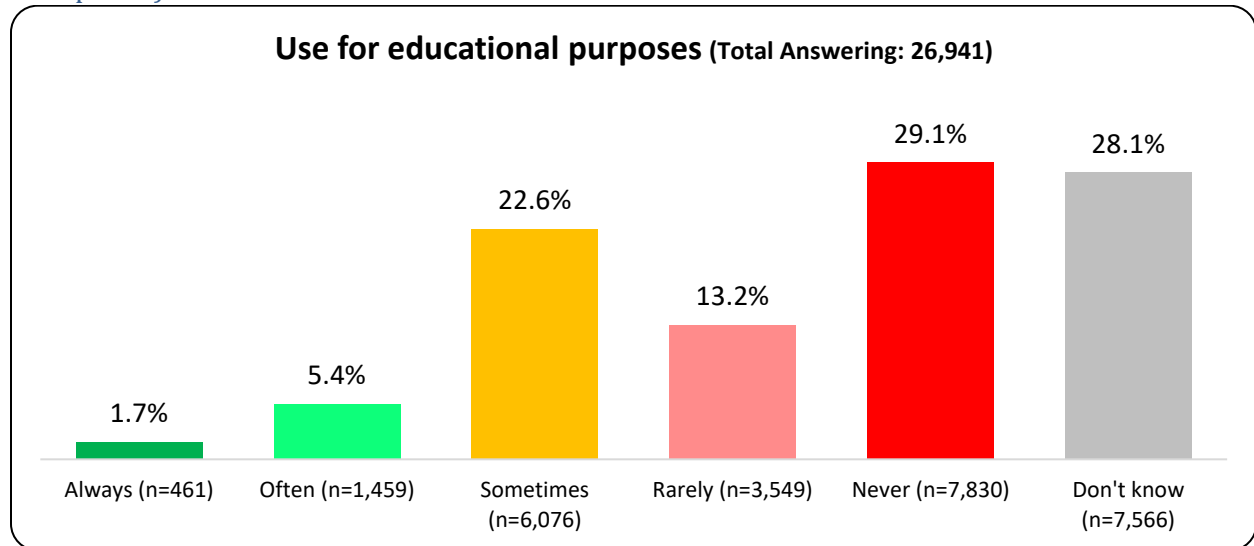
- More than half (56.9%) of children own a cellphone.
- A high proportion of parents/guardians (62.8%) either mentioned that there is either no cellphone policy or they don’t know if there is one at their child’s school.
- Amongst schools that have a cellphone usage policy 48.8% of parents/guardians mentioned that it is always or often enforced.
- Cellphone usage at school increases when children reach higher grades.
- Almost half (48.8%) of parents/guardians and guardians say that their child can rarely or never use a cellphone in the classroom.

5.2.2 - Acceptability of cellphone use in school

Among parents/guardians whose child has a cellphone, almost out 3 of 10 (29.1%) mentioned that the teacher never asks to use a cellphone for educational purposes.

Using cellphones for educational purposes is more widespread for older children. Only 14.7% of parents/guardians with children in Grade 10 to Grade 12 mentioned they are never asked to use a cellphone for educational purposes by their teacher, while it is the case for 43.4% of parents/guardians with children in kindergarten to Grade 3.

Chart 19: Cellphone use for educational purposes by teacher’s (parents/guardians of children with a cellphone)



Question 22: My child’s teacher asks them to use their cellphone during class **for educational purposes**.

A majority of parents/guardians (71.3%) do not feel more comfortable if their child has access to their cellphone in class.

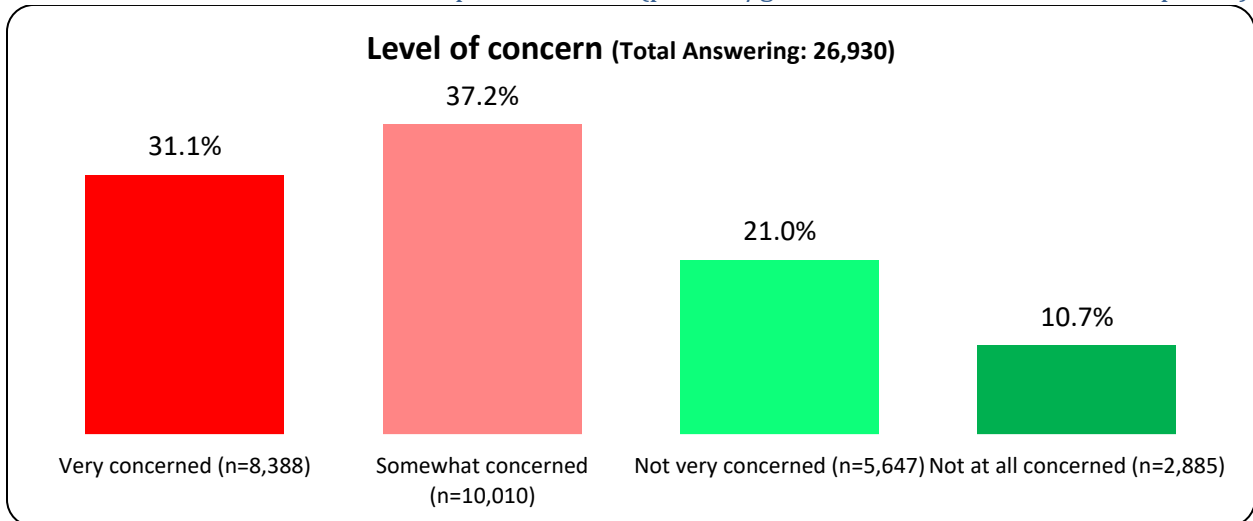
Table 20: Level of comfort with cellphone in class (parents/guardians of children with a cellphone)

Access to phone in class	Numbers of respondents	Percentages
Strongly disagree	8,716	32.4%
Disagree	10,474	38.9%
Agree	4,947	18.4%
Strongly agree	2,147	8.0%
Don't know	613	2.3%
Total Answering	26,897	

Question 24: I feel more comfortable when my child has access to their cellphone during class time.

More than three in ten parents/guardians (31.1%) are very concerned about their child's cellphone use at school and only 10.7% are not at all concerned. The level of concern does not seem to be affected by the grades children are in.

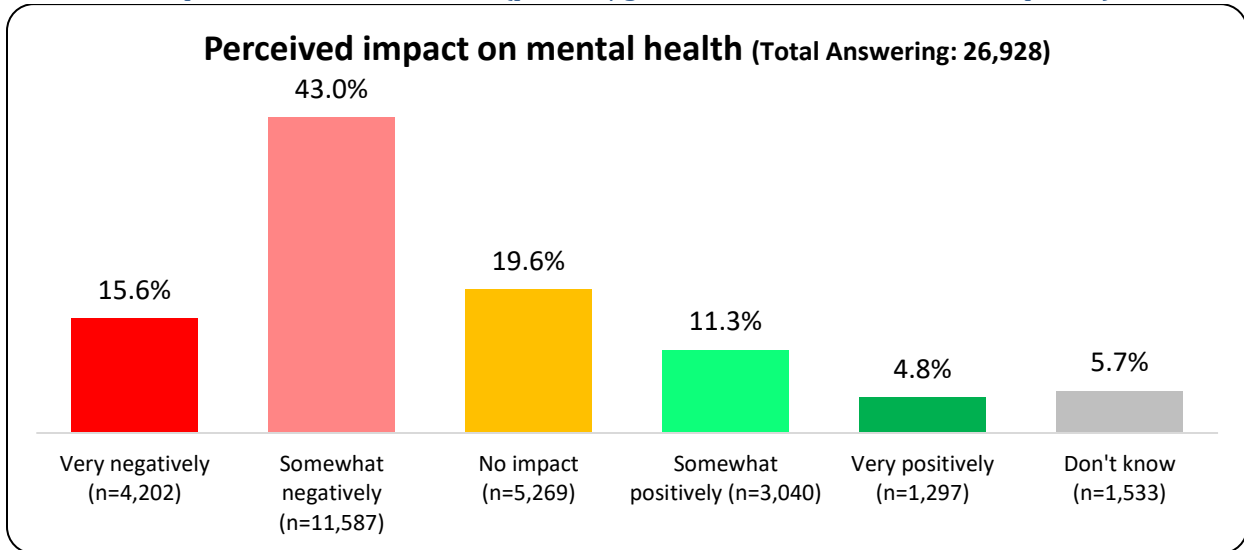
Chart 21: Level of concern with cellphone in class (parents/guardians of children with a cellphone)



Question 27: What is your overall level of concern about the impact of your child's cellphone use at school?

Cellphones are considered to be impacting children's mental health negatively for a majority of parents/guardians (58.6%), while 19.6% see no impact and 16.1% see a positive impact.

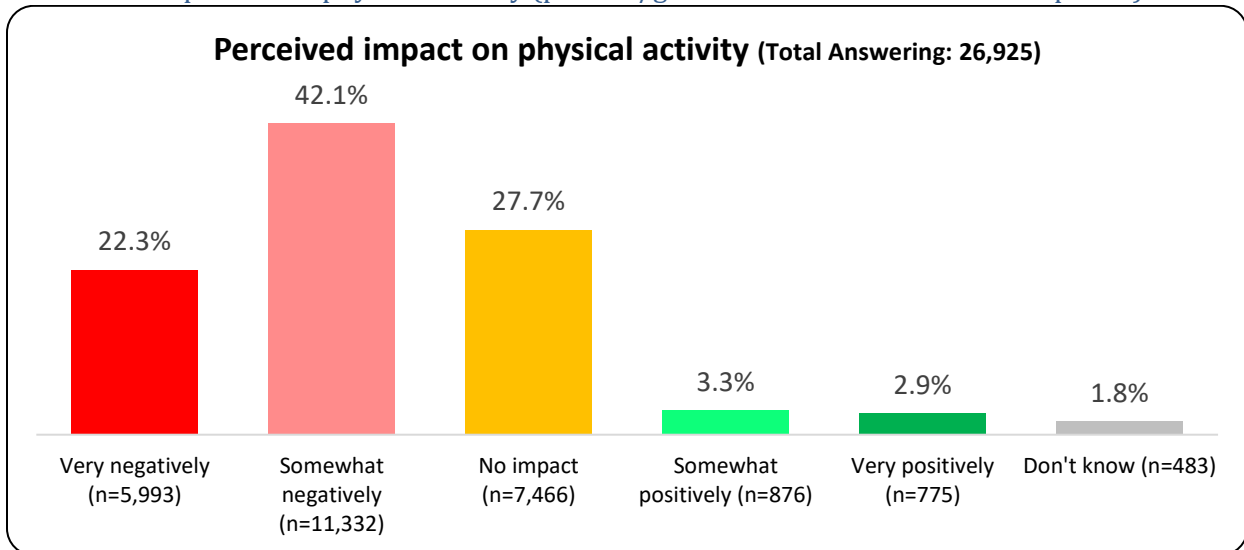
Chart 22: Cellphone and mental health (parents/guardians of children with a cellphone)



Question 25: Having a cellphone impacts my child's mental health:

With respect to physical activity, the impact is also considered negative for a majority of parents/guardians (64.3%). More than a quarter (27.7%) see no impact and 6.1% see a positive impact.

Chart 23: Cellphone and physical activity (parents/guardians of children with a cellphone)



Question 26: Having a cellphone impacts my child's physical activity:

Key observations of the “Acceptability of cellphone use in school” section include:

- Three in ten parents/guardians mentioned that their child can never use a cellphone for educational purposes in class.
- Again, we observe an evolution based on the grade of the child. From kindergarten to Grade 3, 43.4% mentioned that their child is never allowed to use cellphone in class, compared to 14.7% for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

- A majority of parents/guardians mentioned that they either disagree or strongly disagree (71.3%) when asked if they feel more comfortable when their child has access to their cellphone in class.
- Two-thirds (68.3%) of parents/guardians are either concerned or very concerned about the impact of their child’s cellphone use at school.
- A majority of parents/guardians consider that cellphone usage has a very or somewhat negative impact on mental health (58.6%) and physical activity (64.3%).

5.2.3 - Potential usage of cellphones in school

A majority of parents/guardians of children with a cellphone think that cellphones should be allowed during breaks (or both breaks and class) for calls (58.2%) and texting (57.6%). Support for use in the classroom is very low at about 5%.

Support for usage in the classroom is much higher for emergency situations and medical purpose. Indeed, half of parents/guardians believe cellphones should be used in class only or both in class and during breaks in these situations. Between, 11.9% and 14.1% think cellphones should not be used at all for these purposes.

Cellphone use for other purposes at school is less encouraged by parents/guardians. More than half believe children should not be allowed to use social media (68.3%), play games (66.0%), watch videos (58.3%) or listen to podcasts (52.3%), while 41.8% don’t think cellphones should be used for music at all.

Table 24: Support for cellphone usage at school (parents/guardians of children with a cellphone)

	In the classroom	During breaks	Not at all	Varies by child	Total Answering
Emergencies	49.9%	69.8%	11.9%	14.8%	26,738
Medical Purposes	49.7%	60.4%	14.1%	21.9%	26,580
Research	41.2%	46.3%	33.2%	9.8%	26,533
Calculator	38.0%	26.8%	47.9%	7.5%	26,348
Translation	36.6%	40.2%	34.3%	16.7%	26,351
Reading	22.9%	47.3%	39.8%	9.6%	26,489
Music	14.0%	45.3%	41.8%	11.5%	26,547
Podcasts	8.5%	38.6%	52.3%	7.8%	26,378
Videos (e.g., YouTube)	6.8%	33.6%	58.3%	6.7%	26,491
Texting	5.4%	57.6%	34.4%	7.7%	26,621
Calls	4.7%	58.2%	30.3%	11.2%	26,682
Games	2.0%	30.6%	66.0%	3.1%	26,460
Social Media	1.8%	28.4%	68.3%	3.1%	26,475

Question 23: What do you support your child using a cellphone for while at school? (Base: Parents and guardians)

- 50% or more agree with usage for this purpose
- 40% or more agree with usage for this purpose

Key observations of the “Potential usage of cellphones in school” section include:

- Cellphone use is the most acceptable for parents/guardians when used for emergencies and medical purposes.

- It is the least acceptable when used for more recreational purposes (e.g., games, videos, social media, music, podcasts).

5.3 - Perceptions of teachers/principals and school representatives

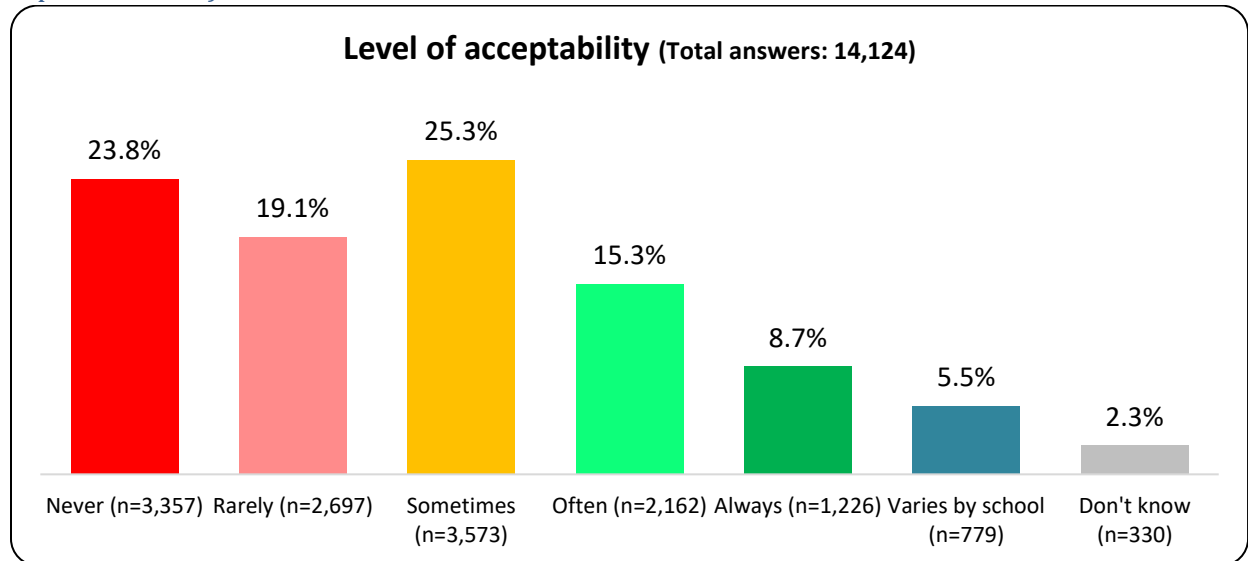
5.3.1 - Portrait of cellphone usage

Just under a quarter (23.8%) of teachers/principals and school representatives say students are never allowed to use cellphones in the classroom. A similar proportion (24.4%) say students are often or always allowed to use cellphones in the classroom.

Schools in which higher grades are taught tend to allow cellphones in the classroom to a greater extent. When kindergarten to Grade 3 are taught, cellphones are never allowed in 35.9% of cases, while this proportion falls to 6.4% when Grade 10 to Grade 12 are taught.

Conversely, cellphone use by students in the classroom is often or always permitted 10.9% of the time when kindergarten to Grade 3 are taught and 41.9% of the time when Grade 10 to Grade 12 are taught.

Chart 25: Allowed use of cellphones in the classroom (among teachers/principals and school representatives)



Question 29: Students are allowed to use cellphones in the classrooms at my school(s).

For a majority of teachers/principals and school representatives (58.7%), cellphones can be stored in a secure place outside of the classroom. It is only when kindergarten to Grade 3 is being taught that being able to store cellphones outside the classroom does not reach the majority threshold (46.3%).

Table 26: Storing of cellphones in school (among teachers/principals and school representatives)

Storage area available	Numbers of respondents	Percentages
Yes	8,296	58.7%
No	3,658	25.9%
Varies by school	1,037	7.3%
Don't know	1,134	8.0%
Total Answering	14,125	

Question 35: In your school(s), is there a secure place where students can store their cellphone outside of the classroom?

More than half (55.7%) of teachers/principals and school representatives mentioned that there is a cellphone use policy in their school(s) and 11.9% mentioned it varies by school. When Grade 10 to Grade 12 are taught, cellphone use policies are less frequent (42.4% mentioned a policy exists and 15.6% that it varies by school).

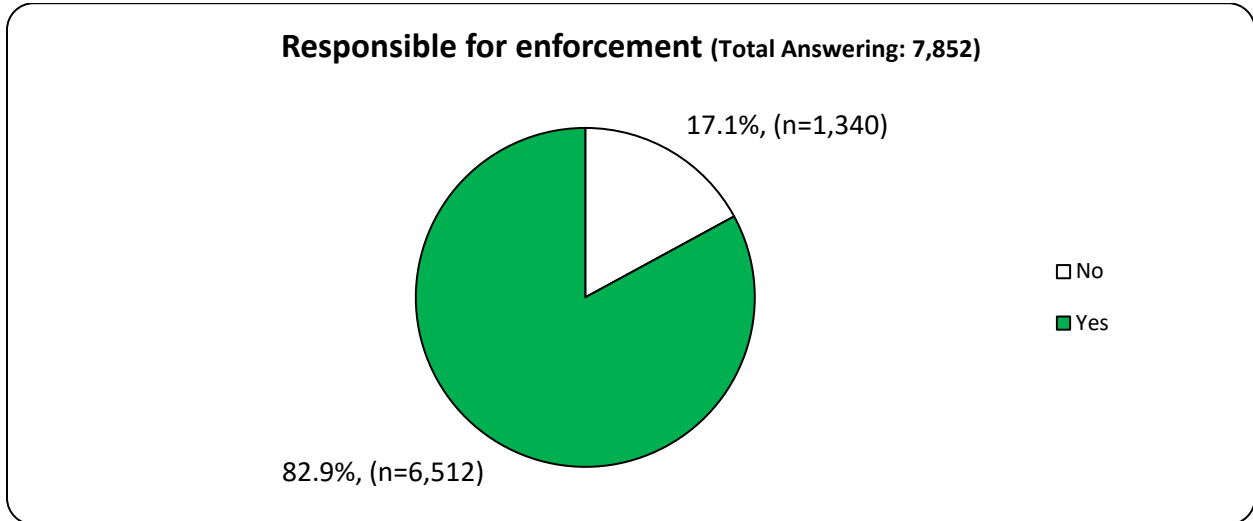
Table 27: Cellphone policy in school (among teachers/principals and school representatives)

Cellphone policy on school	Numbers of respondents	Percentages
Yes	7,852	55.7%
No	3,378	24.0%
Varies by school	1,671	11.9%
Don't know	1,191	8.5%
Total Answering	14,092	

Question 30: Does your school(s) have a cellphone use policy in place?

For 82.9% of teachers/principals and school representatives in schools who have a cellphone use policy, enforcing cellphone policy is part of their role.

Chart 28: Responsibility of enforcement in schools with a cellphone policy (among teachers/principals and school representatives)



Question 31: Are you responsible for enforcing the cellphone policy in your role?

Cellphone use policy is often or always enforced half the time (49.9%), whereas it is rarely or never enforced in 21.1% of cases. Cellphone policies tend to be enforced to a higher degree when the schools teach lower grades. It is always or often enforced for 61.2% of respondents affiliated to a school teaching kindergarten to Grade 3 and for 31.7% when Grade 10 to Grade 12 are taught.

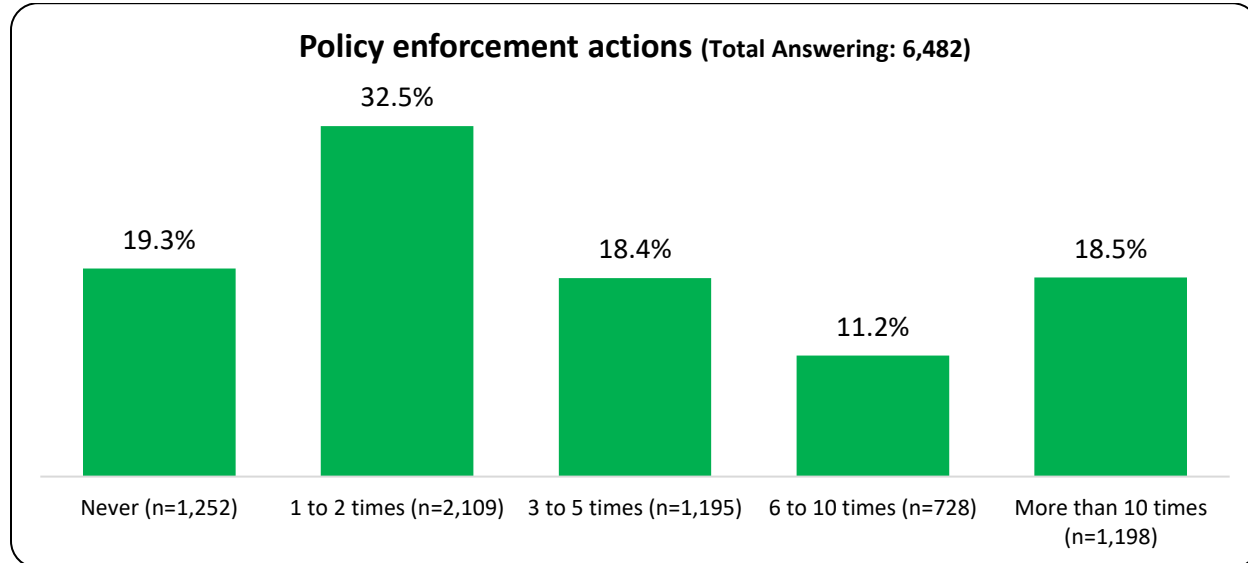
Table 29: Level of enforcement in schools with a cellphone policy (among teachers/principals and school representatives)

Policy enforcement	Total	Among those responsible for enforcing	Among those not responsible for enforcing
Never	4.8%	4.6%	5.5%
Rarely	16.3%	16.5%	15.5%
Sometimes	27.1%	27.4%	25.5%
Often	28.6%	30.0%	22.3%
Always	21.2%	21.5%	20.1%
Don't know	1.9%	0.0%	11.2%
Total Answering	7,826	6,490	1,336

Question 32 and 34: - [In your experience / to your knowledge], is the cellphone use policy consistently enforced?

Among those responsible for enforcing the cellphone use policy, 80.7% have to enforce it at least once a day. When higher grades are taught at the school, the cellphone policy has to be more frequently enforced. Having to enforce it at least once a day increases from 67.8% when kindergarten to Grade 3 is taught, to 73.3% for Grade 4 to Grade 6, 87.4% for Grade 7 to Grade 9, and 91.6% for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Chart 30: Frequency of enforcement in schools with an enforced cellphone policy (among teachers/principals and school representatives)



Question 33: In a typical school day, how often do you have to enforce the cellphone use policy?

Key observations of the “Portrait of cellphone usage” section include:

- Cellphones tend to be allowed to a higher degree for higher grades (10.9% for kindergarten to Grade 3, up to 41.9% for Grade 10 to Grade 12).
- 55.7% mentioned that there is a cellphone use policy in their school(s) and 11.9% mentioned it varies by school.
- Cellphone use policy is often or always enforced 49.9% of the time.
- Almost half (48.1%) mentioned that they have to enforce cellphone use policy more than three times a day and the number on interventions increase for higher grades.

Key observations from the stakeholder discussions in terms of acceptability of cellphone use in school:

The online survey shows that teachers/principals and school representatives need to intervene to ensure that proper usage of these devices is maintained in school.

Some of the stakeholders during the online discussions also mentioned that a provincial policy on cellphone management would increase their leverage and legitimacy to act on this issue. A policy giving guidelines or parameters seemed to be preferred to banning cellphones in schools.

“It gives school divisions the authority to confiscate, to restrict, and to prohibit, but it leaves it up to the school authority, and then we have the ability to leverage and rely on government direction to say no. That gives the flexibility at the school division level, and it gives us the ability to reference the government’s statements and beliefs that yes, we do have the right to do these things rather than it’s an outright ban.”

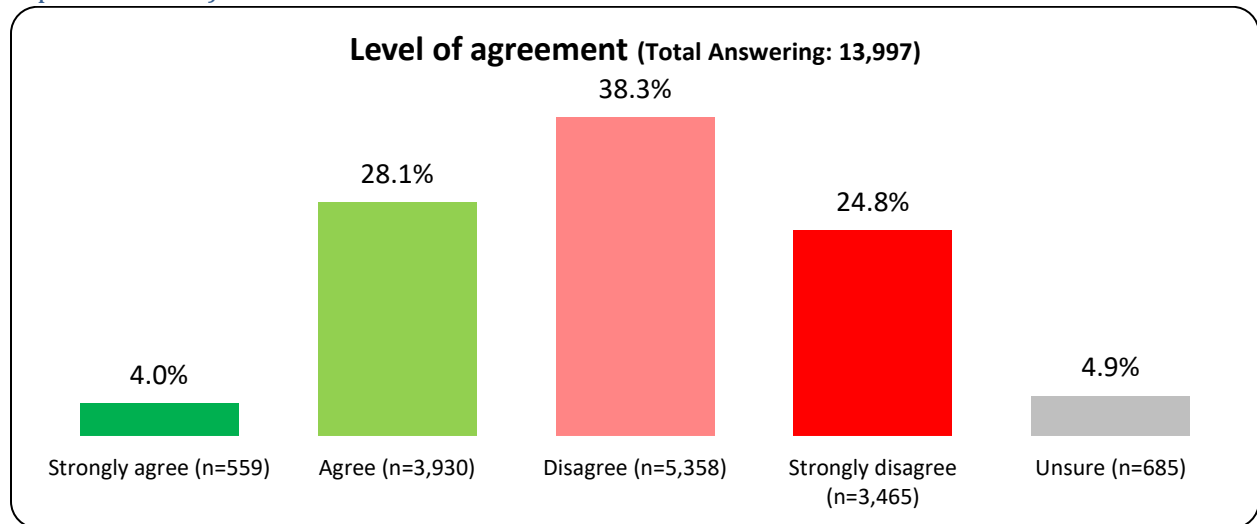
Another stakeholder supported the idea of guidelines and parameters leaving a certain level of flexibility and discretion towards the acceptable use.

“All these things are going to create loopholes and case by case considerations. But I don’t see that as bad, I see that as having discretion to meet the child where they are at.”

5.3.2 - Acceptability of cellphone use in school

According to most teachers/principals and school representatives, using cellphones for educational purposes does not enhance students’ learning experience (63.0% disagree or strongly disagree). Those who believe it does enhance students’ learning experience represent 32.1% of respondents (agree or strongly agree), but of those, only 4.0% strongly agree.

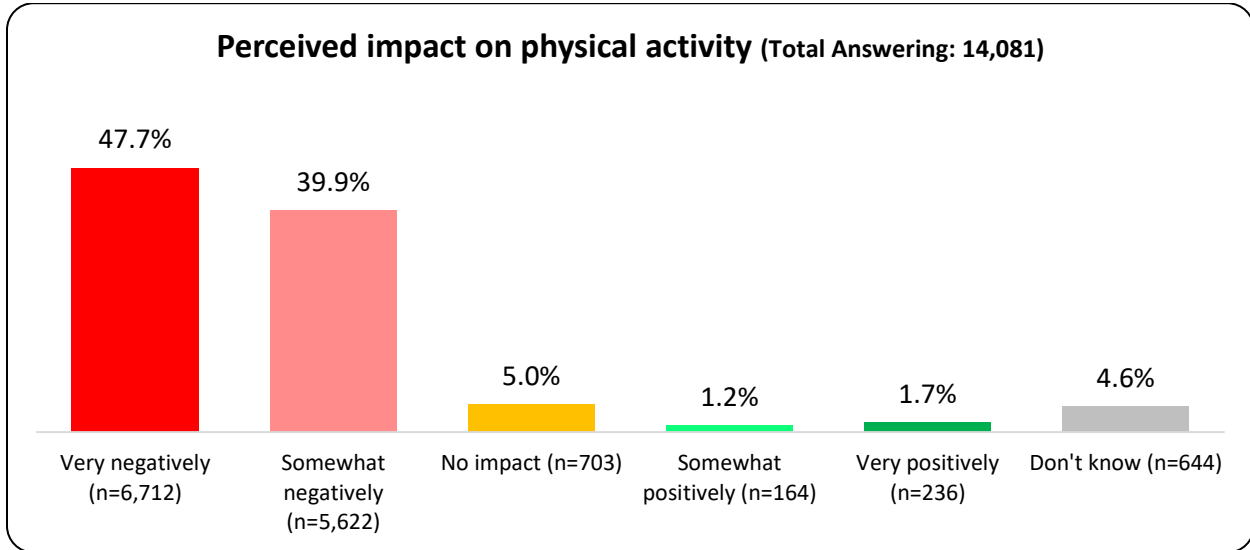
Chart 31: Use of cellphone for educational purposes (among teachers/principals and school representatives)



Question 41: Using cellphones for educational purposes enhances students’ learning experience.

The impact on physical activity is perceived negatively by most teachers/principals and school representatives (87.6%) and positively by only 2.8%, while 5.0% believe there is no impact.

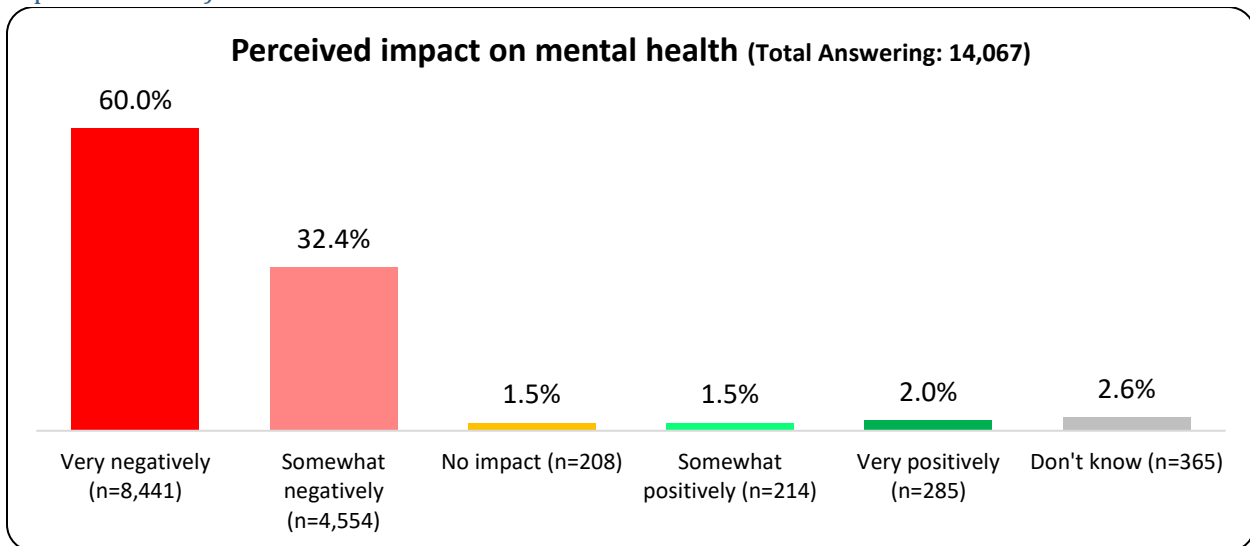
Chart 32: Perceived impact on physical activity (among teachers/principals and school representatives)



Question 42: Having a cellphone impacts students' physical activity:

With respect to mental health, the impact is also perceived negatively by most (92.4%) and positively by 3.5%. Those who do not think it has an impact on mental health represent only 1.5% of respondents.

Chart 33: Perceived impact on mental health (among teachers/principals and school representatives)



Question 43: Having a cellphone impacts students' mental health:

Key observations of the "Acceptability of cellphone use in school" section include:

- Using cellphones for educational purposes does not enhance students' learning experience (63.0% disagree or strongly disagree), according to teachers/principals and school representatives.
- Most teachers/principals and school representatives consider that cellphone usage has a very or somewhat negative impact on mental health (92.4%) and physical activity (87.6%).

5.3.3 - Potential usage of cellphones in school

With respect to using a cellphone as a learning tool, between 40.4% and 53.7% of teachers/principals and school representatives think that cellphones should never be used in school for the reading, research, and calculator. A more acceptable usage based on the answers provided would be for translation purposes. Only 23.7% are opposed to this usage anywhere in the school.

More than half (54.1%) of teachers/principals and school representatives think cellphones should not be used at all for texting in school, while 37.9% are of this opinion for calls. Only around 1% believe this kind of usage is acceptable in the classroom.

Using a cellphone for medical purposes is the most acceptable usage in school for teachers/principals and school representatives, with only 11.4% that are opposed. Acceptability of using a cellphone for emergencies is somewhat lower with 25.6% opposed to this type of use in school.

More than half of teachers/principals and school representatives believe that cellphones should not be allowed at all in schools for visiting social media (74.6%), playing games (67.5%) and watching videos (57.5%). There is a higher level of acceptability for podcasts (46.8%) and especially music (39.9%), but mostly outside the classroom.

Table 34: Cellphone use as a learning tool (among teachers/principals and school representatives)

	In the classroom	During breaks	Not at all	Varies by grade	Total Answering
Medical Purposes	52.9%	53.7%	11.4%	26.1%	13,960
Translation	43.9%	33.7%	23.7%	26.3%	13,925
Research	23.5%	23.9%	40.4%	26.5%	13,912
Emergencies	23.1%	38.7%	25.6%	33.1%	13,908
Calculator	20.7%	12.7%	53.7%	20.9%	13,883
Reading	16.1%	28.9%	42.5%	24.1%	13,927
Music	14.1%	30.0%	39.9%	26.8%	13,950
Podcasts	9.4%	27.3%	46.8%	23.0%	13,895
Videos (e.g., YouTube)	6.0%	23.6%	57.5%	17.1%	13,852
Games	1.6%	23.7%	67.5%	8.2%	13,897
Texting	1.3%	33.5%	54.1%	12.2%	13,919
Calls	1.1%	38.7%	37.9%	23.3%	13,966
Social Media	0.9%	19.1%	74.6%	6.1%	13,919

Question 44: What should students be allowed to use their cellphones for while at school? (Base: teachers, principals, administration, support staff, school board trustees)

- 50% or more agree with usage for this purpose
- 40% or more agree with usage for this purpose

Table 35: Other situations where cellphone use is allowed (5,000 randomly selected responses among teachers/principals and school representatives)

	Numbers of respondents	Percentages
No other situations	4,326	86.5%
As tools for educational purposes/academic tasks (e.g., dictionary)	281	5.6%
For specific class activities (e.g., class polls, quizzes, Kahoot!)	244	4.9%
At the teacher’s discretion during class	184	3.7%
If shortage of other technologies (e.g., shortage of laptops)	179	3.6%
Record audio, take picture, take videos, upload documents (practical use)	100	2.0%
For special school projects (e.g., film or photography projects)	82	1.6%
During breaks or free time	55	1.1%
Related to mental health (e.g., anxiety, feeling unsafe)	34	0.7%
For older students	32	0.6%
Outside of school (before or after school)	30	0.6%
During activities outside the classroom (e.g., field trips)	18	0.4%
Comments about the survey	12	0.2%
To contact parents/guardians	10	0.2%
Cellphones at all times/always/all situations	9	0.2%
Other	92	1.8%
Total Answering	5,000	

Question 45: Are there any other situations where students are allowed to use cellphones during class time?

Key observations of the “Potential usage of cellphones in school” section include:

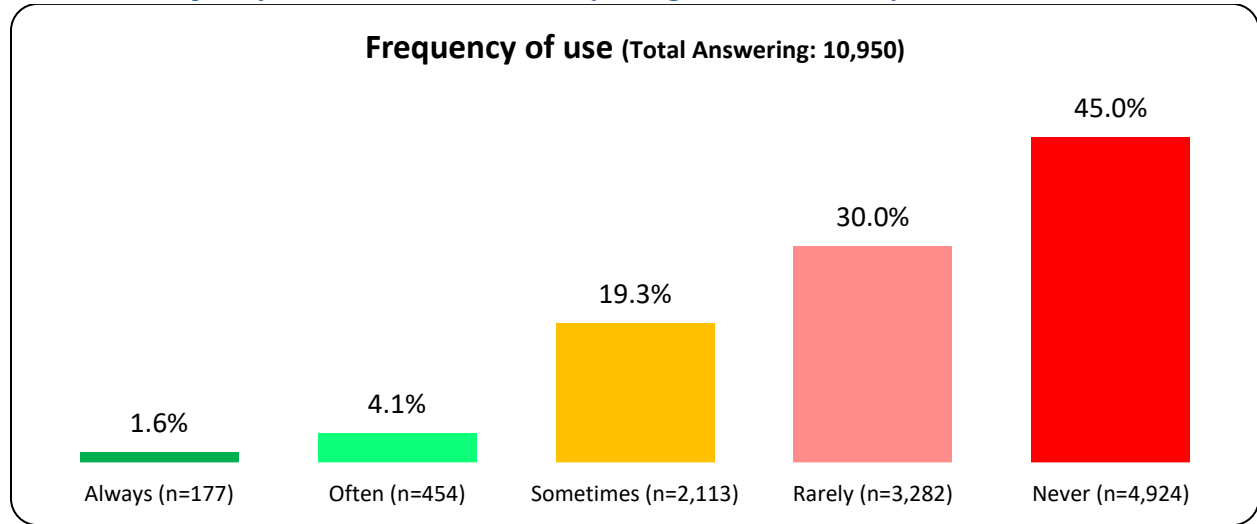
- Cellphone use is most acceptable for medical purposes with only 11.4% of teachers/principals and school representatives opposed.
- It is the least acceptable for games, videos, social media and texting for teachers/principals and school representatives.

5.4 - Perception of Teachers

5.4.1 - Portrait of cellphone usage in classrooms

Among those who teach, 45.0% never allow students to use cellphones in the classroom, 30.0% allow it rarely, and 5.8% allow it often or always. Prohibiting cellphone use in the classroom is more common when teaching lower grades. It decreases from 93.2% for kindergarten to Grade 3, to 77.7% for Grade 4 to Grade 6, 39.4% for Grade 7 to Grade 9, and 12.0% for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Chart 36: Frequency of authorize use in class (among those who teach)

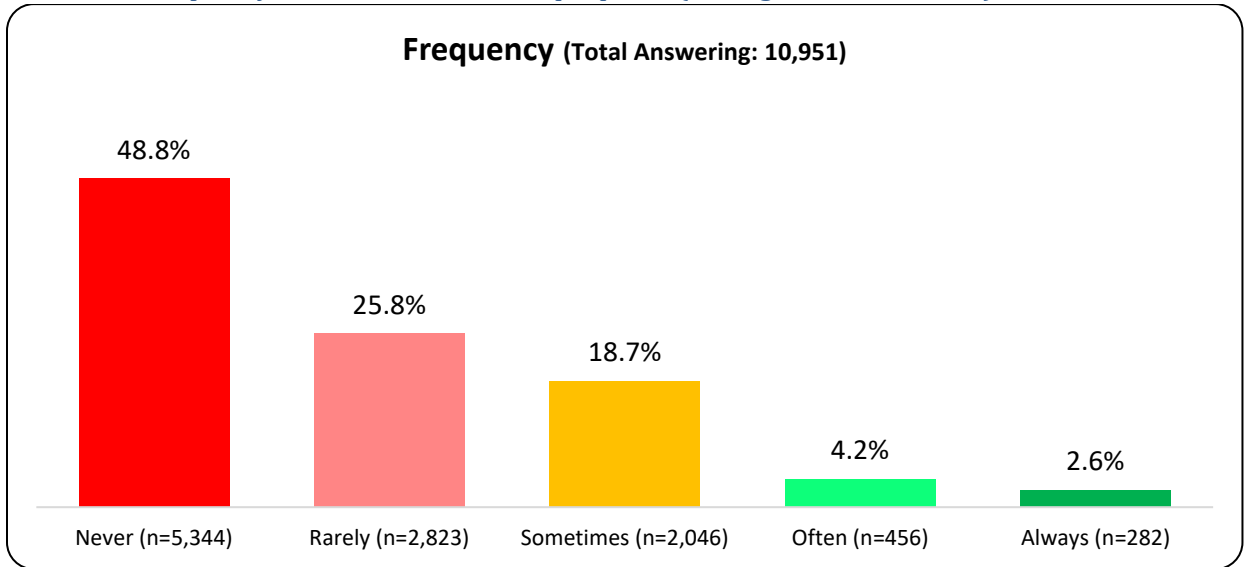


Question 37: I allow students to use cellphones in the classroom:

Nearly half (48.8%) of those who teach never ask students to use cellphones for educational purposes. This is the case for 95.6% of those teaching kindergarten to Grade 3, 82.0% for Grade 4 to Grade 6, 42.0% for Grade 7 to Grade 9 and 17.4% for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Only 6.7% often or always ask students to use cellphones for educational purposes. This proportion increases from 0.8% from kindergarten to Grade 3 to 14.6% for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Table 37: Frequency of use for educational purposes (among those who teach)



Question 38: I ask students to use cellphones for educational purposes in the classroom:

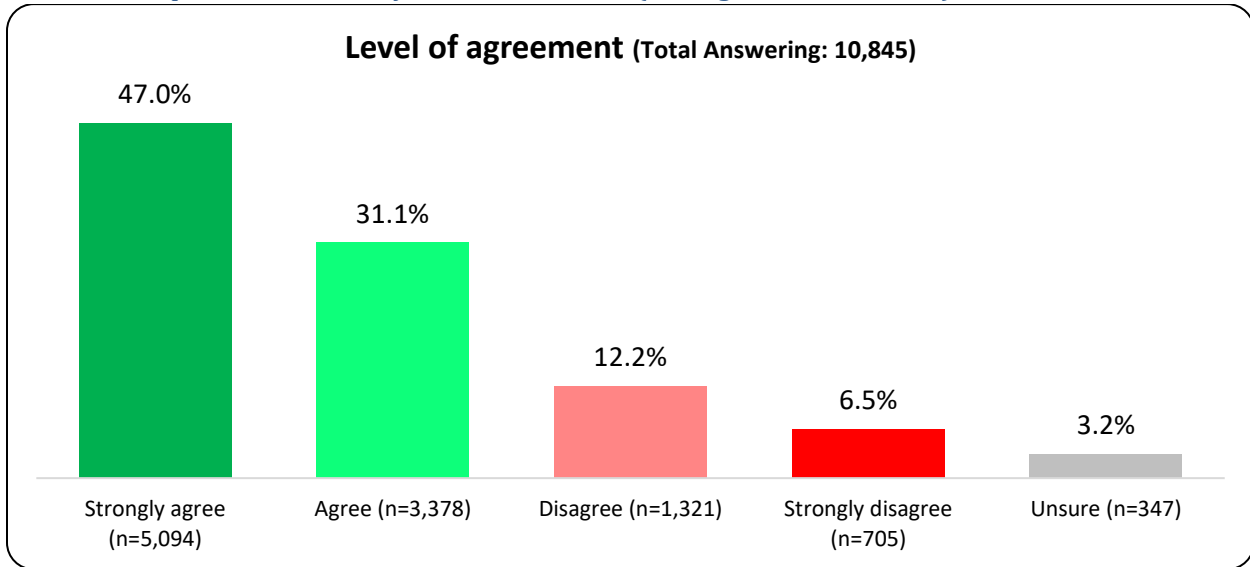
Key observations of the “Portrait of cellphone usage in classrooms” section include:

- 75.0% of those who teach never or rarely allow students to use cellphones in the classroom. Prohibiting cellphone use in the classroom is more common when teaching lower grades.
- 48.8% never ask students to use cellphones for educational purposes. Again, the older the students are, the more teachers tend to ask students to use cellphones for educational purposes.

5.4.2 - Impact of cellphone usage in classrooms

Most teachers (78.1%) agree or strongly agree with the fact that classroom cellphone use significantly impacts their ability to teach students. This proportion increases from 56.8% for those teaching kindergarten to Grade 3 to 87.7% for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

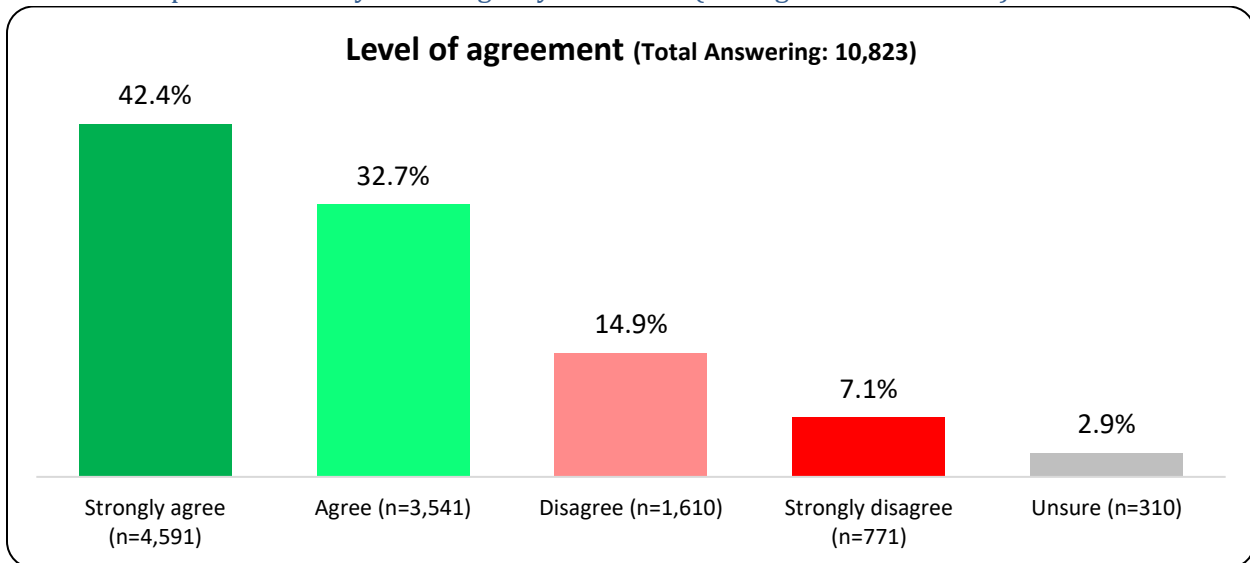
Chart 38: Impacts on the ability to teach students (among those who teach)



Question 39: Classroom cellphone use significantly impacts my ability to teach students.

The use of cellphones by student significantly impacts the ability to manage the classroom for 75.1% of teachers (32.7% agree and 42.4% strongly agree). This is true for 56.6% of those who teach kindergarten to Grade 3, 66.9% for Grade 4 to Grade 6, 82.3% for Grade 7 to Grade 9 and 80.7% for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Chart 39: Impacts the ability to manage my classroom (among those who teach)



Question 40: Student cellphone use significantly impacts my ability to manage my classroom.

Key observations of the “Impact of cellphone usage in classrooms” section include:

- 78.1% of teachers agree or strongly agree that cellphones significantly impact their ability to teach students. Agreement is greater among those who deal with older students.
- 75.1% of teachers agree or strongly agree that cellphones significantly impact their ability to manage their class. Again, the age of the students is an important factor.

5.5 - Other comments about cellphone use in schools

Table 40: Other comments about cellphones in schools (5,000 randomly selected responses all respondents)

	Numbers of respondents	Percentages
Comments/concerns on negative effects of cellphone use in schools or classrooms	2,242	44.8%
Cellphones should not be used in schools/calling for a ban/they are not necessary/they do more harm than good	1,933	38.7%
Cellphone use should be limited to specific circumstances/specific settings (e.g., for emergencies only, only when necessary, during breaks, etc.)	1,043	20.9%
Cellphone use in school must be carefully monitored/studied/need cellphone policy or rules/need consistency	753	15.1%
Comments about the role of parents/guardians	492	9.8%
Cellphone policy is difficult to enforce/students will use their cellphones anyway	490	9.8%
Positive comments on the use of cellphones (e.g., can be helpful or educational, communication tool, useful technology)	387	7.7%
Students must be taught/encouraged to use cellphones appropriately	382	7.6%
Cellphones should only be allowed from a certain age	341	6.8%
Schools should be provided with adequate tools/technology/funding so cellphones are not required/necessary	206	4.1%
Example of cellphone policies used in specific schools, by specific parents	136	2.7%
Comments about the survey	136	2.7%
Students should be allowed to use cellphones	129	2.6%
Other	111	2.2%
Cellphone policy should be decentralized (e.g., let individual schools/divisions decide)	102	2.0%
Not related to cellphone use in schools	64	1.3%
No additional comments	262	5.2%
Total Answering	5,000	

Question 46: Is there anything else you would like to share about student cellphone use in schools?

5.6 - Other observations from the virtual discussion with stakeholders

In general terms, when thinking about putting in place a provincial policy regarding cellphone use at school, we can note diverging positions between some of the stakeholders. One group mentions that the restrictions should not impede the local boards' ability to craft their own policy guidelines.

“So you'd have to be very, very clear on what those restrictions are and not taking away that unique aspect between boards between size of boards, rural board versus urban board.”

“Give us direction, but then give us the flexibility to develop our own policy that works for our context.”

On the other hand, other stakeholders mentioned that clear government directives are necessary to support the management of cellphone use in the school context.

“We receive the support of the province in being able to navigate this. So, we are not feeling like we can get pushed back in the same way that sometimes we do with parents, and students about saying, we have no authority over cell phones or cell phone use.”

“So, if there are considerations to bring in restrictions around cell phone, I would recommend that the language is very clear on what is necessary to be included within that code of conduct for boards.”

It was also mentioned that the balance between the professional judgment of the teacher and clear guidelines is needed for the best outcome.

“But the really critical thing is to preserve some element of flexibility in teacher professional judgment while preserving that baseline. The notion that mobile phones (...) are not to be given free rein in the school.”

Other stakeholders mentioned that province-wide restrictions could have a positive impact on multiple elements of the learning process, but also on bullying and mental health issue.

“It could result in increased student learning without disruption in classes. It could result in interruption to their overuse of screen time which would help their mental health that [a stakeholder] was talking about, and it could reduce the amount of bullying that originates when students are at school.”

In the situation where the provincial government would move forward with creating a policy or guidelines for schools, the various stakeholders believed schools and boards would need an appropriate amount of lead time to amend codes of conduct or adopt/approve goals and standards related to cellphone use.

“You can just announce it on Twitter like Covid, and say, we're doing it Monday. I guess we'd have to react, but I wouldn't suggest that plan, it doesn't work out as well.”

“It takes time to draft policy and get approvals (...) That takes us 3 months at a minimum.”

When asked how much lead time is required if the department wants school authorities to amend codes of conduct or adopt/approve goals and standards related to cellphone use, the lead time stated by stakeholders varied from at least 3 months to a year.

“It's critical that we've got sufficient time to do that (...) because it will have implications on what current policies or codes of conducts are in place, and what the potential shift will be.”

Some stakeholders mentioned that they needed time because consultation was required before making these changes.

“I believe that it could be a contentious issue, and when we need to do a little bit of consultation (...) So, I think we need at least a year.”

“That there would be a consultation process that would have to take place be a post development process communication implementation planning the transition period”

5 – Conclusion

Key observations from the survey

Results of the Engagement on Cellphone Use in Schools survey indicate that cellphone usage at school is widespread among children, and that most respondents believe restrictions on cellphone usage in school should exist.

A significant number of respondents are concerned by cellphone use at school and cellphones are seen as negatively impacting academic achievement, bullying, mental health and physical activity.

Student's grade-level influences perceptions of acceptable usage of cellphones in school. According to respondents, cellphone usage in class should be less restrictive for higher grades.

Most teachers say that they never or rarely allow students to use cellphones in the classroom, or ask students to use cellphones for educational purposes. Most also agree that cellphones have a negative impact on their ability to teach students, as well as impacting their ability to manage their class.

Cellphones usage is higher among higher grades. Those teaching higher grades say they need to enforce existing cellphone policy more often than for lower grades.

Key observations from the virtual discussions

The virtual discussions with eight stakeholder associations highlighted the fact that some view board autonomy and flexibility as being important when deciding to apply restrictions on cellphone use. However, it was noted that clear guidelines and parameters coming from the province could give legitimacy and authority to schools and teachers when comes the time to enforce cellphone usage policies.

Restrictions are also seen as potentially having positive impacts on students' behaviour that could lead to better class management and learning.

It was also noted that if codes of conduct needed to be amended following a provincial policy, boards should be given enough lead time (3 months to a year) to make the change.