

Otto-Eldred School District
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December 20, 2023

Dear Parents & Guardians,

Over the past few weeks and months, it has become more and more evident that we, as a community, need to be concerned with our students’ technology use on their personal cell phones and devices. This concern is evident with students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The overall amount of cell phone use has created a perceived need to have their device in hand at any down moment of the day. In many cases, the use has been inappropriate, risking legal issues and creating potential safety issues for the student.

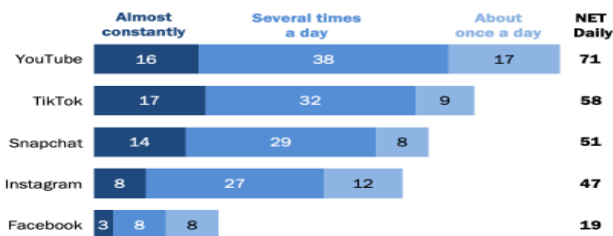
Locally and nationally, school communities are struggling with the same concerns. A social media lawsuit has been filed by numerous states. The focus is on the addictive and destructive content pushed by many social media websites. The overwhelming and alarming impact on our students’ mental health has been seen in the classroom, in the home and in our communities. Locally, several school districts in our area have already restricted cell phone use in schools. Students are not permitted to access their phone or smart watch during the school day. The result – kids are engaging with one another, and discipline issues have decreased. Students have adjusted, classroom attention is more focused, and parents have seen positive results.

At Otto-Eldred, we have seen the impact of this increased technology use across our elementary school and high school. Inappropriate posts from students of all ages raise concerns about their safety. The lack of appropriate boundaries displayed with photos or videos has been a weekly concern at the high school. The number of issues occurring during the school day are increasing. Overall, it is evident that students are relying more and more on their phones, and less and less on actual communication with peers and adults. Attention spans, focus, sleep schedules and most importantly, mental health are all negatively impacted by unhealthy exposure to these devices.

The Pew Research Center published findings of a new study last week (December 11, 2023) detailing the increased use of technology by teenagers:

A majority of teens visit YouTube, TikTok daily

% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they visit or use the following apps or sites ...

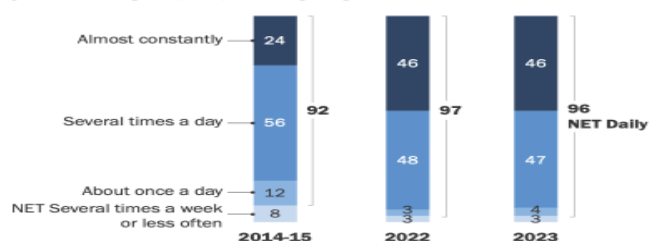


Note: Those who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.
 Source: Survey conducted Sept. 26-Oct. 23, 2023.
 Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023

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The share of teens who say they are online ‘almost constantly’ has roughly doubled since 2014-2015

% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they use the internet ...



Note: Figures may not add up to NET values due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 26-Oct. 23, 2023.
 Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023

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These trends are likely not surprising to parents. While we all appreciate and rely upon the immediate contact we can make with our children via text or phone, do we know everyone who is connected to our children through these apps and devices? As a district, we do provide guidance and instruction on appropriate uses of these apps and devices as well as dangers to avoid. Unfortunately, the connectivity of our world has brought dangers to our youth that were at one time unimaginable. Translating terms such as “sextortion” and “catfishing” have become necessary as we add the newly coined terms in order to guide our students to safe futures. The digital imprint made today by our students will be there when our students enter the workforce tomorrow.

So, we understand the concern, what is our next step? It is a family decision when devices are appropriate for student use, and how much it is used. To help guide families, just ask a few simple questions:

- Do boundaries exist for my students’ use of a personal device? Are the students aware of these boundaries?
- Am I aware of who my student connects to on social media, via text or by email? Does my student personally know those individuals? Do I know those individuals?
- What are the useful apps or websites that my student uses?
- Am I aware of the laws that regulate what apps my student is old enough to use?
- Do I understand the resources available through my internet or phone provider that limits use? Do I understand features of the phone, device or app well enough to guide and protect my student?

Many resources exist to help parents with navigating this ever-changing world. A few are listed below:

[Keeping teens safe on social media: What parents should know to protect their kids \(apa.org\)](#)

[Here are 8 tips for parents and kids on social media use — from the U.S. surgeon general | PBS NewsHour](#)

As a district, we will continue to promote responsible use of technology and websites. Over the course of the last few years, we have developed a 1 to 1 technology deployment so that all students in need of a device have one assigned to them. These devices will connect to the school network and can also be used at home. Prior to that deployment, we developed a “BYOD” Network, or Bring Your Own Device network. That network is still accessible to staff and students. Due to the 1 to 1 initiative, the BYOD network is not needed. A source of many issues has been students’ inappropriate use of our BYOD network. Below is a QR Code that will direct you to our Student Acceptable Use Policy (AUP); a similar policy exists for staff. We will reshare this with students before they return to classes in January. Abuses such as creating a private network, online harassment and shared inappropriate content have become a regular concern. Starting in January 2024, this network will be turned off. We will re-evaluate the continued need for this network later in the spring. Requests for student and staff use of our main network with personal devices will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Each building principal can be sent a request, with a determination to be made by administration based upon need.

This concern has been a topic of discussion at our school board meetings and will be in the future. Please remember students will continue to have full access to the devices assigned to them. Anyone who has a question or concern is asked to contact our district office at (814)817-1380, option 3. As a district, we will continue to utilize social media pages on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram (@oesdmatters). Our website www.ottoeldred.org will also provide updates for parents and the community.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew D. Splain".

Matthew D. Splain,
Superintendent