

Opening Statement of Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA), Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary
Education
“Screentime in Schools”
June 10, 2025

Good morning, and welcome to the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education.

This Committee has several Members who have been classroom educators, myself included. But what a teacher faces today is unrecognizable from the classrooms that we sat in or even taught in. Screens are pervasive, mostly in the form of student cell phones, drawing attention away from interactive discussion and instruction. Too often, students spend most of their days with their heads down, thumbs scrolling, and only a fraction interacting with increasingly discouraged teachers. Students spend lunch sitting side-by-side but interacting with their phones rather than their peers.

We know that thoughtful, focused use of educational technology can be beneficial for students. For example, students can use sensors and apps to gather evidence for investigations and do research faster than ever. This very Subcommittee has examined the use of AI as a targeted tool to increase student achievement.

But research shows that students are spending an average of 90 minutes per school day on their *own* devices during instructional time. This contributes to the eight and a half hours a day the average high schooler

spends on his or her cell phone.

Teachers report that students hurry sloppily through assignments so they can go back to their social media posts or YouTube channel, not engaging in the learning process. Students, starting in elementary school, huddle around phones where students share videos with their friends who don't have cell phones, sometimes exposing children to inappropriate content. Cyberbullying originating at school is contributing to mental health issues among our youth. And cheating has become rampant. And we ask ourselves why student achievement has declined in our country, and why, for example, only 28 percent of our eighth graders are proficient in math and only 30 percent are proficient in reading. I think we have found one of the reasons.

It is not just personal cell phones that can cause problems in our classrooms. School issued devices are overutilized, with middle schoolers spending almost two and a half hours a day on school issued screens, creating eerily quiet classrooms with little student-to-student or teacher-to-student interaction.

Parents in my district agree that screen time should be monitored. A recent survey revealed that 40 percent of parents believe that screen time should be limited to academic use only, used strictly for academic work, and personal devices stay off. Thirty-four percent of parents surveyed said there should be structured device periods, where students can use any device during a set time. The rest of the day would be screen-free. Less than 3 percent of parents said students should have full access to devices during the school day.

How can we balance helpful time on screens with strategies that have been proven through brain research to increase comprehension? Strategies like reading from paper and writing notes by hand can help. And rich Socratic conversation that allows students to hear a variety of perspectives, not just a feed based on their algorithms, would also help. We need to listen to what science tells us about how screens affect brain

development.

Not only does too much screen time affect students, but having to continually compete with cell phones for students' attention contributes heavily to teacher stress and burnout. Studies show that almost half the cell phone policies that do exist are not enforced by school leaders, leading to power struggles between teachers and non-compliant students. The number one issue causing teacher dissatisfaction is student behavior and discipline. Fifty-five percent are thinking about leaving the profession earlier than had planned. If we want to keep good teachers in the classroom, we should start by supporting efforts to increase classroom engagement.

Today we want to hear about the status of state and district-based restrictions on cell phones and those restrictions' effectiveness. We also want to highlight research-based practices of schools that have struck a balance between technology and interactive teaching in the interest of advancing student learning to create curious learners and productive citizens.

Teachers and parents believe this is a community problem that can be solved by having a culture that balances the use of technology in the classroom with proven methods of instruction that encourage active student engagement, good mental health, good relationships, and good instruction. We on the Committee agree, and we look forward to hearing what steps are being taken to stem the tide of screens overtaking our classrooms.