# A California High School Found Cellphones too Distracting, so they're "Locking the Devices Up"

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It wasn’t enough to just tell students at San Mateo High School to put their phones away during class. Now, the principal at the California school has told them to lock them away for good. The high-schoolers are now required to keep their phones in a magnetically sealed pouch during school hours.

Mounting frustration over student attention in class led the principal at the school to start the new policy this school year, which kicked off earlier this month.

"We could walk into different classrooms, and kids would be on their cellphones anywhere from 5 seconds, checking a text, to 30 to 45 minutes at a time," Adam Gelb, principal of San Mateo High School, told NBC Bay Area. "You're here to learn. You are here to work with your teachers and students and we started getting away from that because of these devices and how addictive they can be."

Each school day, nearly 1,700 students place their devices in a pouch that closes with a lock. The principal unlocks them at the end of the day. While teachers say they have already noticed a positive effect on students, the policy has mixed reactions from scientists who argue its long-term effectiveness.

Some technology experts feel the new policy is a step in the right direction and will curb distraction in the classroom.

“Taking cellphones out of the classroom is a no-brainer,” said Calvin Newport, a professor at Georgetown University. "Students tend to perform worse when they have access to phones in the classroom. It’s a good idea for our schools to be a place where students get trained to keep their concentration on one thing at a time. When you shift your focus back and forth between a teacher and SnapChat, your brain does not perform as well," Newport added.

Many students at the school like the idea after initially disagreeing with it.

"Last year, a lot of people spent lunches looking at their phones, not talking with each other. But this year, there is nothing else to do but talk," said Michael Picchi, a San Mateo High School student.

"It helped me a lot. I'm like a typical teenager, you know? Like, I'm always on my phone," said Polina Tu'ipuloto, another student. "Before I would usually just like curl over in the side of my desk and like check my phone and text everyone. But now there's no other thing for us to look at or do except for talk to our teacher or pay attention."

A study from Rutgers University found that students who **had** cellphones or laptops during lessons scored 5 percent, or half a letter grade, lower on exams than students who weren’t using cellphones.

While many researchers have focused on the benefits of cutting out devices from the classroom, others worry about taking away something young people depend on.

Larry Rosen, a research psychologist at California State University, said, "young people constantly check their phones to help with anxiety. They are anxious about staying on top of things, and that anxiety will build up if they are forced to ditch their phones. Taking away phones does not work for everyone," he argues.

Instead, he believes “technology breaks” are a much happier way to do it.

“It’s better to help students figure out how to manage distractions instead of trying to get rid of them. It’s better to learn how to use cellphones and make them productive,” Larry Rosen said.