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June 25, 2024

Dr. Reid and Members of the School Board:

We write to you today in support of a pilot program to store cellphones “away for the day” in lockers or pouches in both middle and high schools. We believe FCPS’ current policy distinction between middle schools and high schools is unwise, and thus urge you to test a full “away for the day” policy in high schools.

This policy can be implemented in many ways, including the use of Yondr pouches (or the equivalent). We are aware that “away for the day” represents current policy in FCPS middle schools, but has proven difficult to implement with fidelity even among these younger—therefore likely more compliant—students. An “away for the day” policy requires strict enforcement and full administrative support. We therefore suspect pouches are the most effective way to implement this policy.

Regardless of our predictions, we advise you to run the pilot program with all viable methodologies, using clear metrics to test each method’s effectiveness. Among such metrics you may consider academic performance, student behavior, student engagement, and student emotional wellness. You may also benefit from measuring the degree of student compliance and “buy in” from parents. We hope you will implement the pilot program with a clear communications plan to inform administrators, teachers, parents and students about what to expect, and the consequences of non-compliance. Additionally, we hope the pilot will be designed utilizing existing best practices at our middle schools.

Research suggests that cellphone use during the school day not only negatively affects academic performance, but also increases stress and anxiety among students. The presence of cellphones within students’ pockets during the school day shifts their attention, and provides an “experience blocker” which takes up time that would otherwise be spent in physical play or in-person conversation with friends and teachers.<sup>1</sup> We note that within the Commonwealth a variety of school systems have already adopted “away for the day” policies. In nearby Arlington County, the School Health Advisory Board has recommended that the public schools adopt an “away for the day” policy for four consecutive years.<sup>2</sup> The time has come for FCPS to act on this issue.

Sincerely,

The President and Education Chairs of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Thompson".

Tim Thompson  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annmarie Swope".

Annmarie Swope  
Co-Chair  
Education Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Trainer".

Nancy Trainer  
Co-Chair  
Education Committee

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<sup>1</sup> See Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Gelman, Scott. “Arlington Parents Call for Schools to Adopt ‘Away for the Day’ Cellphone Policy.” *WTOP News*. June 12, 2024.