

# Oakland Unified School District ♦ Process Writing Assessment

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Persuasive Writing: Banning Cell Phones in Schools?

### Introduction

Does your school have a policy about cell phones on campus? Have you or someone you know ever had a cell phone taken away by a teacher? In this activity, you will have an opportunity to think, read, and talk about policies concerning cell phones in middle schools. Then you'll develop a persuasive piece of writing supporting your point of view. **In persuasive writing, it is important to take a clear position, and give convincing support for your position including response to the counterargument.** The counterargument is the opposing viewpoint.

### Getting Started

To begin, reread the topic of this essay: *Banning Cell Phones in Schools?* The OUSD School Board policy reads as follows: "Use of cell phones, pagers, iPods and other electronic equipment during class and passing time is prohibited, and subject to disciplinary action. The prohibited equipment may be confiscated until the parent/guardian meets with an administrator to retrieve the equipment." Before you read a letter from a concerned parent that opposes this policy, think about your experiences with cell phones at school and talk with a partner to answer these questions:

- Have you ever brought a cell phone to school?
- What do your parents/guardians think about middle school students bringing cell phones to middle school?
- Can you think of some reasons why parents might want their children to have cell phones? Can you think of some reasons why parents might NOT want their children to have cell phones?

Now, write down some pros and cons about having cell phones at school in the boxes below.

### *Some PROS and CONS about cell phone use schools:*

<i>PROS (these points support the idea)</i>	<i>CONS (these points oppose the idea)</i>
•	•
•	•
•	•



Share what you jotted down with your classmates. Did you write similar points?

## Reading

Now read the following two letters. The first letter was written by a concerned parent and the second letter was a response to the parent by the principal. As you read, look for and use numbers to mark these elements of persuasive writing:

- 1 = the writer's position
- 2 = ideas that support and develop this position
- 3 = the counterargument

Dear Principal,

I am the parent of a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at your school. Yesterday, my daughter came home and told me that her cell phone had been confiscated by her teacher. She was told that the school has a "No Electronics on Campus" policy. This policy creates an undue burden on parents and an unsafe environment for students.

As a working-mom, I need to communicate with my daughter throughout the day. I don't have the luxury of being able to drop by school when my daughter needs me or if I need to communicate something to her. It is true that I could call the office, but I know from experience that calls do not always go through. Currently, I check-in with my daughter several times a day. I need to remind her to take her medication and I also want to make sure she is doing well and staying out of trouble. As you well know, 13 year-olds have mood swings and social dramas. I want my daughter to know I am available to her 24/7 and that she can count on me for emotional support. Without a cell phone, my daughter would not be able to reach me while I am at work and this would present emotional and logistical challenges for both of us.

Additionally, I believe that cell phones and pagers help to improve the safety of the school. With the growing threat of violence on middle school campuses, I want to know that there are many people ready to call 911 if an emergency response is needed. We also live in an earthquake zone and if a severe earthquake were to hit, we all will need access to cell phones in order to reach loved ones and to execute an emergency response. I realize that the school has an emergency response plan, but if there were a crisis, I would need to reach my daughter immediately.

Given the arguments stated above, I sincerely hope you will reconsider your policy against electronics on campus. Students should be allowed to have cell phones on campus for issues of safety and convenience. I am sure if all students were required to leave the volume of these devices down or off, the disruption would be minimal and the benefit maximal.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,  
A Concerned Parent

Dear Concerned Parent,

The school has received a number of inquiries about the district's ban on electronics. We understand the concerns of parents for their children's safety during potential crises and the needs of parents to communicate with students during the school day; however, our experience informs our position on this issue. Electronic devices are very disruptive to the educational environment and we will therefore not be altering our policy.

The district enacted a ban on electronic devices when the popularity of pagers surged in the 1990s and we discovered that some of our students were involved in drug sales. As gangs infiltrated our schools and preyed on younger and younger students, the district took action to protect students from involvement in these illegal activities. We worked closely with local law enforcement agencies to develop policies that would deter gang-related crime. A ban on electronics was one of many policies enacted towards this purpose.

Although cell phones are not allowed on campus, many students disregard this rule and bring them to school. The ringing and vibrating of cell phones is a serious disruption to the learning environment. The ring of a cell phone often results in students laughing (usually in response to a ring tone) or teasing the student whose phone rang. This disruption forces the teacher to stop teaching to regain control of the students' attention and to refocus the students on the learning activity. This break in the classroom activity disturbs the "flow" of the learning taking place and it is often difficult to recover from the shift in focus. If the ban on cell phones was revoked, we fear that very little learning would take place in the classroom with forgetful students responding to ringing and buzzing phones, not to mention the illicit text messaging that would take place.

As a principal, I understand that our focus on the disruption of the students' education has come into conflict with cell phones becoming an item of convenience and safety in recent years. More and more parents are lobbying the school board to change its policy primarily based on the argument that phones will make students and schools safer in light of national tragedies. We agree that cell phones offer the school and parents some measure of convenience and safety, but we do not feel that this outweighs the disruption they would cause. Our commitment to parents and students is to have an emergency response plan that protects the safety and well-being of all students. There are phones at the school for emergency purposes in addition to my own personal cell phone and those of many teachers. Parents may contact students during the school day by leaving messages with the main office secretary. There is a school phone that students may use to call parents/guardians with urgent matters.

Thank you for contacting me with your concerns. Please feel free to stop by my office any time to discuss our emergency response plan and to work on ways to improve our school communication systems.

Sincerely,

The Principal

### **Thinking, Talking and Planning**

Work with a partner to complete this exercise.

1. Go back to the letters and review where you wrote
  - **1** (where the writer states the position),
  - **2** (where the writing supports and develops this position), and
  - **3** (the counterargument.)

Did you agree with your partner?

2. How many arguments does the concerned parent use to support his/her position? \_\_\_\_

What are they?

3. How many arguments does the principal use to support his/her position? \_\_\_\_

What are they?

4. Check the persuasive strategies the writers uses to persuade the reader.

- \_\_\_ personal experience
- \_\_\_ an emotional appeal
- \_\_\_ a logical appeal
- \_\_\_ an ethical appeal
- \_\_\_ a counterargument

5. Which writer persuades you to agree with him or her? \_\_\_\_\_ Why? How?

### **Organizing**

Now go back to your chart from the **Getting Started** section and add to your list of PROs and CONs. Decide which position you will take in writing your essay. Plan your essay by using the graphic organizer on the next page. In your planning, make sure your arguments are supported by appropriate and well-elaborated reasons, examples, quotations and/or facts. A convincing essay will include a response to a counterargument.

<b>Claim: What's your opinion? Is a ban on cell phones on school campuses a good idea?</b>

<b>Reasons: Why should readers accept your position?</b>

<b>Evidence to support your position</b>		
<b>Support for First reason:</b>	<b>Support for Second Reason:</b>	<b>Support for Third Reason:</b>
<b>Counter Argument</b>		
<b>Acknowledge other perspectives on the subject</b>	<b>Respond to other perspectives on the subject</b>	

## Writing

### ***A Ban on Cell Phones?***

Teachers and principals are interested in learning your position on the issue of banning cell phones on middle school campuses. They want to know how students feel about changing the district's ban to allow for cell phones on campus.

Write a persuasive essay or letter in which you argue for or against the cell phone ban. Use a variety of persuasive strategies and address a counterargument. Try to persuade your reader to agree with you. You may use notes from any of your prewriting activities.

#### ***Writing Reminders:***

As you write, keep the following points in mind since you won't have time to rewrite.

- \_\_\_ Begin in an interesting way that leads to your controlling idea (position) of your essay.
- \_\_\_ Choose strong arguments to support your opinion.
- \_\_\_ Develop your arguments by including specific information through explanation, personal experiences, examples, and/or statistics.
- \_\_\_ Show in your writing that you know both sides of the issue, and why you disagree with the other point of view.
- \_\_\_ Use language and vocabulary that is persuasive, precise, and lively.
- \_\_\_ Organize the main sections of your essay into paragraphs so that the reader can follow your ideas.
- \_\_\_ End with a confident conclusion that restates your main point.

#### ***After You Write (Editing)***

After you write, take time to review the items below. You may make changes right on your paper.

- \_\_\_ Give the essay a title. (You can choose your title before or after you write the essay.)
- \_\_\_ Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, and quotation marks appropriately.
- \_\_\_ Check your spelling.