

## A Message from the Upper School Principal and Dean of Students

*August 2, 2024*

Dear Upper School Students, Parents, and Faculty,

This letter is to accompany our **new Upper School policy on the use of technological devices** — specifically phones, headphones, and earbuds — during the school day. The smartphone, a pocket-sized computer equally empowered to increase productivity and distraction, has transformed our society — how we interact with each other, how we work, and how we distract and comfort ourselves.

While these devices have many productive uses, there is substantial evidence for negative effects on school-aged children and teenagers, and we as educators have seen the shift in our classrooms and hallways — reports from students and families of more teen sleep deprivation and anxiety; more difficulty making friends and branching out of social circles; and more trouble focusing on assemblies, longer readings, or multi-step processes. Our students have noticed this as well — 61 percent of Park Upper Schoolers (May 2024) wish that either they or their classmates (or both) would use their phones less at school.

In response to these observations, support for a new policy has been growing among the faculty and administration, to help us and our students manage these devices in a healthy way. Over the last two years, we have held faculty meetings to discuss, consulted research on the topic, surveyed students widely in the springs of 2023 and 2024, and held student drop-in sessions to discuss observations and ideas. In May 2024, the faculty proposed and overwhelmingly approved a new policy:

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### *Upper School Device Policy 2024*

- **Phones and laptops may not be brought to assembly, class meetings, and other large gatherings.** They should be left in backpacks or lockers outside of the assembly space. Earbuds and headphones are not permitted to be worn in assembly, unless part of a specific accommodation from a member of the Counseling or Learning Resource offices.
- **All phones will be placed in a school-designated storage space in the classroom during class time, unless specifically requested to be used by the teacher.** They should not be used during class periods, including breaks. They can be retrieved at the end of the class period.
- **Laptops may be used during class per the teacher's directions.** Students may be asked to close them or put them away at times, depending on the needs of the activity. Accommodations are made for students with specific learning needs, as designated by the Learning Resource Office.
- **Earbuds and headphones should not be worn in class, except with teacher permission during independent work times.**
- **Students may decide for themselves how to use technology during free blocks (G or X).**

- Students who have trouble adhering to this policy may have their phones, earbuds, or other devices confiscated until the end of the school day.
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[Here is more information](#) on the logic and process that we used to arrive at these policies, including evidence for the harm of smartphones and social media on the teen brain, answers to common first questions about how the policy will work in practice, and resources to help think about the challenges of managing tech use in and out of school.

Our policies, community norms, and teaching will continue to evolve as we see the effects of these changes and adapt to whatever new technologies will come at us. One thing must never change—the centering of the students’ learning. Education is the joy of discovery in learning about our world and your own place in it—your ability to express yourself, your understanding of how you engage with your communities and your responsibilities to others, your appreciation and wonder for the patterns and behaviors of the natural world, and your inspiration to contribute to and better our collective understanding.

We look forward to a new year of strong connection, deep learning, and mindful focus, for teachers and students alike!

Sincerely,

*Traci Wright*  
Upper School Principal

*Elliott Huntsman*  
Upper School Dean of Students