**A Proactive Approach to Classroom Cell Phone Use**

“Part of teaching digital citizenship is knowing where your students are in their understanding of privacy, safety, etiquette, identity, empathy, and security online,” says Liz Kolb (University of Michigan) in this article in Edutopia. The average age for first acquiring a cell phone in the U.S. is 10, and many children arrive in school with little guidance on when to use their devices. Setting expectations for classroom cell phone use needs to be done early in the school year, Kolb believes. Her suggestions:

1. Have an open discussion. Here are some questions teachers might ask to build students’ awareness:

- How do you feel about your cell phone and the activities you do with it?

- What do you do with your cell phone and why? (If you don’t have one, what would you like to do?)

- Which apps and websites are your favorites?

- What are some inappropriate ways cell phones are used? What is poor cell phone etiquette?

- How can cell phones help you learn? To gather information, collaborate on school projects, or evaluate websites?

- How can cell phones distract from learning?

- What don’t teachers understand about the way you use your cell phone?

- How can we work together to create positive mobile mental health?

**Discussing these questions may be the first time students have thought through how their phones affect their lives in and out of school.**

2. Use a “stoplight” management system. This is a way of giving students a heads-up on how cell phones will be used (or not used) as they walk into a classroom:

- Red light – A symbol on the door tells students that devices will not be used that day and need to be turned off and placed face down in the upper right-hand corner of desks, or in backpacks, or in a pocket holder on the teacher’s desk.

- Yellow light – Cell phones will be used for part of the lesson, but must be set to silent/ vibrate and face down in the upper right-hand corner of desks until use is permitted. This allows the teacher to quickly scan the room for compliance and makes it harder for students to peek at text messages and social media during all-class instruction.

- Green light – Students know that phones will be an active part of the lesson and should be turned on and set to silent or vibrate and placed face up in ready position for use throughout the class.

This signals clear expectations as students walk into each class, and opens opportunities for specific uses of cell phones as part of instruction.

3. Draft a class contract. Kolb suggests a discussion about why limits are important and possible consequences for violations. Students then reach consensus on a class contract that’s sent home for student and parent signatures. The contract might be revised as the year progresses.

“3 Tips for Managing Phone Use in Class” by Liz Kolb in Edutopia, September 11, 2017.