



# **RICHARDSON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

EVERY CHILD. EVERY TEACHER. EVERY LEADER. EVERY DAY.

## **Administrative Services**

Matthew Gibbins Ed.D.

Written Testimony

K-12 Subcommittee, U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce

June 10, 2025

My name is Dr. Matthew Gibbins, and I serve as an Assistant Superintendent in the Richardson Independent School District (RISD). I'm honored to share the story of our district's journey to establish a phone-free learning environment for both students and teachers.

Located just north of Dallas in Dallas County, RISD serves approximately 37,000 students across 50 campuses, including 4 high schools, 8 junior high/middle schools, 37 elementary schools, and 1 alternative campus. Our district reflects the vibrant diversity of our broader community: 37% of our students identify as Hispanic/Latino, 30% as White, 22% as Black or African American, and over 55% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Over my 25 years in RISD, I've served in multiple roles including teacher, campus principal, Director of Special Education, and now Assistant Superintendent. In 2022, our Superintendent, Ms. Tabitha Branum, asked me to lead an initiative to address the increasing disruption caused by student cell phone use at the secondary level. While my role was one part of a broader team effort, the progress we've made is a direct result of exceptional collaboration among teachers, campus leaders, families, and our central support teams.

Over time, we heard mounting concerns from educators and staff that smartphones were interfering with instruction, reducing student engagement, and contributing to serious challenges including cyberbullying, physical altercations, academic dishonesty, and safety concerns linked to social media. These concerns were echoed by families and reinforced by our end-of-year teacher feedback survey, where cell phone use was identified as the number one concern.

In response, we revised Board Policy FNCE (Local) in August 2022 to clarify and strengthen expectations regarding student phone use. At the same time, we introduced a new tool: the magnetically sealed Yondr pouch, which allows students to secure their phones, smartwatches,

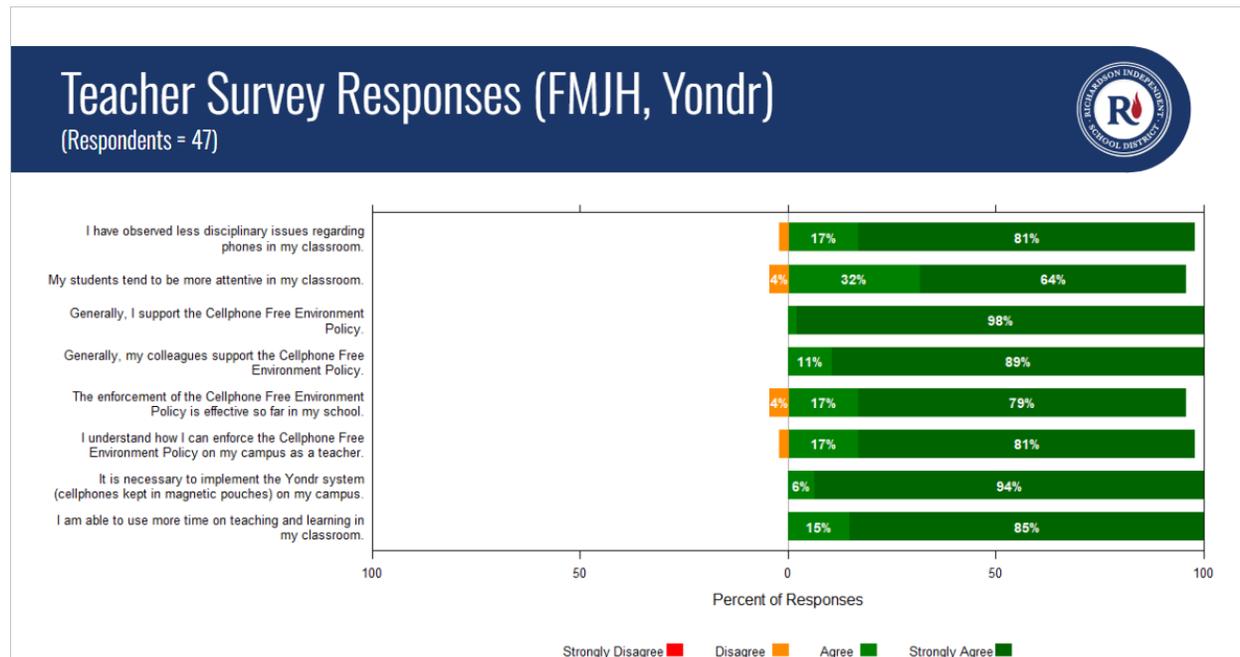


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and earbuds during the school day. We piloted this solution at one junior high campus during the 2022–2023 school year. The district worked closely with the administration and staff and the end of the year survey results were compelling with 98% of teachers reporting fewer disciplinary issues, and 100% observed an increase in daily instructional time.



Encouraged by these outcomes, we expanded the program to three additional campuses for the 2023–2024 school year, including Lake Highlands High School—one of our largest secondary campuses with nearly 3,000 students. While this expansion raised some safety concerns from families, we addressed them proactively through community meetings, detailed FAQs, and clear communication about emergency procedures. We emphasized that in true emergencies, student safety depends on following school protocols not on personal devices.

Today, RISD enforces consistent cell phone expectations across all campuses. On designated Yondr campuses, students receive personal pouches that remain sealed throughout the school day, with devices powered off and stored before entering the building. Non-Yondr campuses follow a policy that requires devices to remain powered off and out of sight, enforced by staff monitoring rather than pouches. Policy violations result in escalating consequences, beginning with device confiscation and parent contact, and potentially leading to in-school suspension for repeat infractions.



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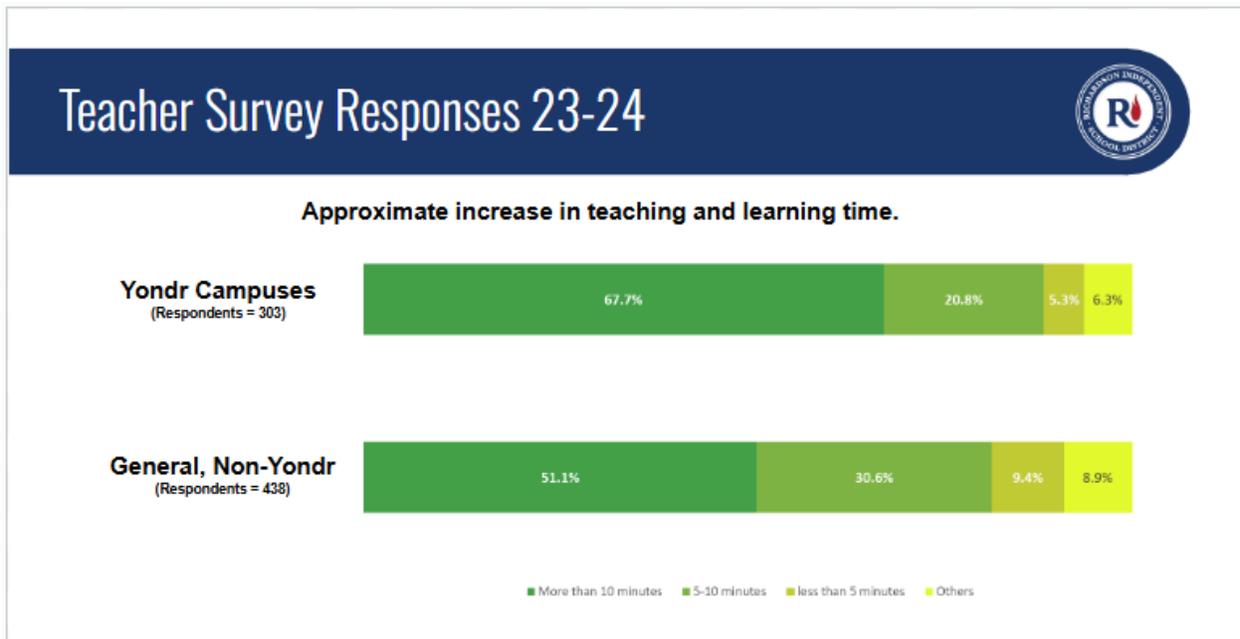
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To support communication, families are encouraged to contact students via their district email accounts (accessible through school-issued Chromebooks) or by calling the school directly.

Interest in our approach continues to grow. To date, more than 50 K–12 districts across Texas and beyond have contacted us to learn more about our phone-free model. For the 2024–2025 school year, all four RISD high schools have voluntarily adopted the Yondr program. Early data shows significant impact: some campuses have seen reductions in both in-school and out-of-school suspensions ranging from 15% to 54%. Teacher retention has also improved, with many citing the phone-free environment as a key reason for remaining in RISD. Retention rates on Yondr campuses ranged from 85% to 94%.

Survey data from the end of the 2023 - 2024 school year further shows that teachers across both Yondr and non-Yondr campuses are regaining instructional time on average, more than 10 minutes per class period.





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### **Principal and Teacher Testimonials**

#### **Carolyn Vincent, Math Teacher and Department Head, Lake Highlands High School**

“Using Yondr pouches for our new cell phone policy enforcement has strengthened our classroom culture. Students are more engaged with each other and learning. Since I am not having to focus on student phones, I can focus on my students and their learning.”

#### **Susan Burt, Principal, Forest Meadow Middle School**

“Since implementing Yondr pouches, we’ve seen a transformational shift in campus culture. Students are more engaged in learning, more connected with peers, and more active in class discussions. After three years, teachers continue to report stronger focus, fewer disruptions, and improved classroom management. The pouches have significantly reduced bullying and eliminated cyberbullying during the school day. Hallways are once again filled with conversation and laughter. Yondr isn’t just about managing phones it’s about reclaiming our learning environment and creating a more connected, respectful, and emotionally safe school community.”

#### **Chris Choat, Principal, Richardson High School**

“Teachers overwhelmingly support the Yondr system, reporting fewer distractions and more instructional time. While students were initially unsure, many now say it’s not as difficult as they expected and they feel more present in class. Disciplinary issues tied to social media have decreased dramatically, contributing to a more focused and respectful school environment.”

#### **Nick Rustin, Principal, Lake Highlands Middle School**

“Yondr has been a game changer. Though Chromebooks still pose occasional distractions, removing phones has significantly reduced teacher-student conflicts. Our clear, district-wide policy removes the power struggle over phone use allowing teachers to focus on teaching and administrators to handle enforcement. This shift has helped build stronger teacher-student relationships and improved the classroom climate.”



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### **Kerri Jones, Principal, Lake Highlands High School**

“After two years with Yondr, we’ve seen a dramatic change. Teachers no longer battle cell phones. Passing periods are filled with conversation. Fewer fights are recorded and shared. The cafeteria is lively students talk, play games, and even read. The calm we now experience on campus didn’t exist before. There’s no perfect system, but with clear expectations and strong support, we’ve built a better learning environment. Our teachers are grateful they’re finally free to do what they love: teach!”

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While we know that student achievement and teacher retention are influenced by many variables, the early results from our phone-free initiative are both meaningful and measurable. When paired with clear policy and strong campus leadership, a phone-free environment can help schools become more focused, less distracted, and more student-centered.

With the passage of the **Texas House Bill 1481**, we believe districts across Texas and beyond are moving toward a future where learning environments are safer, calmer, and more conducive to both academic and emotional growth.

For more information about our cell phone policy, please visit:

 [RISD Cell Phone Guidelines](#)

Sincerely,

Matthew Gibbins, Ed. D.  
Assistant Superintendent Administrative Services  
Richardson ISD

