

THESIS: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CELL PHONE BANS

**Exploring Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of the  
K-8 School Cell Phone Ban within the Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg,  
Manitoba**

**by**

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### Abstract

In response to concerns surrounding smartphone use and its potential impact on adolescent mental health, attention, and academic achievements, many schools around the world have implemented some form of policy banning the use of cell phones in their buildings (Stechyson & Fraser, 2024). In Canada, Manitoba was one of the last provinces to implement cell phone bans in kindergarten to Grade 12 schools, which came into effect in September 2024 (Adamski, 2024). Manitoba has a tiered cell phone ban, meaning that students from kindergarten to Grade 8 have different cell phone policies than the policies that govern use in high schools. For students in Kindergarten through Grade 8, cell phones are prohibited during school hours, including recess and lunch hours (Government of Manitoba, 2023). Inevitably, the rollout and enforcement of these bans have fallen on teachers within schools and individual classrooms. Despite this reality, limited research has examined teachers' perceptions and experiences of implementing these bans. The aim of this thesis was to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions of the cell phone ban in elementary and middle schools in the Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Using semi-structured interviews with six teachers within this division, data was collected and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences with the ban as it pertained to their teaching and well-being, along with their perceptions of the cell phone ban's impact on their students. Findings from this thesis study highlighted the benefits and concerns associated with this policy and informed future practice and policy directions.

**Keywords:** *Cell phone usage, smartphones, adolescents, education, classrooms, policy enforcement, mental health, academics, qualitative research, Winnipeg, Manitoba*

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### **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all teachers who work tirelessly throughout each school year, supporting, inspiring and shaping the lives of their students every day.

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## Chapter 1: General Introduction

### Background and Context

Smartphones, first widely available in 2012, mark the point at which adolescents began to own these devices in greater numbers, profoundly shaping how they communicate and access information (Haidt, 2024). Between 2009 to 2012, social media also became more constant and readily available for adolescents with the introduction of Facebook and Twitter (Haidt, 2024). Author, Ceci (2022) found that by 2022, 39 percent of Canadian children aged two to six had access to a cell phone, while 50 percent of children aged seven to eleven owned one. During the same 10-year period, the rate of adolescents aged 12 to 17 who owned a cell phone rose to 87 percent (Ceci, 2022). These statistics are not unique to Canada. Indeed, the increase in access to and use of smartphones among young children and adolescents is reflected worldwide. In May 2025, a study of 2000 parents of children in kindergarten to Grade 5, found that 67% of these parents feared they were losing precious time with their children due to screen addiction (AngelQ, 2025). Moreover, these parents noted approximately 96 hours (about 8 days) each year fighting over their child's screen time use. Among these parents, the most substantial concerns were the impact of smartphone use on their child's attention span, including decreased homework completion, increased anxiety, and trouble sleeping (AngelQ, 2025).

Additional research describes an association between smartphone use and increases in children's mental health concerns and psychiatric diagnoses, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Haidt, 2024). Haidt also found that sex differences are related to smartphone use; adolescent females were more impacted by use including increased anxiety and depression compared to adolescent males. Primary reasons for this difference are because girls tend to use these platforms for peer validation, social comparison, and social interactions (Haidt, 2024). With the emergence of countless exciting social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Snapchat), many

adolescents (and adults) struggle with the ability to be fully present with the people around them, which in turn has transformed social life for everyone by exchanging face-to-face social time to virtual interaction (Haidt, 2024).

One way some countries around the world are combating technology addiction for adolescents is by enacting legislation to ban social media for children under 16 years of age. These laws are designed to target tech companies' irresponsible design and algorithmic features, while holding them accountable for the harm they can cause adolescents (Geist, 2026). In December 2025, Australia made global history by implementing the first nationwide social media ban (including TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook) for children under 16 (LiveNOW from FOX, 2026). Numerous countries have since followed suit, initiating the discussion around social media harms and implementing legislation to restrict access for young people. Countries with some form of social media restriction include Austria, Brazil, Britain, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, and the United States (LiveNOW from FOX, 2026). On June 10, 2026, the Canadian federal government's cultural minister, Marc Miller, introduced Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act, which would require social media services to restrict children under 16 from accessing accounts. This policy also includes setting out criteria for AI chatbots to respond and report online interactions to police when an online user expresses suicidal ideation or self-harm. Although further details on its implementation have yet to be released, this announcement is long-awaited by some parents, given the growing concern about social media's impact on their children (Tunney, 2026).

On April 25, 2026, Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew announced that our province will be the first in Canada to ban teens (16 and under) from using social media and AI chatbots (CBC

News, 2026). Kinew wants social media companies to “take responsible steps to prevent anyone under 16 from having an account or else face penalties” (CBC News, 2026). This article goes on to say that tech companies would be required to deactivate or remove the accounts of users in this age cohort and to ensure they cannot create new accounts. If companies fail to follow these policies, they will face a fine. Details of how this policy will be implemented have yet to be formally announced; however, it has been shared that schools will be at the forefront of implementation and enforcement in Manitoba (The Canadian Press, 2026).

In addition to the adolescent social media mental health crises, previous studies have found that when communication is substantively online and virtual rather than in-person, social competencies become underdeveloped and limited, including capacities for empathy and the ability for face-to-face interaction, along with limited ability to foster healthy relationships and resolve conflict (Dobešová Cakirpaloglu et al., 2020). In addition to relational and emotional health concerns, recent research supported by the National Institutes of Health found that children who spend more than seven hours per day on screens can promote premature thinning of the cerebral cortex, an area of the brain responsible for executive functioning (Aloteibi, 2022). Moreover, Dr. Michael Rich, a pediatric neurologist, suggests that it will take 20 years to understand the impact of tablet and cellphone use on the adolescent brain (Rudderham, 2024). Taken together, these detrimental effects on brain development, children’s mental health, well-being and relational impacts are permeating school classrooms, leaving teachers facing new and challenging realities. The ubiquitous growth in cell phone usage has brought significant changes to the classroom environment, with school administrators and teachers grappling with increased concerns about attentional and learning disruptions, academic attainment, mental health issues, cyberbullying, interpersonal challenges, and academic dishonesty (Gath et al., 2024). There is

also evidence suggesting a relationship between smartphone use, poor mental health, and challenging social outcomes among children and adolescents (Campbell et al., 2024; Haidt, 2024). Given these consistent and robust findings, school divisions and educational institutions worldwide are seeking solutions to this growing challenge, including the implementation of cell phone bans in educational settings.

The struggles teachers face with cell phones in the classroom are wide-ranging. It is often focused on maintaining the attention of students, noise and distraction (Nikolopoulou, 2020), erosion of teachers' status and performance, increases in offensive and violent behaviour (Beerli & Horowitz, 2020), and increased concerns about cheating and student safety related to cyberbullying (Gath et al., 2024). Even as many policymakers have sought to ban cell phone use in educational settings, administrators and teachers have struggled to regulate cell phone usage during school hours. Limited practical guidance on smartphone use in schools has created new challenges for school administrators and teachers (Rahali et al., 2024). This confluence of research linking smartphones to negative mental health and educational impacts, and the realities of implementing a ban on their use, poses challenges not only for school administrators but for teachers directly.

When the first provincial cell phone ban was implemented in Canada, Ontario was the first province to do so in 2019 (Smale et al., 2021). It wasn't until the 2023-2024 school year that cell phone bans began to be implemented in school systems across other Canadian provinces. Manitoba was the last western Canadian province to introduce such a ban for kindergarten to Grade 12 students, which came into effect in September 2024 (Adamski, 2024). This policy, announced by the Manitoba Government in August 2024, aims to reduce distractions in schools while acknowledging the negative mental health impact of students' smartphone use

(Government of Manitoba, 2024). The Manitoba cell phone policy varies based on grade level. As an example, Kindergarten to Grade 8 students are banned from using cell phones at all times throughout the school day, including during lunch and breaks. In contrast, Manitoba students in grades 9 to 12, are banned from using cell phones during classtime; however, they are permitted to do so during lunch and break times. Exceptions to these mandates are provided for students whose medical or diverse learning needs require smartphones. In such cases, school administrators collaborate with teachers to establish protocols for cellphone usage in educational settings (Government of Manitoba, 2024).

While the cell phone ban in Manitoba schools is provincially mandated, individual teachers are critical to how the policy is actualized and implemented. Given the importance of teachers in enacting such bans, it is surprising that there is a dearth of research on teachers' experiences and perceptions of cell phone bans. More broadly, in jurisdictions with bans, teachers have expressed concerns about implementation, often stating that it is 'more than what they signed up for' and that they are uncomfortable and unprepared to police cell phone usage (Robertson et al., 2020). Previous research has also found that teachers' disciplinary styles often lead to differing outcomes in the implementation of these policies, suggesting that the teachers' level of strictness influences students' adherence to classroom rules and regulations (Gao, 2017). This was illuminated by Beeri and Horowitz (2020) who found that each teacher has a distinct disciplinary style in their classroom, characterized by setting limits, setting clear guidelines, and establishing well-understood expectations. Whether a teacher employs a dictatorial, permissive, or authoritarian style significantly influences the classroom environment (Beeri & Horowitz, 2020). Additionally, research by O'Bannon and Thomas (2015) found that teachers' viewpoints on cell phone use in the classroom differed significantly between those over 50 years of age and

those relatively new to the profession. Teachers with more classroom experience were significantly less enthusiastic about having phones in classrooms, finding them problematic and unnecessary for teaching, compared to newer teachers who saw some benefits in having cell phones in classrooms. However, there is a present lack of research on teachers' perceptions of their experiences with the cell phone ban in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Given that the cell phone ban in Manitoba is well into its second year of enforcement, research aimed at understanding teachers' experiences in implementing the ban and their perceptions of its effectiveness and impact on students' learning and well-being is warranted.

### **Study Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of this thesis research was to explore teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding the implementation of the current cell phone ban in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in the Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Given my role as a Registered Social Worker in this school division, focusing on a single division enabled a more in-depth, contextually grounded exploration. The cell phone ban policy was recently introduced in Manitoba, and there are currently no studies in Winnipeg examining teachers' perceptions and observations about its implementation, effectiveness, or its potential impacts on student mental health, relational capacity, or academic outcomes. In response, my thesis aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' experiences teaching with the cell phone ban, and how has this impacted their teaching practices and well-being?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of a cell phone ban on their students' well-being (physical and mental health) and academic outcomes?

While the Manitoba cell phone ban policy is province-wide, its implementation and rollout varied widely across individual classrooms, schools, and even school divisions. Despite initial research offering helpful recommendations for schools and teachers, limited follow-up research restricted the further design of policies for administrators (Sheng & Lipscombe, 2024). This was also certainly true within the Pembina Trails School Division. Robust research, along with professional education and support, was crucial in helping teachers adopt the policy as one that could make a meaningful difference for both them and their students (Randhawa et al., 2024). It was anticipated that findings from this thesis study would help illuminate teachers' voices regarding this policy within this division, assess its implementation effectiveness, and shed light on the effective implementation of future policies that included all affected voices.

## **Positionality**

### ***Personal experience***

As a mother of two young children (ages 6 and 9), I find myself navigating the ongoing challenge of managing technology and screen time as my children grow older. I am grateful for research linking technology use to brain development, given its practical impact on how my partner and I make informed decisions that feel appropriate for our sons and for us. Understanding the impact that screens and cell phones can have on growing brains and the foundation for healthy relationships shapes our views about when and how we want our children to have smartphone access.

I am deeply grateful that the increased use of cell phones among my friends occurred during my final year of high school. This was a challenging time for me, and in retrospect, I can only imagine the complexities that may have arisen from having a cell phone in my pocket, which I suspect may have pulled me further away from supportive, relational connections in my

life. At that time, my frustrations with technology were centered around our slow dial-up internet connection and the need to share a single computer with my family. I am thankful for the simplicity of this frustration compared to what children and adolescents experience today.

### ***Professional background***

I currently work as a School Social Worker in the Pembina Trails School Division. I am in my third year in this role and have witnessed firsthand the complexities, frustrations, and challenges that students face when bringing their phones to school. Particularly over the past year, I have walked alongside teachers as they navigate the implementation of the provincially mandated cell phone ban. Prior to the implementation of this ban in the 2024-2025 school year, I observed phones as a persistent classroom distraction, requiring frequent reminders and redirection that took time away from teaching and learning. Late in the 2023-2024 school year, administrators informed staff that the government might enforce a cell phone ban for the following school year. During that summer, I found myself checking the news and work emails, curious whether such a ban would come into effect. I clearly recall the public announcement when the policy and its grade-level-specific rules were released. As I am not privy to the information school administrators receive from the Senior Administration team, I was unsure how this information was released or what instructions were given for its implementation.

Since that time, my presence in various schools as a Social Worker and my observation of teacher-student interactions have exposed my naivety about believing that this ban would be adhered to by all students and educators. The reality is that many students continue to bring their phones to school and need frequent daily reminders about the current ban. This reality has sparked my curiosity about the ban's effectiveness and how teachers perceive its impact on academics, mental health, and overall student well-being.

***Awareness of bias***

I identify as a white, middle-class woman and am aware of both the privilege and potential bias I bring related to access, equity, and adherence to rules as they pertain to cell phone usage. I bring awareness of my assumption that all students have access to technology and smartphones, and that some students use their phones as a lifeline to connect to appropriate resources and support. Additionally, I am aware of my potential bias in thinking that “screen-free is better”. Given the relevance of this topic and the ongoing research on technology and mental health, it can be all too easy to think the easiest solution is to eliminate technology via bans. Alas, the reality is more complex than this, particularly given that complete elimination is all but impossible, and that doing so often bypasses the root cause of how technology is reshaping young people’s social conditions making it extremely hard to disengage from. These complexities, including the limited opportunity to hear teachers' voices regarding this ban and reports on the ban's effectiveness in classrooms, were reasons to explore this topic.

***Strengths as a researcher***

An exploratory qualitative research approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of teachers’ experiences and perceptions regarding the cell phone ban in the Pembina Trails School Division. This research method enabled me, as a researcher, to listen to teachers’ stories and opinions, which I benefit from and enjoy in my everyday work. During both my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Social Work, I had opportunities to conduct qualitative research interviews in various courses. Additionally, as a School Social Worker, I am skilled in clinical interviewing and drawing experiences from individuals. My role as a School Social Worker has allowed me to build relationships with teachers in each of my schools, helping them feel safe and comfortable being honest in their reflections on this policy rollout. My aim was for the research

and information generated by my thesis to help policymakers and other school divisions hear teachers' voices and potentially shape future policy directions that promote teachers' and students' well-being.

### **Thesis Outline**

The following chapters outline my study's rationale and methodology. Chapter 2 builds on this chapter by reviewing and critiquing the literature on cell phone bans and contrasting differing views on the current policy ban. Chapter 3 describes my chosen research methods, provides a rationale for using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and outlines my epistemological stance, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and the strategies I used to ensure rigour and trustworthiness. Chapter 4 presents the findings, outlining main themes and sub-themes from the data. Finally, Chapter 5 addresses the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations for the future.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Orientations**

### **Introduction**

In 2023, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) urged schools worldwide to ban cell phone use in classrooms (Stechyson & Fraser, 2024). UNESCO, a global agency, did so out of concern for an emerging child health crisis characterized by mental health concerns, cyber-bullying and peer victimization, and attentional issues and distractions in classrooms, given the ever-increasing technology and social media addiction among young people. As an attempt to address these concerns in educational contexts, cell phone bans have become increasingly common worldwide, even as implementation and enforcement vary by country, province, school division, and school (Randhawa et al., 2024). The implications and effects of Manitoba's cell phone ban, which came into effect in September of the 2024/2025 school year, are still evolving. Inevitably, teachers are the 'gatekeepers' or 'enforcers' of these bans and are largely responsible for their day-to-day implementation in their individual classrooms (Campbell, 2006; Gilroy, 2004). Therefore, it is important that we hear directly from the 'teacher-gatekeepers' themselves to understand their perceptions and experience and the ban's impact on teachers' and students' well-being.

As a School Social Worker posted at four elementary and middle schools in the Pembina Trails School Division, I have observed varying approaches to implementation since the ban came into effect. I have also noted that a good number of students continue to bring their cell phones to school despite the ban. Since the enforcement of cell phone bans in many parts of the world, numerous researchers have noted gaps in the literature on teachers' views and perceptions regarding the impact of the cell-phone ban on students' mental health, academic performance, and overall classroom environment (Alakurt & Yilmaz, 2021; Gath et al., 2024; Grigic

Magnusson et al., 2023; O'Bannon & Thomas, 2015; Randhawa et al., 2024; Thomas et al., 2014). Given the relative newness of this ban in Manitoba, there is also a gap in the research on teachers' perceptions and experiences in our own context. This thesis proposal aims to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse views, perceptions, and recommendations given by teachers regarding the current cell phone ban in their kindergarten to Grade 8 schools within one division, Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

### **History of cell phone bans**

The mobile phone has undergone drastic changes in a very short time in terms of accessibility, affordability, and physical appearance. Initially designed in 1983 to allow telephone conversations while driving, this device has evolved into a tool seen as 'essential' and is now (more than ever before) in the hands of children and teens (Robertson et al., 2020). Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) relies heavily on these devices for daily communication and is often perceived as a cornerstone of relationships (Dobešová Cakirpaloglu et al., 2020). Although many people outside Generation Z use cell phones, this generation has been most impacted by smartphones (Haidt, 2024). Market research performed by Media Technology Monitor in Canada (2022) showed that two in five Canadian children and youth (age 2-17), or 81% of teens, owned a cell phone, and that 39% of young children (aged 2-6) had used a cell phone in the past month. These rates are thought to have increased dramatically since 2022 due to factors arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, including having to quarantine, and physically isolate and distance from others. Although cell phones are seen as a helpful tool for establishing and maintaining connections with others, ongoing research shows a dark side to their use, particularly for children and teens.

Prior to the widespread adoption of cell phones, there was a history of banning pagers in North American schools, dating back to the late 1980s and early 1990s (Campbell et al., 2024). Parents would send pagers with their children to school, asking them to use them to message about their whereabouts; however, these devices became quickly associated with drug dealing, shifting the school's response, leading them to vilify these devices and outright ban them from school property (Kassorla, 2023). For example, in 1989, the district of Maryland became the first state to enact a statewide ban on pagers in schools, followed by Michigan, Florida, and Chicago. In 1988, 50 other school districts across the country banned cell phones and pagers from entering school grounds (Mathilda & Schildkraut, 2025). However, by the early 2000s, most of these bans were lifted (Campbell et al., 2024) because of safety concerns raised by the Columbine High School shooting and the September 2011 terrorist attacks, both of which highlighted the need for parents and students to be in readily accessible contact during emergencies (Ballaro & Ginsburg, 2024). That said, a second wave of cell phone bans emerged in schools around the world, with the aim of supporting children's learning and well-being. Countries like France imposed a ban on phones in 2017, Israel followed in 2018, Shandong province, China, in 2018, and Ontario, Canada, in 2019 (Campbell et al., 2024).

In 2022, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted that, globally, most schools had some form of rules regarding the use of digital devices, though these rules varied widely in terms of policy and implementation (Stechyson & Fraser, 2024). As these bans began to become more common place worldwide, schools found greater leverage to restrict students' access to technology, especially when backed by government policy (Adams, 2020). Research has shown that when policy changes are backed by politicians responding to

community concerns, there is greater buy-in from parents, caregivers, and schools (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2021).

As noted previously, in 2019 Ontario became the first Canadian province to implement a provincial cell phone standard for all Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools, prohibiting cell phones on school property, including school buses and during instructional time (Smale et al., 2021), whereas, Manitoba was the last western province to introduce a cellphone ban for students from kindergarten to Grade 12, which took effect beginning in the 2024-2025 school year. This announcement followed bans already in place for the 2024-2025 school year, including Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia (Adamski, 2024). Depending on the province one lives in, varied approaches to implementation are being followed. For example, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have banned cell phones for all kindergarten to Grade 12 schools. Ontario uses a tiered system based on grade level, while New Brunswick requires that phones be silenced and stored away during class time. Alberta and British Columbia permit school districts to create their own policies, with provincial standards providing a broad policy framework (Locker, 2025).

Like Ontario, Manitoba has adopted a tiered cell phone ban, meaning students from kindergarten to Grade 8 have different cell phone policies than high school students. For students in elementary and middle schools (Kindergarten - Grade 8), cell phones are prohibited during school hours, including recess and lunch hours. In contrast, for students in grades 9-12, cell phones are restricted during instructional time, and students may use them during breaks and lunchtime (Government of Manitoba, 2023). Even as phones are banned in schools from kindergarten through Grade 8, schools differ widely in how they require students to put them away during formal instruction. Some schools request that these devices be left at home, while

others ask students to place them in lockers, and still others provide cell phone pouches upon arrival in the building or the classroom. Due to differing restrictions in elementary and middle schools compared to high schools, the focus of this study will be on elementary and middle schools in the division, as this policy aims for the most restrictive ban.

### **Legal considerations and students' rights**

Developing and implementing cell phone bans in schools requires following provincial legislation and alignment with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Kiedrowski et al., 2010). Permitting phones in schools raises questions regarding property, search and seizure, and free speech. The challenge is that schools must consider these concerns even as they seek to maintain discipline, safety, and productive learning environments. The Supreme Court permits staff to search and confiscate property if safety is a concern (Kiedrowski et al., 2010). Previously noted safety concerns include cyberbullying, inappropriate or excessive screen time, and distraction (Smale et al., 2021). Declaring phones as contraband is one way to address legal challenges and is currently under global review, as evidence of the effectiveness of cell phone bans remains inconclusive.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes fundamental rights for every child. This includes consideration of how children should be treated in the digital world while maintaining their right to privacy and access to information. The Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors the implementation of digital rights, including those within the school systems. The CRC argues that phones could serve as tools that support children's ability to exercise and fulfill their rights; however, they also require responsible limits. These limits include legislation to protect children from harmful content, including gender-based violence, child trafficking, cyber-aggression, and cyber-attacks. It is emphasized that children's

perspectives and experiences need to be considered when drafting and enacting these policies (United Nations, 2022).

Previous research has noted parental concerns about these cell phone bans, arguing that they infringe on their constitutional right to stay connected with their child (Smale et al., 2021). For example, in 2007, a group of New York parents argued this point in court, although the judge ruled that the ban did not block contact, noting that before cell phones existed, parents would call the front office to reach their children, a method that remains possible and effective to this day (Smale et al., 2021).

Sections 7 and 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protect citizens from unjustified intrusions into their privacy (Department of Justice, 2020). When cell phones are used to harm others in school settings, the safety and well-being of the community take precedence over individual privacy (MacKay et al., 2020). At such times, educators have the legal right to confiscate and, if necessary, search through a student's phone without a warrant (Smale et al., 2021). Policymakers have responded by banning these devices to ease teachers' classroom challenges.

These legal, ethical, and policy considerations illustrate the complexity of cell phone bans and how they directly shape teachers' practice and role within the school. Emphasis should be placed on understanding how teachers are affected, how they interpret these policies, and how they experience them.

## **Cell phones and poor outcomes**

### ***Mental Health***

In the past decade, noticeable emphasis has been placed on the mental health of children and youth as it pertains to their use of cell phones and access to technology. Author and clinical

psychologist Jonathan Haidt, in his book *The Anxious Generation* (2024), states that the shift in the mental health of Generation Z adolescents (those born between 2008 and 2011) began in 2010, coinciding with the introduction of the first smartphones to the mainstream market. Additionally, researchers Nagata et al. (2024) found that compared to the early 2000s, adolescents are 50% more likely to experience a major depressive episode, which they associate with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and screen time on the mental health of adolescents. Nagata et al. (2024) also found that, on average, 8- to 12-year-olds spent 5.5 hours per day using cell phones for non-educational purposes, whereas those aged 13-18 years spent 8.5 hours per day engaged with their cell phones. They suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a 52% increase in the time adolescents spent on mobile devices. These realities differ significantly from the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendation that screen time should be limited to a maximum of two hours per day (Poirier et al., 2024).

Recent research by Common Sense Education revealed that, on average, teens receive 237 notifications on their cellphones per day during school hours and spend 43 minutes on their phones during these hours (Common Sense Education, 2025). Furthermore, cell phones are being owned by younger children, increasing their mental health risk, given the challenges children have in setting their cell phones aside when notifications and the attraction of these devices persistently call their attention. Recently in May 2026, 242 physicians in Manitoba were surveyed about social media's impact on adolescents' mental health and well-being, given that social media and excessive screen time can pose greater health risks to youth than substance use and physical inactivity. Participating physicians were asked to rank the top risks to the health and well-being of children and youth. Social media and excessive screen time were ranked as the highest risk, followed by adverse childhood experiences (such as trauma, neglect, and violence)

and socioeconomic stressors (poverty, housing, and food insecurity) (Doctors Manitoba, 2026).

This engagement with physicians was part of the impetus for the proposed ban on social media in Manitoba, intended to protect children's health and well-being (Sanders, 2026).

Odgers and Jensen (2020) found that suicide rates tripled (especially among 10 to 14-year-old girls) from 1999 to 2017. These authors contend that girls are seen as the heaviest users of social media, which has led to some claims that smartphones and social media may be a contributing factor in the increase of depression, loneliness, and suicide among children. However, the negative effects of cell phones and social media use on adolescents are often overstated in media and policy discussions. Odgers and Jensen reviewed large-scale studies on this topic and found small or negligible associations between social media use and adolescent mental health outcomes. In contrast, a large study performed in England by Przybylski and Weinstein (2017) found that their sample of over 120,000 15-year-old adolescents identified no significant association between mobile technology use and mental well-being. These researchers studied the length of time adolescents used technology in accordance with when they used it (weekdays or weekends). Findings revealed that mobile phone use may interfere with structured activities during the week, but otherwise, other findings were negligible.

More recently, Goodyear et al. (2025) examined the impact of school-level cell phone policies on adolescents' mental well-being, phone usage, and social media engagement. The study focused on 1,227 students aged 12-15 from 30 English secondary schools in the UK. The researchers found that outside of the classroom, there is an association between elevated levels of phone/social media usage and its impact on adolescents' mental health, including depression, anxiety, and poor sleep habits. However, results showed that in school, restrictive policies had no meaningful impact on students' overall mental well-being, nor did they reduce the time

adolescents spent on their devices after school or on weekends. There was also no evidence demonstrating that restrictive cell phone policies had a positive impact on students' anxiety, depression, academic performance, sleep, physical activity, or classroom behaviour. According to the authors, policing cell phones in schools may help limit screen time during school hours, but these interventions were insufficient to reduce screen time outside of school or improve students' overall well-being.

Similarly, Adams (2020) studied this phenomenon across several schools in England and found some studies linking minors' use of social media in schools to depression and an increased risk of suicide. Consistent with findings from Odgers and Jenson (2020), the increase in these mental health concerns, when plotted alongside the increase in social media usage, affords a powerful message connecting social media with an increased risk of depression and suicidal behaviours. However, these authors also cautioned that just because the two trends are increasing simultaneously does not mean that one phenomenon is causing the other and thus does not imply causality. Contrary to these studies, Best et al. (2014) found that, for some adolescents, social media actually increased self-esteem, strengthened social support networks, and enabled safe identity experimentation. In addition, marginalized youth benefited from accessing supportive peer networks and communities from their smartphones.

It is also important to consider the content children view on their cell phones and its impact on their physical activity and interactions with others. Girela-Serrano et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of the mental health effects of mobile phone use among adolescents and found a suggestive but limited association between greater mobile phone use and poorer mental health, with results varying depending on what adolescents were viewing, for how long, and when they were viewing content. Several studies found that social media use can be

associated with an increase in anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem (Bickham et al., 2015; Ikeda & Nakamura, 2014). In addition, in some studies, more than two hours of social media use and online chats were linked to a higher risk of depression (Nishida et al., 2019; Tamura et al., 2017). Additionally, it was found that greater mobile phone usage before bedtime was associated with worse mental health. Odgers and Jensen (2020) found that adolescents' access to mobile phones can decrease their physical activity and interaction with others. Additionally, adolescents who have been victimized in-person are more likely to be bullied, victimized, and solicited online, including adolescents who have struggled with mental health realities offline.

Although debated, the body of evidence documenting the association between cell phone and social media use on children's health outcomes is mounting, suggesting that adolescents who engage extensively with social media may experience greater impacts on sleep quality, higher rates of obesity and depression, and increased exposure to inappropriate or unsafe content, possibly due to the nature and duration of device usage (Reid Chassiakos et al., 2016). Although debated, some studies have found little to no evidence to prove the correlation between cell phone usage and its impact on adolescents' mental health. However, due to this being such a prevalent topic, more focus and attention are being placed on it, allowing for more robust conversations and research that can identify more negative impacts.

### ***Mobile Phone Ban and Academics***

In the absence of an examination of current research on cell phone bans and their impact on academic performance, one might assume that banning these devices would improve academic performance by mitigating their distractions. However, existing research on this topic varies. A review of 26 articles by Böttger and Zierer (2024) found that cell phone bans have a small and positive impact on students' academic outcomes, including reduced distractions,

improved focus, engagement, and participation. The most pronounced finding was that the effect size ( $d = 0.162$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) was statistically significant, indicating that cell phone bans lead to a calmer learning environment, which, in turn, may improve concentration. These findings are similar to those reported by King et al. (2024), who studied five Australian schools, Grades 7–12, and the effects of cell phone bans on academic outcomes. Their results provided a comparative analysis of schools with and without cell phone bans and concluded that there were few differences in students' academic engagement, although subtle positive academic effects were found for lower-achieving students.

This contradicts previous research from Beland and Murphy (2016), which examined the impact of cell phone bans on students' academic performance in four high schools in England. Results showed that standardized test scores increased by approximately 6% on average and by more than 14% for low-achieving students. Consistent with King et al. (2024), high-achieving students were less likely to benefit from these bans compared to low-achieving students. The researchers suggest that one factor explaining this difference may be that lower-achieving students have lower self-control and are more easily distracted by cell phones in class compared to higher-achieving students.

Related to the notion of cell phone use and self-control, Wilmer et al. (2017) examined the relationship between smartphone use and cognition among adolescents, finding negative associations between smartphone use and three facets of cognition – attention, memory, and instant gratification. This research supports concerns that smartphones' impact on memory function is prevalent, suggesting that reliance on smartphones may impede students' learning and retention. Research on reward processing and delayed instant gratification is another outcome associated with smartphone use. Findings from this study link higher smartphone use to a

tendency to prefer instant gratification over larger delayed rewards. This may help to explain why teachers are struggling with students' lack of patience, focus, and self-control in the classroom.

Together, these highlighted studies demonstrate the varied results and outcomes tested within the school system regarding the mobile phone bans and their impact on academic performance. Given that the ban is a relatively recent phenomenon, research on this topic has been limited and inconsistent, and further exploration is needed to understand the impact of such bans on elementary/middle school students' academic performance.

### ***Cyberbullying and peer victimization***

While traditional bullying remains an ongoing concern in schools, the release of the smartphone has resulted in cyberbullying and online peer victimization. Cyberbullying is defined as sending harmful texts using the internet or smartphone through instant messaging, emails, chat rooms, and social media networks (Feinberg & Robey, 2009). Due to the discreet nature of cyberbullying in schools (compared to in-person bullying), this issue can be incredibly difficult for teachers and administrators to monitor and address (Smale et al., 2021). The analyzed longitudinal data among adolescents in the US from 2007 to 2019 estimated that one in four middle and high school students experience cyberbullying (Patchin and Hinduja, 2019), and those affected are more than twice as likely to struggle with suicidal thoughts and attempts (van Geel et al., 2014). Within the Canadian context, it is reported that three out of 10 Canadian youth say they have been cyberbullied before which has a negative impact on one's self-esteem, mental health, and relationships (Public Safety Canada, 2024).

Over a decade ago, Davis & Koepke (2016) and Walker (2013) examined the association between smartphone bans in schools and cyberbullying and peer victimization. Results showed

that schools that banned smartphones had unexpectedly *higher* rates of online victimization and harassment compared to schools that did not implement bans. These authors offered possible explanations for this association, suggesting that it may be the case that the punitive effect of cell phone bans, in turn, reinforces a negative school environment, thus increasing cyberbullying. These researchers also found that positive school climates were associated with lower incidents of cyberbullying victimization (Davis & Koepke, 2016). Whereas traditional forms of bullying normally occur face-to-face and often on school property, cyberbullying mostly happens outside of school hours, and with schools banning cell phones, this may be driving the peer victimization underground (Brewer, 2014). In contrast, Paolini (2018) suggests that creating well-informed policies on cell phone bans may even help eliminate cyberbullying that occurs outside of the school setting. Additional research on how these bans may mitigate or exacerbate cyberbullying, and peer victimization is warranted.

### **Effectiveness of the Ban**

There are varied and widely held views on the effectiveness of cell phone bans in schools, often shared as anecdotes in the mainstream media. For example, Rudderham (2024), a Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) reporter, reported on the effects of a recent cell phone ban at Saint John's High School in New Brunswick. The school principal reported that students' academic performance increased (especially among lower-achieving students) and that there were fewer conflicts when students were asked to put their phones away. These shifts allowed teachers an extra 5-7 minutes of teaching time per class (Rudderham, 2024). The Province of Manitoba reported that within the first year of Manitoba's cell phone ban, a teacher from a Winnipeg high school noted that, due to the cell phone ban, students were able to finish their work or assignments early, and it gave them the opportunity to read more books and engage with

peers and teachers (Province of Manitoba, 2024). Given the recent implementation of this ban in Manitoba, the effectiveness and impact of this policy on classroom dynamics, teachers' and students' well-being, and students' academic outcomes have yet to be fully explored using robust research methods.

### **Banning may not be the solution**

Existing research on the effectiveness of these bans may challenge the common belief that cell phone bans are necessary for students to self-regulate phone use and for teachers to avoid competing for attention. Recent research finds that outright bans may not be the most effective way to reach these goals (Gath et al., 2024). One could assume that restricting phone use fosters greater attention among students during classroom learning. However, some researchers argue that banning these devices altogether might hinder both students and teachers alike. For example, Sheng and Lipscombe (2024) suggest that cell phone use and technology are persistent aspects of modern life, making complete bans unrealistic and unattainable to enforce and maintain.

Similarly, Gath et al. (2024) suggest, that rather than outright banning cell phones in the classroom, students should be given opportunities to learn critical thinking and related skills about the benefits and challenges of cellular use to then self-regulate their use themselves. Gath et al. (2024) argue that learning strategies focused on developing a healthy relationship with one's phone and using it may be a healthier, more proactive measure than an outright ban. This finding aligns with Grigic Magnusson et al. (2023), who also found that integrating mobile phones into classroom practice as learning tools may lead to positive learning experiences. Two other researchers have found that positive use of technology in the classroom can increase students' motivation and engagement (Thomas et al., 2014; Nikolopoulou, 2020). Whereas

Robertson et al. (2020) argue that removing students' phones also deprives them of opportunities to learn about appropriate phone use and online safety.

### **Teachers' Role**

As stated previously, teachers play a critical role in upholding and implementing cell phone bans (Gao, 2017). Albeit limited, previous research examining teachers' perceptions and experiences in implementing cell phone bans has found that teachers are more comfortable promoting learning than policing cell phones (Robertson et al., 2020). Due to the ever-changing nature of students' needs, teachers are asked to offer guidance, counselling, resource support, and more, while also maintaining a positive learning environment and staying on track with provincial education guidelines. Indeed, given all that they are required to do, some teachers have expressed that enforcing this ban should not be part of their role and responsibility as educators.

The introduction of smartphones into the classroom has led teachers to face increased competition for students' attention, and some have struggled to enforce these policies, thereby affecting the student-teacher relationship and even leading teachers to leave the profession due to students disregarding rules and limits (Beerli and Horowitz, 2020). These experiences were further reinforced by Grigic and Magnusson et al. (2023) finding that implementing and upholding the cell phone ban proved more complex and challenging than expected, even with teachers agreeing to the ban and participating in policy planning. This emphasizes the need for policies to be clearly communicated, consistent, and to have support readily available and in place for teachers when challenges arise with implementation (Randhawa et al., 2024). Moreover, a lack of clarity around the cell phone ban policy leads teachers to apply different rules, resulting in confusion for students (Sheng & Lipscombe, 2024). It is imperative that

teachers receive appropriate information and training on classroom management and student guidelines, as well as a clear understanding of school rules (Nikolopoulou, 2020).

As noted previously, on April 25, 2026, Manitoba's Premier, Wab Kinew, announced a proposal to ban social media and AI chatbots for adolescents aged 16 and younger. Media reports indicate that the Manitoba Government will first turn to schools to enforce this ban, and the province is currently in the process of consulting with the various Manitoba school divisions, the community, and parents on what this new social media ban will look like in practice (CityNews, 2026).

Teachers' age and comfort level with mobile phones can also impact implementation and compliance with the policy (Nikolopoulou, 2020). A study conducted in Korea by Baek et al. (2017) found that teachers' attitudes towards mobile devices varied, with female teachers and those with 15 years of teaching experience showing more positive attitudes towards the ban. Previous research also found that teachers' support for mobile phones in classrooms is also changing (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2015). O'Bannon and Thomas (2015) suggest that a growing number of younger teachers (born after the 1980s) are entering the classroom with greater digital experience and comfort. These teachers have grown up with technology at their fingertips, making it easier for them to accept it as another classroom tool. These authors also suggest that teachers who did not grow up in the digital age are less comfortable with these devices and, therefore, are more likely to support a cell phone ban in schools. As teachers are the ultimate implementers and enforcers of the cell phone policy within their individual classrooms, it is important to better understand how the cell phone ban has affected them, their own well-being, and their views on its impact on students. Interestingly, currently in Manitoba, no policies exist regarding teachers' own use of cell phones during school hours and in the classroom.

As noted, there are differing views on whether banning cell phones in schools is the best approach to managing these devices and improving students' and teachers' outcomes. Research has found that banning smartphones may, in fact, result in more harm to relationships, as administrators and teachers struggle to implement and enforce these policies and practices. Smale et al. (2021) reported that some teachers have adopted the stance 'if you can't beat them, join them', adding that smartphone technology can enhance student collaboration, engagement, and idea sharing. Additionally, some teachers believe that the deliberate and integrated use of mobile phones within their lessons may yield educational benefits for students (Adams, 2020; Aloteibi et al., 2024; Grigic Magnusson et al., 2023).

In summary, given the limited, inconclusive and varied findings regarding school cell phone bans, their impact on adolescents, and the limited research on teachers' experiences with the ban, this study aims to address gaps in the existing literature.

## **Theoretical Orientations**

### ***Cognitive Load Theory***

Three dominant theoretical orientations seek to explain adolescent behaviour and the impact smartphones may have on them in educational settings, with implications for well-being and academic outcomes. Cognitive Load Theory, developed by John Sweller in the 1980s, has been particularly helpful in contextualizing children's and adolescents' behaviour and development (Alasmari, 2020). This theory has had major implications in the field of education due to its understanding of learning, working memory, and cognitive load (Alasmari, 2020). A researcher in this field, David Geary, divided the brain's processing and organization of information into two spheres: 'biologically primary knowledge' and 'biologically secondary knowledge' (Garnett, 2020). This author explains that the first aspect concerns everything the

brain does that cannot be taught (e.g., how to communicate in our first language; how to recognize faces), while the latter concerns everything we are taught, which is where schools come in. The premise of this theory is that we all have limited working (short-term) memory, and when one's brain is overloaded with too much information, this can prevent learning (Sweller, 2011). From this theoretical perspective, when mobile phones are brought into the classroom, the added cognitive load (including notifications, phone calls, and social media distractions) pulls students away from the specific learning task at hand (Alasmari, 2020). In addition to the cognitive load adolescents face, teachers' instructional practice and well-being are closely linked to their cognitive workload. Classroom management, including enforcement of the cell phone ban, may affect teachers' cognitive load. This theory can provide a foundation for evaluating whether the cell phone ban has affected teachers' own cognitive load, practices, classroom management, well-being and their views on its impact on their students.

### ***Social Learning Theory***

The second theoretical orientation is the Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in 1977 (Alzamil et al., 2024). Social Learning Theory stipulates that one acquires new behaviours through both experience and observing others and the consequences of their actions (McLeod, 2023). Scholar Rachmad (2025) explains that within the school system, knowledge is not only transmitted from teacher to student but also that learning is inherently social. This theory has been applied in educational settings, where teachers seek to consistently model and demonstrate behaviours they want their students to adopt (McLeod, 2023). Rachmad contends that technology has altered the fundamental architecture of social influence, with social media becoming a platform for individuals seeking validation and visibility. This lens helps to explain adolescents' behaviour in terms of mimicking or copying; if their friends are using their phones,

they are also inclined to do so. Teachers also have a unique role in shaping how they model expectations around the cell phone ban and how they manage the social dynamics it creates. Because teachers are consistently in the classroom, they can observe changes in student engagement, academic performance, and overall well-being. This theory provided a lens for understanding the barriers and supports that influence the effectiveness of implementing the cell phone ban through social reinforcement and modelling.

### ***Theory of Power***

The final theoretical orientation that guided this research is the theory of power, developed by Michael Foucault in the 1970's. Foucault challenged how we look and think about power and how we relate to others. Rather than seeing power as held only by those at the top, he emphasizes that power is relational and fluid (Foucault, 1980). Foucault was also interested in the theory of power in the classroom, arguing that education should foster self-reflection, experimentation, curiosity, and freedom of thought (Ball, 2019). Students should be able to question and explore ideas in the classroom while complying with school rules, while teachers should try to create a space for open dialogue that supports intellectual thinking and self-development (Ball, 2019). This theory provided a lens for understanding the power that teachers hold in the classroom and the tension between encouraging authentic learning and implementing cell phone ban rules.

When brought together, these three theoretical considerations provided a grounding framework for explaining teaching environments, their use of power, student behaviours and learning processes in relation to the implementation of a cell phone ban. As bans were enforced to help break the addictive cycle of smartphones being readily available, teachers should try to model the cell phone ban regulations for their students. Removing cell phones from classrooms

inevitably removes an extraneous cognitive load for students. This allowed for more dedicated classroom time if policies were adhered to. These theoretical orientations helped me make sense of the findings by hearing about the perceived impact on teachers' and students' as they no longer had the extraneous load that cell phones brought, understanding how students learn social behaviours by teachers' modelling and reinforcing what's expected, along with hearing how the ban shifted the power struggle as the policy came from the government.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology & Data Analysis**

#### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative study utilizing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework to better understand teachers' experiences and perceptions of the recent cell phone ban implemented in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in the Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The research objectives were to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of this ban on their own teaching and well-being, to highlight the successes, barriers, and supports they encountered in implementing the policy, and to understand the cell phone ban's impact on students' well-being and academics. From these objectives, the proposed research questions that guided my research were:

1. What are teachers' experiences teaching with the cell phone ban, and how has this impacted their teaching practices and well-being?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of a cell phone ban on their students' well-being (physical and mental health) and academic outcomes?

#### **Methodology**

##### ***Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis***

This study was guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which centres on how people make sense of their life experiences (Alase, 2017). IPA aims to both understand and then interpret individuals lived experiences with a particular phenomenon, focusing on eliciting rich, nuanced insights into the subjective human experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). This depth of analysis allows for a greater understanding of participants' realities, enabling readers to relate closely to participants' realities (Padgett, 2017).

Given the limited empirical research examining teachers' experiences and perceptions of the implementation of these bans, IPA is well aligned to explore and interpret the impact of this topic with teachers (Alase, 2017). IPA aligns with the proposed theoretical orientations that guided the research, by providing a lens for understanding the impact of these bans on teachers directly and how teachers themselves perceive the impact of the ban on their students. The following chapter outlines the foundations of IPA, epistemological stance, trustworthiness and reflexivity, participant recruitment, data collection methods, and the data analysis processes that were conducted.

### ***Foundations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis***

IPA is informed by three philosophical foundations: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology was initially developed by Husserl in health psychology, which focuses on the philosophical study of 'being' while 'bracketing' the researcher's preconceptions and pre-existing knowledge to avoid interference with the data (Oxley, 2016). Hermeneutics shifted away from 'bracketing', allowing for greater interpretation of a phenomenon, recognizing that the researcher's views of the world are inextricably intertwined with the way the participants' experience is interpreted (Oxley, 2016). Lastly, idiography focuses on the participant and the details of their lived experience, which is a central component of IPA. IPA emerged as a response to dominant positivist approaches in research, intentionally exploring participants' subjective experiences and personal meaning-making (Smith, 1996). IPA is a unique methodology, as it also incorporates the researcher's interpretation and reflection within its work, termed "double hermeneutics" (Smith, 1996). Double hermeneutics, or 'dual role,' allows the researcher to make sense of participants' sense-making. Therefore, the researcher plays a central role in this iterative process, interpreting and analyzing

participants' experiences (Tuffour, 2017). That said, this 'dual role' also requires the researcher to ensure they practice trustworthiness and reflexivity throughout the research process.

IPA sample sizes are small, allowing the researcher to gather an in-depth understanding of one's individual lived experience and its relation to the phenomenon (Oxley, 2016). In this study, each interview transcript was examined independently before making any cross-case analysis and theme-making. After exploring participants' experiences, patterns, and themes were then analyzed across interviews.

### **Epistemological stance**

IPA researchers argue that IPA's epistemological position typically lies between critical realism and contextual constructivism (Oxley, 2016). Because of this, IPA researchers also argue that the methodology does not adopt a single epistemological position. Oxley (2016) goes on to argue that IPA researchers must practice 'epistemological openness,' meaning that the researcher can decide on the epistemological stance that feels most appropriate for their study.

From this stance, I adopted a critical realist epistemological position in my research with teachers because it highlights participants' statements, which were grounded in their lived realities (Oxley, 2016). The use of 'double hermeneutic' reflection was used when interpreting the data, meaning that the participants speak to their experience with the phenomenon, which is then further interpreted by me as the researcher. By adopting a critical realist perspective, I acknowledged that the participant's perception and my interpretation of their experience were inextricably linked to the reality of the experience (Oxley, 2016).

### **Trustworthiness and Reflexivity**

Building and maintaining trustworthiness and reflexivity in my research with teachers was paramount to my ongoing IPA research process. Reflexivity, as defined by Horsburgh

(2003), is the researcher's active acknowledgment that their decisions and actions affect and shape the meaning of the participants' experiences under study. In practice, this involved me, as the lead researcher, engaging in ongoing self-evaluation of my beliefs, assumptions, and personal biases as I conducted this study. As an example, one way I practiced reflexivity throughout the research process was by maintaining extensive field notes and voice memos during recruitment, interviewing, transcription, and data analysis. As outlined in my positionality statement in Chapter 1, my personal experiences, including my background, raising two young children, and my current professional experience as a social worker in the school system, all contributed to what I brought to this research study. This research process unfolded as I continued to reflect on my biases and assumptions, thereby prompting me to practice reflexivity.

Both pillars of trustworthiness and reflexivity were reflected and practiced throughout my research endeavor. I followed Olmos-Vega et al. (2023)'s four-domain approach to ensure reflexivity was diligently practiced throughout the process, including personally, interpersonally, methodologically, and contextually. Personal reflexivity meant reflecting on my own background, beliefs, and assumptions. Interpersonal reflexivity involved considering my relationship with the study participants while reflecting on similarities and differences. Methodological reflexivity involved reflecting on how the method was chosen and how my decisions about data collection and analysis were shaped. Finally, contextual reflexivity entailed understanding the broader contextual forces that might have influenced the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Details on how I practiced trustworthiness and reflexivity are further articulated when describing my approach to data analysis section of this chapter.

Trustworthiness was established between each participant and myself, by outlining the research process and providing an overview of the consent form, emphasizing confidentiality and

the destruction of any identifying markers throughout the research process. Additionally, each participant was reminded that their information would be stored in a secure location and that they could review it at any time during the process. Participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions, and their information would be destroyed. I completed member checking by sending each participant their transcript for review and verification. Additionally, a second follow-up interview was scheduled with each participant to review my interpretation of the initial interview for member checking purposes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To ensure the integrity of the study and protect participants, several ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. To begin with, it was important to define the power dynamics in these interactions with the research participants. As a School Social Worker, I was transparent about my research role being separate from my professional role. Participants were also reminded that their participation was voluntary, confidential, and would not affect workplace relationships. I also avoided recruiting teachers who worked directly with me on my school teams to mitigate power dynamics.

Informed consent was another ethical priority. Participants had to fully understand the purpose of my study. I provided a clear consent form outlining the purpose, data use, interview process, general interview topics, data storage, and participant rights. This information was provided both in writing and verbally to ensure understanding. Confidentiality was addressed by removing identifying information and using pseudonyms. Data was stored securely. Participants were informed that my academic advisor, Dr. Stewart-Tufescu, oversees my work. Prior to starting the interview, the participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns.

## **Participants**

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

This study utilized a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling was based on participants' willingness to participate in the study, allowing for a rich, detailed account of their experiences related to the cell phone ban in their schools. The study selected participants who were teachers in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in the Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba. For my study, I interviewed teachers with diverse teaching experiences, ranging from those with many years of teaching experience to others who had just entered the profession. This variability in teaching experience highlighted both one's comfort level with classroom technology and differences in experience based on years of direct teaching.

All schools in Manitoba have had cell phone restrictions in place since the 2024-2025 school year. Therefore, teachers choosing to participate in this research project were in their second year of the cell phone restrictions. As the study focused on understanding teachers' perceptions of the cell phone ban, it was important that teachers had at least two years of teaching experience before the ban was implemented, allowing teachers to reflect on and compare whether the ban was helpful to them as teachers and to their students. Participants were also required to speak English.

### ***Exclusion Criteria***

Individuals were excluded if they were not currently employed as a teacher within the Pembina Trails School Division. This included substitute teachers without a regular assignment, retired teachers, student teachers, and educational assistants. The rationale for choosing to hear only teachers' voices was that they were consistently the ones in the classroom with the responsibility to uphold the ban. My study also excluded teachers who began teaching only after

the ban was implemented or those with less than two years of teaching experience, as they could not provide comparative pre- and post-ban insights. As interviews required in-depth reflection in English, those not fluent, unable to give informed consent, or unable to participate due to cognitive or communication barriers were excluded.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Participants were recruited through multiple channels. After my thesis proposal was successfully defended and approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 1, I reached out to the Pembina Trails School Divisional Human Resources Superintendent (see Appendix A) to explain my research study (including my ethics approval letter). The Human Resources Superintendent assisted me in distributing my recruitment poster (see Appendix B) along with my email invitation (see Appendix D) to all kindergarten to Grade 8 teachers in the Division. This assistance greatly helped me spread the word about my study, enabling prompt responses from interested participants. I also distributed my recruitment posters in staff rooms across the Division.

Of the eight participants who indicated interest in participating in my study, only six met the screening criteria of classroom teaching and two years of teaching experience before the ban. At the first point of contact with interested participants, I obtained contact information and stressed the confidential and voluntary nature of participation. A screening email was then sent to each participant to ensure they met the eligibility criteria. The screening email asked about teaching experience, the grade they taught, a preference for in-person or Zoom meetings, and consent to be audio-recorded. I informed each eligible participant that they would need to read and complete a consent form (Appendix D), which outlined the nature of the study, the option to withdraw voluntarily, and measures to ensure confidentiality throughout the process.

All six participants agreed, signed, scanned the consent form online, and sent it back to me. I then uploaded all electronic consent forms to my password-protected OneDrive. To ensure I was following an iterative process, I scheduled the first interview with the first participant who responded. I offered the option of meeting in person at a comfortable, confidential location or via UM Zoom. I allowed participants to choose the interview day and time that was convenient for their schedules. Before each interview, I arranged to meet the participants in person to pay their full \$65 honorarium (\$50 for the first interview, \$15 for the second follow-up interview).

Participants were required to sign a Cash Honorarium Declaration (Appendix G).

### **Participant demographics**

The following table provides basic demographic information on the participants in this study. Teachers ranged in years of teaching experience and in their teaching grades. All teachers had at least 2 years of teaching experience and extensive experience with cell phones before the ban was implemented.

Table 1.

#### *Demographic Profile of Participants*

| Teacher # | Gender | Grade Taught | Years of experience |
|-----------|--------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1         | Female | Grade 7 & 8  | 6 years             |
| 2         | Female | Grade 3      | 15 years            |
| 3         | Female | Grade 5      | 29 years            |
| 4         | Male   | Grade 6      | 19 years            |
| 5         | Female | Grade 7 & 8  | 25 years            |
| 6         | Male   | Grade 8      | 16 years            |

### **Data Collection**

Participants were interviewed individually using in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Appendix F). The first interview with each participant was scheduled to last 60 to 90 minutes, and each participant was reminded before the interview that it would be audio recorded. Five of

the six participants chose to meet via Zoom for convenience. Before the interview, I emailed each participant a list of mental health resources for reference (Appendix G). At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and thanked them for their participation. I explained to each participant that the conversation would be audio-recorded, and all agreed they were comfortable with the interview being recorded. I also ensured each participant felt comfortable with the consent form that they signed, ensuring they were aware of the confidential nature and the right to withdraw at any time from the study.

Before the interview began, I explained the study's purpose and ensured the participant felt that their story and experience mattered. The interview proceeded following the approved protocol and semi-structured interview guide, with prompting questions asked to help ensure depth and personal experience were fully explored and heard. Non-verbal nuances (e.g., pauses, facial expressions) were noted in my field notes and were included to preserve the participant's account (Smith et al., 2009). At the completion of the interview, I thanked the participant and reminded them that they would be able to review the de-identified transcript before scheduling the second follow-up interview. After each interview, I recorded voice memos to note observations and added any questions or comments that arose. All other memos and field notes, including post-interview audio notes, were uploaded to UM OneDrive, as data that were included in my analysis.

After each interview was complete, I uploaded the audio file to Temi, a secure transcription software approved by the University of Manitoba. I then carefully read the transcript, omitting and anonymizing any identifying information (e.g., workplaces or any other school identifiers). I then sent the de-identified transcript to the participant via email who could review it and request corrections for member-checking purposes. None of the participants had

any changes or additional information to submit following their review. After receiving participant confirmation of the accuracy and acceptability of their transcript, I uploaded it to Dedoose, a secure online platform for qualitative analysis, coding, and theme development, which is approved by the UM. I began immersing myself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcript in Dedoose. I then began developing the initial themes and formatted my interpretative summary of the conversation. I then scheduled a 30-minute follow-up interview with each participant to read my written interpretation to them, allowing them to voice their thoughts, ask questions, and ensure member checking. This process was followed and completed entirely before moving on to the next participant, ensuring I was using an iterative and interpretive approach. This process was followed independently for each participant.

### **Data Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis served as the overall methodological framework for this study, following the three-step guidelines outlined by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014). During the data analysis section of this study, Braun & Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis was used to inform theme development and coding processes.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Using an IPA framework, I immersed myself in the data to understand participants' perspectives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This immersion allowed me to delve deeply into the participant's story, creating space for ideas and emotions to emerge. Data analysis began after the first interview was completed and transcribed, allowing insights to emerge and inform subsequent interviews. This process involved listening to the audio recording while following the transcript, then reading and re-reading it. Multiple readings helped my own insights and

observations emerge, which were noted beside the quotes in the transcript. The following three-stage process unfolded after each interview was complete.

### ***Multiple Readings and Making Notes***

The initial stage of analysis involved closely reading each transcript multiple times (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As advised by these authors, I listened to each audio recording a few times to help immerse myself in the data. Upon reviewing each transcript, I reviewed the field notes and voice memos I had taken immediately following the interview to highlight specific information, including the words and metaphors the participants used to describe their experience. It was important to note my assumptions, expectations, and evolving insights as I read each transcription, maintaining an open stance without disregarding my personal influence. While reading the transcript, my own thoughts and opinions came into play, especially when teachers spoke about students adhering to the ban. Because I am in a number of schools, I have noticed students using their phones in hallways, which signals to me that some students still are not fully adhering to the ban. It took conscious practice to set aside my own assumptions and opinions, even though they may have merit. These field notes were recorded and uploaded to OneDrive for ongoing reference.

### ***Transforming Notes into Emerging Themes***

From these notes, themes began to emerge, reflecting teachers' unique or shared experiences. Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) describe this process as the 'hermeneutic circle', meaning that understanding the whole of something depends on understanding its parts. As themes emerged, they were organized chronologically for each case, which helped me to understand how participants' experiences unfolded over time. I found it helpful to read each transcript to identify similarities between narratives, which eventually led to broader themes. I

wanted to honour each story told, but as I immersed myself in the data, similarities emerged, and differences were also noted. For example, after the first interview, it was clear that pre-ban conflict had a significant impact on this teacher, as she spoke about specific times that were stressful and draining. When I began the second interview, without prompting, the next teacher organically spoke about the pre-ban struggle and conflict that was so hard to manage. Due to these struggles being expressed by most participants, the similarities in struggle and conflict led to the first theme: Pre-ban conflict. The additional themes emerged from immersion in each transcript, followed by zooming out to see the similarities and differences.

### ***Seeking Relationships and Clustering Themes***

This next stage involved grouping themes into coherent clusters. To organize these themes, I followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022) and, using the Dedoose software, I assigned codes to each emerging theme and made connections with other themes. When looking across all transcripts, themes began to emerge organically. For example, without much prompting, each teacher openly discussed the period before the ban, offering rich insight into their lived experience of that trying time. From there, a subtheme of the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts was discussed, which was consistent across all participants. Pre-ban conflict was the next sub-theme that developed, which was something all participants organically touched on. Themes continued to be created by identifying similarities across transcripts while also preserving each individual story as its own unique unit. Quotes from participants were then selected to highlight the themes identified, ensuring that teachers' voices remained the focus of analysis and understanding. Analysis of the emerging themes highlighted unique and shared perspectives, emphasizing the complexity of each experience. To ensure the analysis remained

focused on the study objectives, the themes were continually evaluated for their continued relevance to the research objectives and questions.

### ***Moving to the next case***

This three-stage process was followed with each of the transcripts, treating the data on its own terms to preserve idiographic integrity. This process ensures that rigour and trustworthiness are at the forefront of data analysis, as it provides a transparent and systematic approach. This is done through multiple readings, which grounded me in the participants' lived experience, followed by iteratively developing themes. Cross-case analysis followed after all transcripts were analyzed, highlighting commonalities and differences. To ensure that the teachers' narratives remained at the forefront, I used direct quotes from participants in the write-up of findings presented in Chapter 4. This gave readers clear insight into the participants' perspectives, while balancing my interpretive lens with the teachers' authentic voices. Additionally, I maintained a structured plan to repeatedly check my interpretations against the data, adjusting as necessary. I did this by revisiting each transcript, written field notes, voice memos, and identified themes to remain grounded while honouring each participant's accounts. By engaging in ongoing reflexive practice, including field notes, self-reflection and debriefing with my academic advisor, Dr. Stewart-Tufescu, I worked to ensure my assumptions did not overshadow teachers' voices and lived experiences.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as my methodology was to explore the essence and lived experiences of Manitoba teachers since the cell phone ban came into effect, and to gain a better understanding of its impact on their well-being while

teaching. These interviews also highlighted teachers' perceptions of how the ban has affected their students, including its impact on students' mental health, academics, and overall well-being. This chapter presents findings from participants, organized into overall themes, sub-themes, and data excerpts.

### **Themes**

Five main themes emerged from the data analysis. To begin, the findings examine pre-ban conflicts, detailing the day-to-day experiences of teachers and students as cell phones were introduced in classrooms. This is followed by an exploration of the demands placed on teachers by their reactions to the cell phone ban announcement and their efforts to comply with the government mandate within particular school cultures. Thirdly, the findings explore the impact on teachers' and students' learning practices, including the ban's effects on teachers' well-being, classroom structure, and modelling practices. Following this, the theme of perceived effects on students is explored, highlighting the perceived impact of the ban on students' mental and physical health and their academic learning. Finally, the findings explore the broader system and contextual influences shaping the policy's impact beyond the classroom. This theme includes future-oriented considerations. A summary table of the themes and subthemes is presented below.

**Table 2. Thematic Summary Table**

| <b>Main Themes / Sub-themes</b> | <b>Brief Definition / Essence</b>                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Pre-Ban Conflict</b>      | This theme speaks to the significant impact cell phones had on students and schools before the ban, shaped by the COVID-19 |

|                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                      | pandemic, and how phones have affected classroom management.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>1a. COVID-19 Pandemic</i>                         | Teachers discuss the unique impact the pandemic had on their teaching and student reliance on devices.                                                                                                                                          |
| <i>1b. Classroom Management</i>                      | Teachers discuss the challenges of ‘policing’ cell phones before the ban and how managing cell phones in the classroom was a constant battle.                                                                                                   |
| <b>2. Demands on Teachers’</b>                       | This theme highlights teachers’ emotional and practical responses to the announcement of the ban, including how they learned about it, their initial reactions, and their efforts to comply with the government mandate within school cultures. |
| <i>2a. Announcement</i>                              | Teachers reflect on how they heard about the ban and its initial rollout.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>2b. Compliance through government mandate</i>     | Teachers reported better parent and student compliance after the government implemented the policy.                                                                                                                                             |
| <i>2c. School culture</i>                            | Teachers reflect on the impacts of having a strong / weak administration and how this impacts school culture regarding ban implementation                                                                                                       |
| <b>3. Impact on Teachers’ and learning practices</b> | This theme captures teachers’ reflections on the cell phone ban’s impact, how it shifted the classroom environment, how it forced more planning and creativity in lesson planning, how teachers want to model, and how the ban promotes safety. |
| <i>3a. Shifts in classroom atmosphere</i>            | Teachers reflected on the shift they have seen within the classroom when compared to pre-ban experiences                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>3b. Loss of motivational tool</i>                 | Teachers reflected on needing to think ahead and more creatively when needing the computer lab for academics                                                                                                                                    |

|                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>3c. Modelling</i>                              | Teachers reflected on their desire to model not using their phones in front of their students since the ban.                                                                                               |
| <i>3d. Safety</i>                                 | Teachers reflect on how cell phones can support safety in schools but can also be used to plan and make threats.                                                                                           |
| <b>4. Perceived effects on students</b>           | This theme focuses on teachers' perceptions of the impact the school cell phone ban has had on students' well-being (physical and mental health) and academic outcomes.                                    |
| <i>4a. Improved social connection</i>             | Teachers describe the improvement they have witnessed in their students by having more positive face-to-face interactions.                                                                                 |
| <i>4b. Students physical &amp; mental health</i>  | Teachers describe a positive shift in their students' physical health, as students are no longer distracted by their phones. Teachers witness that students are still struggling with their mental health. |
| <i>4c. Academics</i>                              | Teachers report that although students are less distracted, it is hard to quantify the impact on academics.                                                                                                |
| <b>5. Broader System and Contextual issues</b>    | This theme explores broader systemic and contextual issues that shape the policy's impact beyond the classroom.                                                                                            |
| <i>5a. Role of home and community environment</i> | Teachers reflect on the integral role parents have in reminding students of the rule at school but see a disconnect when students have no boundaries or regulations on technology use at home.             |

### Theme 1: Pre-ban Conflict

To provide context and understanding of the experience of teachers before the ban was announced, each participant organically reflected on what teaching and classroom management was like prior to the Manitoba government's introduction of the cell phone ban in September 2024. It became evident early in the interviews that cellphones had a significant impact on

teaching and learning when cellphones were in classrooms. Teacher 4 described this time in her classroom by saying,

Students were often reluctant to go above and beyond their art pieces. And so many would be finished their work in five minutes and say they're done and then ask, can I bring out my cell phone? And then other kids would follow suit. That was really difficult to police.

Teachers were quick to describe the frustration and exhaustion that came with managing cell phones in the classroom before the ban, and during the pandemic. These frustrations were layered with the impact of the pandemic and its effect on their students.

#### ***Sub-theme 1a: COVID-19 Pandemic***

A few of the teachers noted the unique impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this reality (Teachers 1, 4 and 6). These teachers reflected on the added demand during the pandemic for students to have devices and screen time, with screen time becoming a 'new normal' for learning at home. Once the quarantine subsided, these devices were, perhaps understandably, brought into the classroom more. Teachers 1, 4, and 6 raised concerns about the impact of students using devices to complete school tasks during these times, given that many of their parents are also working from home. Combined, they note the increase in student reliance on these devices. It also became evident that this particular period was one which they wanted to forget and leave behind. As reflected by Teacher 6,

I mean we told all these kids [during the pandemic] to get on your devices. It's super important that you have a device and that you're on it, you know? When I was teaching during COVID, I would teach for, I think an hour. I'm blocking it out. But I'd teach for like an hour in the morning, an hour in the afternoon. And then things changed. But even

in the years that followed where there was kind of blended kind of schooling, we'd have weeks at home and weeks in school. We'd have kids in different rooms. And even in those years, we were reliant on every kid having a device, you know?

This statement emphasizes the extent to which schools relied on each student having a device and being on it during the pandemic. But then, once the pandemic ended, this shift meant having students put these devices away. It also became clear that the strain and stress teachers experienced during the pandemic felt overlooked as articulated by Teachers 1, 4, and 6. Participants positioned this period as one in which their role expanded well beyond instruction, and included often unmanageable, emotionally demanding tasks linked to student cell phone use.

### ***Sub-theme 1b: Classroom management***

Before the ban, most teachers described managing cell phones in the classroom as a constant battle. Teacher 6 reflected on this reality by speaking to the added roles and expectations this brought to their daily life and teaching practice. He described this as,

Suddenly I have to be a policeman and a detective and a teacher all at the same time.

Because I'm wondering, are they on their phone? I can't tell if they're on their phone. And then when you call them out and then they're good at hiding it and it just, it just ate up a lot of time. And that caused stress.

The reality that a single teacher was responsible for monitoring cell phone use among 25 to 30 students in the classroom felt impossible, unsustainable, and “so hard to keep up with” (Teacher 2). Teacher 1 reflected that the decision to confront students about their cell phone use weighed heavily on them and raised significant doubt about whether the teacher would have sufficient energy to uphold this request or whether it would lead to further conflict with the students. Phrases such as, “is this a day that I really wanna die on this hill?” were used,

emphasizing the effort it took to uphold a request they knew students would push back on (Teacher 1).

Reflecting on the period before the ban, the participants shook their heads as they recounted the conflict and stress caused by cell phone use. Teacher 6 described this time as follows: “the biggest blowouts would have been before the ban, when we would try to crack down on kids who were constantly on their phones. They were very possessive. It’s like an extension of them” (implying their phone). Because adolescents often see their phone as an extension of themselves, conflict can easily arise when they are asked to put it away. Teacher 4 also described that, before the ban, “there were a lot of behavioural issues,” and that monitoring and asking kids to put their phones away was a “constant battle” (Teacher 1). Teacher 1 noted that when cell phones were in the classroom, there were “definitely bigger emotions, because you are basically taking away a baby’s soother”. This analogy suggests that cell phone reliance by students is a challenging reality to break and assumes that the teachers need to assert their authority for students to listen. Teachers also expressed a level of vulnerability when their workspaces were violated, as confiscated phones were to be held in the teachers’ desk. Teacher 1 explained that if she “didn’t lock my desk, they would go through my stuff”. This teacher also described a specific incident of being yelled at by the student saying, “Who are you? I don’t have to listen to you. You’re a nobody. That’s my property”. Teacher 1 describes the aftermath of this incident,

I have never been so angry in my life. And then to have to regulate yourself and go back in front of 30 kids to teach them when you’ve just been shot through the roof. I have to go do my job, be a calming presence for a bunch of other kids.

This teacher expressed feelings of defeat, exhaustion, and constant strain that were added onto their plate. Additionally, this account suggests that teachers struggled with their authority, where students began to push back and resist their teachers' personal and professional space. There is also an added layer of pressure for teachers to maintain composure and control in situations that are escalated and complex.

When asked what their experience teaching with the cell phone ban has been like and how it's impacted teaching practices and well-being, Teacher 4 offered a description of witnessing his students' anti-social, isolated behaviour transform. He described being outside with students for recess duty before the ban. He explained that "there was no interacting socially, no interacting physically, no physical activity. It was eerie how depressing it was. I'm an active person, I was just like, something is not right". This language choice reflects a scene that is the opposite of what recess is expected to represent - i.e., typically, a time of play, laughter, and social interaction. Instead, Teacher 4 reflected that there were "200 kids outside, and I'm not kidding, maybe like 20 of them would be actually moving. The rest would be just sitting there on their phones, making TikTok videos or just playing games on their phones". Consistently, teachers in this study reflected on the strong hold cell phones have on students, even when they are physically present with their peers. Teachers also expressed sadness that cell phones seem to be taking away from this critical time in a student's life. One described this sentiment, saying, "kids should just be kids," however, questioned how we can get back to that time (Teacher 3). Teacher 3 discussed how technology is drawing students away from interactions she recalls having in her school years. She reflected on how students used to pass notes in school, something she rarely sees now, and expressed a wish for that kind of innocent interaction to return. Five of the six teachers expressed sadness at witnessing how cell phones can take students away from

what is right in front of them. Interpretively, there are questions about why we are allowing cell phones to take over adolescents' lives, as it is described as taking away from them just being kids. Additionally, when we see how addictive these devices are, why aren't we doing anything about it?

Some teachers also noted a deeper emotional experience when trying to implement certain rules pre-ban. There was a sense that the “staff just lost” in their shared feelings of defeat, frustration, and exhaustion during attempts to remind students to put their phones away (Teacher 4). The lack of student adherence and growing disrespect gradually eroded teachers' perceived authority in the classroom. The cycle of ‘effort without impact’ experienced by teachers left them feeling “numb to it for several years” (Teacher 4). Teacher 6 notes that, even after asking students to put their phones away, some would still end up on their phones (Teacher 6). Teachers expressed that this experience was often overlooked, as they felt increasingly responsible for far more than learning and classroom management. Participating teachers described this pre-ban period as one in which their role expanded to include instruction, with unmanageable emotional demands linked to device use.

The complexities within these personal accounts highlight the additional responsibilities placed on teachers before the cell phone ban was announced, and during the pandemic. Teachers described this time as incredibly stressful, frustrating, and straining, revealing how embedded cell phones had become in the daily realities of teaching and students' lives. These accounts highlight how teachers were making sense of their experiences during a period that felt increasingly difficult to control. These added responsibilities placed on teachers shifted their teaching role, impacting their own professional and personal well-being.

## **Theme 2: Demands on teachers'**

With the provincial government announcing the cell phone ban in schools to begin in September 2024, the participants shared that this was met with a mix of relief and trepidation. Teacher 5 explains that “we were certainly hopeful that this ban would go through,” while Teacher 2 questioned this decision. Her reaction to the provincial announcement was, “Wait, what? How is that possible?” This theme explores participants' emotional and practical responses to the announcement of the ban, including how they learned about it, their initial reactions, and their efforts to comply with the government mandate within particular school cultures.

### ***Sub-theme 2a: The Announcement***

Participating teachers were asked to reflect on how they first heard about the ban and how the division communicated it. These questions sought to have participants reflect on how they made sense of the policy within their professional and emotional worlds. Participants shared that they were observing cell phone bans being enacted in other provinces, and questions arose about when a similar policy would be implemented in Manitoba. There was a shared narrative from all six participants that they first heard about the mandate through public media, including the CBC and CJOB radio, in the summer months leading up to September 2024. At that time, teachers were made aware of this significant development from outside their professional environment, including that its implementation would be in September and that they would be the ones to enforce it. Participants reflected on this time with a sense that implementing this ban would be yet another thing added to their plates, highlighting once again the multiple roles that teachers are expected to play in students' lives. When asked what it had been like to be at the forefront of implementing this ban, one teacher shrugged her shoulders and said, “Teachers are at the forefront of most things. The government wants to implement something, and we are the

people who must do it” (Teacher 1). This quote conveys frustration, emphasizing the reality that teachers are asked to implement policies without being fully consulted first. The reality in this instance was that institutional direction and change were communicated outside of the school system, alongside limited directives from the Department of Education or school divisions at that time, leading to teachers questioning ‘how’ this would happen and ‘what’ this would look like in practice (Teacher 2).

Although some participants anticipated that Manitoba would eventually enact a cell phone ban (given that this province was the last western province to do so), the preparation and conversation around this with teachers was limited and informal at best. Teachers expressed dismay at this, given that the mandate was seen as both anticipated and prematurely enacted, and as insufficiently developed at the organizational level. As Teacher 4 stated, “we all wanted the ban to happen probably long before it started to happen” and Teacher 5 commented that it was “news we wanted to hear” suggesting a desire for additional support given the emotional and professional exhaustion teachers were experiencing. Teachers 2 and 3 expressed relief and anticipation at this time, and all participants expressed a longing for change.

While there was a sense of relief and optimism, several participants spoke to the lack of communication and directive from the Manitoba Government and the Division on how this ban would be enacted. Reflecting on that time, Teacher 3 shared, “I don’t remember receiving anything else about it... like it was just, here’s the ban, but nobody really talked about it”. Teacher 4 described that there were “some guidelines sent from the division, but it was pretty abrupt”. While Teacher 2 reflected on not receiving “a survey or anything like that going out on what we think as teachers. It was just decided for us”. This lack of concrete direction appeared to shift responsibility back onto the teachers, which, to most, was a familiar dynamic when new

policies are introduced in the school system. There was a felt sense of “we’ll kind of figure it out as we go along” (said by Teacher 5), while Teacher 6 described this period of time as “we’re building a plane as we’re flying it”, thus highlighting the uncertainty of yet another thing to add to teachers’ plates with little support to take on this new responsibility.

At the same time, the frustration that was felt by the teachers interviewed was outweighed by the relief they expressed at a provincial ban coming into effect in September 2024. There was a collective sense that something needed to change so teachers could regain some control in their classrooms. This was coupled with feeling like a ‘weight was lifted off their shoulders’, speaking to the added strain policing cell phones caused teachers. Teacher 5 expressed her thoughts on the benefits of a ban: “the benefits of them not bringing their phones, not having their phones in the classroom... Just knowing that it’s like, this needs to happen”. This only reinforced the longing for change within the school system, highlighting tension and the added stress that policing cell phones was having on teachers.

***Sub-theme 2b: Compliance through government mandate***

Given that this ban was enacted by the Government of Manitoba, rather than a division- or school-led mandate, participants expressed shared curiosity and optimism about its compliance and success. Because the policy was coming from the top, teachers felt it would be better supported and adhered to by parents and students. At its best, this new policy supported teachers, eliminated inconsistencies, reduced conflict between teachers and students, and provided provincial regulations that parents also couldn’t push back on. It also created clear expectations for the classroom and schools. There was a clear consensus among the participating teachers that a complete ban in kindergarten to Grade 8 was far more effective for implementation and adherence than a tiered approach, as was the case in Grades 9-12. They

shared a sense that in the absence of a complete ban, cell phones would continue to be “very hard to monitor and implement” (Teacher 2).

Before the ban, individual schools' cell phone rules were inconsistent and ineffective, and they only increased teachers' stress. Interestingly, while the government announcement brought relief, one teacher reflected that although families and students had finally begun to ‘follow the rules’, they also felt like they had been “slapped in the face” (Teacher 1). Teacher 1 saw this as a judgement on the inability of teachers to effectively manage cell phones in their classroom prior to the ban. Teacher 1 expressed:

It unfortunately kind of reiterated what we kind of heard and saw during COVID, where teachers aren't that important. Like, you have no authority over my kid. I'm the only authority of my kid, you know, but the government is also the authority, so we're gonna listen to them.

This same teacher conveyed a deeply felt sense of frustration and tension, providing a comparison to the complexity experienced during the pandemic, where teachers felt overlooked and undervalued. Compared to the pandemic experience, in some cases, the cell phone ban exacerbated an existing wound. This is because parents and students began complying only after the government mandated the ban, and teachers felt that their voices and authority were once again insufficient to effect change. Similarly, Teacher 4 spoke to greater parent and student compliance with the ban, saying:

I'd say because it was not a school thing, it was a province thing. It was received better than just like a school thing where it was, oh, every school was different before that, but now the province is not allowing it. So, you're not allowed your phone here. And I feel

like that's more where the parents bought in and we saw kids, you know, being better, more responsible with their phones.

Teacher 6 explained that the pushback from parents and students diminished drastically, given that the government initiated the ban, unlike previously when it was a teacher-led initiative. Teacher 1 described this time as being the “first time that there hasn’t been a lot of pushback from students, which is shocking, especially in grades seven and eight”. Upon interpretation, one is left wondering whether parents are finally receiving the message about the impact of social media and cell phone usage on their children, or whether compliance simply emerged from parents and students because the government is enforcing the policy.

Following the provincial announcement, shared feelings of relief and anticipation appeared to contribute meaningfully to teachers’ both personal and professional well-being. Teachers described differing responses to this reality. On the one hand, they were grateful for the consistent, clear enforcement of cell phone bans; on the other hand, some felt frustration and sadness as they witnessed parents and students finally complying after the province intervened. Teachers expressed a desire to have clearer expectations and regulations regarding the ever-growing challenges posed by cell phones in the classroom.

### ***Sub-theme 2c: School culture***

Support from administration and colleagues can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of implementing a new policy. When leadership is strong, embodying an “open culture”, teachers feel more buy-in and a desire to implement and support a policy or mandate. A felt sense of ‘we’re all in this together’ can be the impetus for success in implementation. Such an approach builds a culture of sharing and discussion and allows for support as challenges arise. Participants spoke about the strengths of their administration, feeling supported, and having the

policy directed and enforced by their administration as critical to the policy's effective implementation. However, this was not the universal experience of all participants. For example, Teacher 2 expressed frustration that their administration was not as present during enactment and provided very limited guidance and support regarding the practicalities of implementation.

Teacher 2 articulated this experience by saying,

So often, you know, if students are not using it [cell phone] appropriately, a teacher may not have the power to say to the student, look, this is the 10th time you've done this. I've talked to you 10 times. And if administration is not present or not following through, there may be no support with that.

This, in turn, creates a culture of working alone, which does not promote cohesion and belonging. It was noted that a lack of consistent leadership can lead to inconsistent practices across classrooms, making it more challenging for teachers to feel aligned. Although the cell phone ban is meant for students, this teacher noted that, without consistent administration, more and more teachers had their phones out during the day. A couple of other teachers spoke about their administration asked teachers to be mindful of their phone use in front of students, as a way of modelling and promoting this ban.

When it comes to policy enforcement, it is critical for the staff, students, as well as the school culture to have a strong and present administration leading the group. Understanding the school culture in one's building is directly linked to teachers' well-being and buy-in, which in turn impact students. Teacher 3 spoke about the small community school she works at and how integrated the students' parents are within the building. Reflection on parental buy-in and support, even before the ban, for limiting their child's technology use positively impacted school culture, making it that much easier for teachers to enforce the ban. Instead of seeing her students

with cell phones, she sees them with smartwatches that let them see messages from their parents and send brief messages home. This teacher explained that, initially, some discussion was held about the smartwatches, but there have been no issues with these devices in school.

Before the province announced the cell phone ban in 2024, Teacher 1's administration had already begun trial-ban experiments with the entire school after the winter break. The administration asked all students to keep their phones away from school and class during these two weeks, seen as a "reset". This teacher also decided to partake in this ban with her students. She spoke about the unique opportunity it provided her to empathize with and relate to her students during their debriefing of this trial experience. Teacher 1 shared:

And then we surveyed the kids and said, okay, like, what were some really difficult things that were in these two weeks? What were some things that you noticed that were maybe positive? And some of the kids during that time said, I actually ate my lunch because I wasn't playing my video game. Or another kid said, I talked to somebody I don't usually talk to. So that was the feedback that I was getting from my students just after two weeks.

This pre-ban experience with a trial cell phone ban for staff and students demonstrated how integral it is to have administration backing up the necessity of what the school is trying to implement.

Additionally, Teachers 1, 4, 5 and 6 all spoke about their administration enforcing a 'three-strike' policy with the cell phone ban. It was explained by Teacher 4 as,

If a phone is out the first time, it's a verbal warning. The second time, the teacher will take it till the end of the day. The third time, it goes to the office and a parent has to come pick it up.

It is unclear whether this directive was issued by the Division or was administration-led. However, this three-strike policy was experienced by these participants as an additional positive way of enforcement and a tangible way for teachers to implement a consistent strategy. Having these types of routines and enforcement methods helped teachers feel supported by their administration, thereby affecting their overall sense of purpose and well-being.

### **Theme 3: Impact on teachers' and learning practices**

Participants were asked to reflect on their experience with the cell phone ban as teachers, for example, on their identity as teachers and their ability to do their jobs effectively. Given that the ban is in its second full year of enforcement in Manitoba, participants were able to reflect on both the positive and negative impacts on themselves and how these relate to their felt sense of well-being.

#### ***Sub-theme 3a: Shifts in classroom atmosphere***

Several participants emphasized that enforcing this ban is “just another thing we have to worry about” (Teachers 1, 4, and 6). It was expressed that over the past number of years, especially, there’s been “a lot of additional stuff that we are expected to do”, including emotional and social learning, making sure that students are ready to learn, on top of the curriculum that teachers are expected to teach (Teacher 1). This was narrated was also articulated by Teacher 6, who said, “we are expected to do ABCD before we even get to our lesson plan”. In many ways, there is a strong sense of responsibility on teachers to meet desired learning objectives while juggling multiple other roles. That said, all six participants reported feeling much less weight on their shoulders once the ban was in place. Their relief offers a stark contrast to the stress of enforcing this ban, the conflict that arose from it, and the pushback from students and parents. With enforcement support coming from administration, questioning and pushback from parents

and students subsided, opening space for classrooms to return to what they ‘should feel like’. This return to a sense of “normalcy” involved reconnecting and rediscovering a love of teaching, positively impacting teachers’ reported well-being.

Participants noted that after the September 2024 announcement, students either weren’t bringing their phones to school at all or, if they did, would listen to instructions and place their phones in their lockers for the day. Teachers reflected that, in part, parents may have helped to reinforce the policy by explaining to their child what the new school and provincial rules meant in their daily lives at school. With that, there was a felt sense that parents were assisting the teachers in enacting this mandate. One teacher described that although this is a major issue that is no longer at the forefront, she still feels immense stress about the job itself and the responsibility it entails. Dealing with the rollout of the cell phone ban was seen as “nothing compared to what the COVID-19 pandemic was like” (Teacher 1). This teacher reflected on the weight and lack of control she had during that period in her teaching career. This teacher indicated that she is now feeling more comfortable in the classroom and that in turn, she feels her students are also feeling more comfortable.

Aside from the conflict and distraction cell phones created in the classroom, this teacher explained that, prior to the ban, these devices were used inappropriately, including students taking pictures of other students or teachers in class and then posting them online without consent. In the past, this led to increasing amounts of stress, impacting students’ desire to participate in class and adding time required for investigation and discipline around online posting. This teacher described this time as constantly feeling “conscientious of my forward-facing personality” to help prevent any negative or contradictory posts that could be reflected online about her. This example speaks to the vulnerability she felt when cell phones were part of

the classroom atmosphere. Participants reflected that the ban has cultivated a classroom environment that feels and appears more comfortable, allowing teachers and students to have more honest conversations about mental health and current events without fear of being scrutinized or posted about online. In a sense, this shift has restored her enjoyment and confidence, allowing her to encourage her students to think critically about various topics. Inevitably, these positive shifts in the classroom are examples of how impactful the ban has been on teachers' comfort and ability to have meaningful discussions with their students, which, in turn, positively impacts these teachers' overall well-being.

A few other participants spoke about the impact of seeing their students succeed with this ban and how this, in turn, impacts their own well-being. Teacher 4 spoke about pre-ban classroom shifts related to “annoying” and “disruptive behaviours” observed in students. Pre-ban and post-pandemic, this teacher noticed that students had a really hard time communicating with one another and would display inappropriate or atypical ways of connecting socially. This included students “being very physical with one another, lots of poking and tickling and it was just like, nobody wants to be poked like that, like stop tapping each other in the head. That’s annoying behaviour”. This teacher saw the lack of practice in social connections and the increase in cell phone usage as related to the pandemic's impact. However, this teacher has noticed a shift in his classroom, seeing that “social interactions have become much better because kids are talking to each other more”. There is now a greater opportunity for face-to-face conversations in the classroom, allowing students to practice basic relational and interpersonal communication skills. This shift in the classroom has led this teacher to feel that the behaviours are now more manageable, allowing more time for classroom instruction and learning.

Together, teachers have found these shifts in the classroom to be overly positive, allowing them to focus on what they are there to do: teach. Inherently, this return positively influences teachers' desire to challenge students to think critically, build friendships, and learn through adversity. These classroom shifts allow teachers to see more joy in their students, which inevitably brings joy back into their profession. Interpretively, this positive shift in the classroom has reduced emotional strain and reconnected teachers with the aspects of teaching that initially drew them to the profession, thereby improving their well-being.

***Sub-theme 3b: Loss of instruction tool***

In conversation with participating teachers, it was noted that the cell phone ban has also forced them to be more creative and intentional in their lesson planning. One could interpret this shift as teachers reclaiming their profession, forcing teachers to ‘think outside the box’. This may cause some teachers to pause and confront how much of their daily teaching practice involves accessibility to technology. Some participants reflected on the ease they felt when asking students to bring out their phones for teaching purposes, and the neat ways they could be utilized. Teacher 6 noted one benefit of cell phones in classrooms stating that when “there weren’t enough laptops, or they weren’t working, every kid could just pull their phone out”. However, these instances of asking students to bring out their phones also highlighted inequity, as not all students have phones to work on. After the ban was announced, these teachers found that some of their lesson plans required more preparation when the computer lab was already booked. Teacher 1 explained that access to technology at her school has affected her lesson planning, as more teachers have been requesting the use of computer labs and laptops. This forced her to think outside the box, as the computers available there are “really bad quality”.

Additionally, there was expressed frustration about the need for technology in certain subjects, including math and English Language Arts (ELA), but also about the need to put it off until there was availability. Teacher 6 describes this time by saying, “We're fighting for scraps of time to get on laptops and into the computer lab because everybody has to share”. This teacher expressed some frustration in this process: “Unless you're organized and I'm not super organized, it's hard, you have something planned, and then you look online and, oh, I can't get the laptops for a week. You know, so I guess I'll be doing something else”. This reflection highlights the additional planning and forward thinking needed to incorporate computer labs and technology into lesson planning. This presents a certain dichotomy. On the one hand, technology (computers, laptops) can be really important in education, even as the easiest form of technology, in everyone's pocket, is no longer available. While the removal of these devices assists in solving behavioural issues, it in turn creates instructional complexities. The connection between the loss of an instructional tool as it relates to teachers' well-being can be seen as frustrating and time-consuming, in that it can have an impact on fulfilling one's role and exploring new ways of teaching certain subjects.

### ***Sub-Theme 3c: Modelling***

The notion of teachers' modelling the use of their phones, or lack thereof, throughout their workday was another important point of discussion raised by the participants. Although the cell phone ban was put in place for all kindergarten to Grade 8 students, there is also an unwritten rule about teachers needing/wanting to model the policy which they are implementing. However inconsistent, some administrators feel more strongly than others about how teachers should model this appropriate use. Some participants shared that their administration has requested that, as a means to help students see consistency, all staff in the building put their

phones away for the school day. In contrast, other administrators have no guidelines on this, seeing it as the task of each individual teacher to model however they see fit. This demonstrates how strongly administration presence and leadership influence the overall culture in a school.

That said, all six participating teachers expressed a desire to model using their own phones in front of their students for different reasons. Some teachers noted a strong desire to “make sure I’m not using it in front of them either” (Teacher 2), while others were more transparent about needing to have their phone visible on their desk in case their child or child’s school needed to get a hold of them during the day (Teacher 5). For Teacher 1, the modelling of being very obvious about putting their phone in the desk drawer when her students entered her room was important. Other teachers expressed a sense of frustration around why teachers felt a need to have their cell phone in their back pocket all throughout the day (Teacher 2; Teacher 3).

One participant made an individual choice at the beginning of last year to keep their personal cell phone at home during the workday (Teacher 2). She described this choice as being intentional and saw it as helping to create a boundary between work and home life. The impetus for this choice was related to what we are teaching students and the modelling that should come from teachers. This teacher saw this choice as a positive shift in the quality of her interactions with colleagues in the building. She expressed that her colleagues are aware that they cannot text her during the day and must come see her in person. She describes this choice as “actually being healthier for me” and she was able to reflect on the time when she did have her phone at work and how she was constantly distracted and checking it for messages. The deliberate decision to leave her device at home has positively impacted her overall well-being while prompting her to reflect on her dependence on her phone.

Since the ban has been in place, some teachers have expressed frustration at seeing other teachers and staff continue to use their phones, even while working one-on-one with students. Given students' hyper-awareness of technology, Teacher 3 noticed that students may have “more meltdowns because they want to be on an iPad”. However, this teacher felt defeated because she knew she shouldn't be the one to go over and tell another teacher to put their phone down. One teacher related this situation to her own classroom, saying that if she brought her phone out to scroll, she would miss something important, or a student could get hurt (Teacher 3). There was a resounding feeling of frustration at the lack of consistency in adherence to a mandate that has not been implemented for teachers in the building. This frustration was also felt in meetings in their buildings, where colleagues would be consumed by their phones throughout the whole meeting, or they would rely on AI to help brainstorm options. Although cell phones and AI have become very helpful tools in classroom planning and meetings, they can pull people away from the basics of human interaction.

Modeling putting cell phones away can be seen as an opportunity for teachers to take a break from their devices, while also indicating that students don't need to rely on technology as much as they do. Teacher 1 reflected on having “the same soothing strategy,” in which she would have a bad day, then go home and be on her phone for hours. There is an underlying awareness and shared struggle that teachers feel regarding their own connection to their cell phones. Acknowledging the hardship and inviting conversation about the cell phone ban fosters empathy between teachers and students.

### ***Sub-theme 3d: Safety***

As cell phones have increased the level of online communication for students and teachers, the potential dangers of online use have also been amplified. This, in turn, has increased anxieties among some teachers about students using cell phones in schools to make threats.

One teacher reflected on being thankful for the cell phone ban, as she no longer needs to worry as much about what students might be communicating or planning on their phones during the school day. Her reflection is connected to the recent Tumblr Ridge tragedy, one that has sent shockwaves throughout the country. On February 10, 2026, a mass shooting occurred at Tumblr Ridge Secondary School located in Tumblr Ridge, British Columbia (CBC News, 2026). The suspect fatally shot 5 children and one teacher while injuring 26 other individuals. This horrific incident rippled across the country and school communities. The families of the victims in this tragedy are now taking legal action against OpenAI for not notifying authorities of plans being made online by the suspect (CBC News, 2026). In addition to this recent event, there have been several threats against schools in Winnipeg. Between February 3 and 19, 2026, the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) investigated 11 separate school threats across the city (CBC News, 2026). None of these specific threats were credible, but the impact of these on communities, schools, and students is real.

Although there are benefits to having cell phones at school for safety reasons, this is outweighed by the fear that phones “create havoc by students communicating with others and initiating something dangerous and inappropriate” (Teacher 2). Even if incidents are not directly experienced by teachers, hearing about them in the news can influence vicarious trauma, along with seeing their classroom and world through a lens of danger. For this particular teacher, this ban is therefore seen as a safeguarding strategy that reduces their anxiety about perceived risks and threats to safety and security.

Together, these participating teachers reflected on the felt sense of the positive impact the cell phone ban has had on their own teaching practices and their well-being. They expressed how these changes in their classroom have sparked their joy for their profession, a shift that has changed how classrooms are taught. Witnessing students build social connections and interests has added to the joy teachers' feel within the classroom. Overall, the participants in this study suggest that although teachers continue to feel expectations on their roles and responsibilities have increased, the benefits of not having cell phones in the classroom and their role in implementing this mandate have greatly outweighed the risks along with positively impacting their well-being.

#### **Theme 4: Perceived effects on students**

This theme focuses on teachers' perceptions of the impact the school cell phone ban has had on students' well-being (physical and mental health) and academic outcomes.

##### ***Sub-theme 4a: Improved social connections***

Participants reflected positively on the improved behaviours they witnessed in their students following the government cell phone ban. Of particular note was the improvement in student social connections. Two teachers shared that the second year of implementation was noticeably different from the first (Teacher 4, Teacher 6). For one, it felt like a more cohesive group, meaning there was a more universal sense that kids were able to be kids again, allowing them to work on building connections. This could be due to several factors, including students being more accustomed to the ban, knowing the rules will not change, and teachers feeling more comfortable and consistent in implementing the mandate (Teacher 4). There was a consistent message from all teachers that they are noticing a positive shift in their students' interactions: laughing, talking, and asking questions. Teacher 1 has noticed “more smiles, more positive and

kind interactions”. Teacher 4 shared experiencing far fewer inappropriate physical interactions between students, seeing the subsiding of annoying behaviours of poking or tickling. While this cannot be directly attributed to the ban, it indicated that students are spending more intentional time together, may be better equipped to deal with interpersonal conflict and are engaging in more prosocial face-to-face interactions. As a specific example, one participant noted that the board games that were to be used during lunch breaks in the classroom sat untouched in the classroom prior to the ban and are now being used. Teacher 1 describes this time as “now I get to see my students have fun in an analog way”. It was apparent that the connection that teachers were building with their students was “much more genuine” (Teacher 5).

There was also a shared sense of being able to model what a healthy friendship looks like, as well as how to build and foster connections. For some teachers, it has been life-giving to witness friendships blossom in the classroom, sometimes in unexpected ways since the implementation of the ban. When they see students having a goal of making one friend, and when cell phones are not there, distractions are lessened, and friendships can happen more easily. Students are more aware of others, inviting them to sit with them at lunch or play a game together.

#### ***Sub-theme 4b: Students’ Physical & Mental Health***

Two teachers noted a significant improvement in their students’ physical health. Before the ban, recess was once a period marked by students consumed by their phones and has since been transformed into a time of physical activity and social connection. This shift has not only benefited students’ social and emotional connections but also brought joy to teachers. What was once described as an “eerie” and “depressing” scene is now a playground of enjoyment and physical release (Teacher 4). Similarly, pre-ban, students would bring their phones to gym class

where they could use their devices as timers and stopwatches (Teacher 2). The shift since the cell phone ban has allowed for teaching about using devices already in the gym, thus lessening their appeal.

One aspect that teachers remain ambivalent about is whether the ban is having a positive impact on students' mental health. Although teachers are not seeing the “big blowouts” and reactions to cell phone confiscation as was initially anticipated, mental health concerns are still prominent, meaning the deeper struggles students are experiencing continue. Mental health is seen as extending beyond the classroom and being more nuanced than other forms of health. While students are now getting a clear break from their devices during the school day, their cell phone use after school hours is where teachers are seeing a significant impact that continues to affect the classroom and learning environment. There is a shared, overarching awareness of the gravity of students' access to cell phones and social media, which is incredibly challenging to contain. As Teacher 5 explained, “I think mental health is still a huge concern for kids with social media after school, even though we are seeing less of the fallout from a weekend of texting”. This sentiment was shared by Teacher 1, who explained that she is not seeing as much “constant covert bullying”, but is very aware of the chat groups and Snapchats out there that are impacting students' self-worth, confidence, and well-being. The reduction in these “fallouts” may suggest that teachers are seeing some protective benefits from the ban, although the gravity of unmonitored online use outside of school hours remains a concern.

#### ***Sub-theme 4c: Academics***

Participants also reflected on their perceptions of the cell phone ban's impact on students' academic performance, which they deemed challenging to quantify or interpret. Several teachers reported that since the cell phone ban, students seem “less distracted” (Teacher 1) and that their

“level of focus is definitely better” (Teacher 4). When students are less distracted, their ability to be present and listen to teaching improves. This is witnessed by one teacher, who noticed that her students are more present in their work, wanting to complete it fully and do better (Teacher 5). This teacher reflects on the “huge difference” she sees in her students’ learning, ability and creativity. Teachers believe the reason for this positive change is that the devices in their pockets aren’t there calling for their attention. Teacher 2’s reflection that technology is “really controlling these kids” suggests that the draw of one’s phone is hard to self-regulate, impacting students’ ability to disengage independently. Reflection on noticing students’ “overreliance on phones instead of developing independent skills” has been one lasting classroom impact (Teacher 2). This could be due to students having less practical time to master these skills.

A couple of teachers noted a perceived shift in students’ academic resilience over recent years, with students seeking “instant feedback” or “instant results” in their work (Teacher 4). What was once a class of independent problem solving and critical thinking is now a classroom of students who “expect everything to be spoon-fed to them” (Teacher 4). One could connect this need for instant gratification to students having constant access to information at their fingertips, along with the scrolling of quick, addictive videos, and the advent of generative artificial intelligence. Another contributing factor could be the lack of challenges kids face outside of school due to their draw to their phones. This “spoon-fed” classroom has led to frustration among teachers who want students to practice problem-solving through adversity, recognizing that this is a lifelong skill to develop. This could also lead teachers to feel some pressure to ensure their students acquire those skills as they continue to grow. This is seen as a shift to what classroom resilience was like before technology was more readily available for students. Teacher 4 noted that the desire to “do well” and to care about their marks has also declined in the past

decade. In the last decade, it has been rare to see a student come in and ask to redo an assignment or test. It was also noted that the desire to do better extends into home life, where this teacher has noticed some parents showing less interest in their students' academic outcomes, as some report cards have yet to be opened or viewed.

Although hard to quantify, teachers are noticing a positive shift in students' attention in the classroom, contributing to better academic outcomes. However, some students' resilience and desire to see the benefits of education and to do better are difficult to manage. The positive shift in students fostering connections with one another, moving their bodies during recess, and just “being kids again” offers a glimmer of hope in this complex situation.

### **Theme 5: Broader system and contextual issues**

This final theme explores broader systemic and contextual issues that shape the policy's impact beyond the classroom. These include the role of the students' home and community environment and future-oriented considerations.

#### ***Sub-theme 5a: Role of home and community environment***

It was evident among all participants that the impact of home life, including boundaries, rules, and supervision around technology, is seeping into the classroom. Several teachers noted that as soon as students leave the school building, their phones are out (Teachers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6). Parents of kindergarten to Grade 8 students should still be heavily involved in their children's lives regarding their technology use and overall well-being. It is when parents are on the same page as the school system on technology enforcement and recognize the impact technology and social media can have on their child that more cohesive communities can evolve. Teacher 3 commented that the community surrounding their small school is strong, one that is working to foster education and to figure out how to support their children in the digital world beyond the

school. This parenting group was very happy with the government mandating this policy, as it aligns with their values and views on technology and its harms. Having parents' support and backing, in turn, allows the school to feel supported, offering relief to teachers who are at the forefront of implementation.

In contrast, when parents offer limited support with few regulations and boundaries around technology use at home, teachers notice an impact on their students. One teacher estimated that about 90% of their class had no restrictions on their devices at home (Teacher 4). This teacher goes on to state, “If parents aren’t going to enforce rules at home, it’s impossible to enforce here”. This nuanced perspective adds many complexities to this challenge, raising questions about the effectiveness of a block of time when students are away from their devices and how impactful it is when some kids have free rein with their devices at home. Although students are now getting a break from their devices while in school, the reality for some is that they go home and are drawn right back to them, with little to no restrictions. The impact of these late sleepless nights is what teachers are noticing in their students. Although their attention is not being pulled in different directions at school, many kids still arrive tired. Teacher 6 describes the impact of sleepless nights and attention in class as there being a “relationship between that exhaustion and their devices that is a little worse”. This teacher has students falling asleep in class, and their peers would be the first ones to tell the teacher that “they saw them logged into whatever, at like 2:00 am”. Teachers emphasized that students are being exposed to so much online with very few restrictions. And if there are restrictions, students are smart and capable of working around them. Teacher 4 described this predicament as a “parenting problem” along with “parents being lazy”. This teacher goes on to say, “You can talk about technology at school all you want, but you’re not responsible for them 24 hours a day”. This sentiment reflects significant

frustration and curiosity about why parents are not doing more to restrict technology at home. Setting up parental controls on one's device is a simple task that does not take long (Teacher 4). These teachers describe additional concerns their students discuss, including going to bed when they feel like it and watching TikTok until they fall asleep, which they equate with the attention difficulties they observe in their classrooms during the day.

One frustrating component of inviting conversations around technology at home with parents is that some parents are “not fully honest because they’re embarrassed about it,” along with receiving the message that “as long as my child isn’t bugging me, I’m okay” (Teacher 2). This sentiment of using devices as “babysitters” may be correlated with the COVID-19 pandemic, when parents were forced to work from home, and students were learning online. To help parents be productive and efficient, technology was used to distract their children. Teacher 4 states,

We’re trying to educate them, but there are no rules at home. And I think COVID magnified it, where that was just the default for a lot of parents. I’m busy, I gotta do work, go play on your screen.

One could interpret this as an effective strategy parents can use; however, when there are limited restrictions, issues can arise. Additionally, it was noted that some parents are using students' devices to help dysregulate and soothe when the student is having bigger emotions (Teacher 1). If there is an ingrained pattern of turning to a device when one is experiencing unpleasant emotions, this is not teaching tools and skills for self-regulation. This begs the question of how children are being prepared to face adversity and confront their emotions with curiosity rather than distraction.

From conversations with participating teachers, it was evident that home life and technology regulation are just as important as, if not more important than, school regulation.

Teacher 1 emphasized this by saying:

I think paying attention is a muscle that has to be built. And so, if you're building that muscle at school, that's awesome. But if you go home and you're playing video games or on your phone scrolling endlessly for X amount of hours, or you're on TikTok for X amount of hours, does it negate what's going on?

This statement suggests feelings of frustration, uncertainty, and helplessness stemming from a lack of consistency and appreciation for teachers' efforts to support students at school. There is a perceived tension between teachers' sense of responsibility and accountability for ensuring students have a deserved break from technology to be present in their academic work, and the lack of parental support and follow-through when students go home.

Some teachers have also noticed a decline in parental involvement in their children's academic work at school. This lack of support can affect students' desire to learn more and see the benefits of education. These examples are seen as shifts from what parental involvement looked like 10-20 years ago. Questions arise about why this shift is occurring now and how to help parents see the benefits of education and its impact on their children.

#### ***Sub-theme 5b: Future-oriented considerations***

A clear, consistent message from all participating teachers was about feeling responsible for educating students and preparing them for the future, as well as how to be safe online. Not only are teachers there to help students academically, but they are also there to help them learn and develop skills and prepare for the future. One way schools are doing this is by inviting public safety officers and guest speakers to educate students on online safety. One participating teacher

spoke about how their teachers have weekly grade-level meetings where they discuss topics that have come up in the news or issues they're seeing in their classrooms and turn that into a classroom lesson (Teacher 5).

The reality is that technology, cell phone usage, video games, social media, and generative artificial intelligence are not going away any time soon. As Teacher 2 stated, "the future is definitely involving technology, and I think that it does have a huge place, and it is going to be important for students". One could question this statement, asking whether, if technology is here to stay, taking these devices away in schools "poses some restrictions on authentic learning" (Teacher 1), and whether there is a question around how to teach "responsible use rather than strict prohibition" (Teacher 2). Teacher 6 states:

I think if we were a truly responsive school system, we would be finding a way to teach students how to use technology healthily. Instead of just an outright ban, because historically, outright bans haven't really worked... Outright bans certainly do not teach people how to use things responsibly.

Schools and teachers are trying to create an environment that ignores a major aspect of their lives. Teachers do not want to return to a time when cell phones were unmanaged in their classrooms. However, all participating teachers believe that something about the cell phone ban isn't unrealistic or doesn't line up: students are getting a break from their devices during the day but then returning to them after 3:30 pm. This leaves some teachers feeling that, because they are not getting education on digital literacy including appropriate and safe technology use at home, schools are left to try to incorporate learning that can hopefully stick (Teacher 1, 2, 4, 5, 6). These teachers perceived this as one missing piece in supporting students was around greater parental accountability and support around technology use at home. Therein lies frustration and

considerations around how much home life and parental influence has in the consistency and education of safe cell phone usage.

Questions were raised about the logistics of Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew's most recent public announcement of the proposed first-in-Canada ban on social media and AI chatbots for youth 16 and under. Teacher 6 questions "how that is going to work" suggesting apprehension around implementation, although having some alignment with this policy. The fact is that students are smart and tech-savvy, and in banning social media and AI chatbots, they are capable of finding other platforms to use. Although limited details are available on the timeline and logistical procedures for enforcing this new policy, some may interpret it as another reactionary response and the "easiest way" out. Due to the increasing evidence and currently little accountability of online harms for adolescents, the introduction of Canadian Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act, will provide a legislative and regulatory framework across the country through a new Digital Safety Act for social media services and for certain AI chatbots (Canadian Heritage, 2026).

### **Summary of findings**

The findings described here, including the five themes and sub-themes, detail the individual responses of the six participants and how some ideas weave together in this study. Conducting this study allowed me to actively listen to each participant's responses and personal experiences with the cell phone ban in their classroom, including its impact on teachers' well-being and perceptions of its impact on their students. Although Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is an iterative process, cross-case analysis revealed connections with other participants, and themes began to emerge. By maintaining and safeguarding one's individual story, shared ideas and situations arose from the data analysis process. Each participant's experience

highlighted the shared consensus that the cell phone ban within their school and classroom has been successful and helpful overall. There have also been positive effects on teachers' overall well-being due to the management of cell phones in the classroom. Teachers are seeing the positive impact the cell phone ban has on their students, which in turn affects their ability to enjoy teaching. Teachers have also noticed a benefit to their students' well-being: their students' attention is no longer split between two realities, allowing them to be more present, which improves their attention and leads to stronger relationships with their peers. However, some teachers note that the impact of cell phone use is seen in the classroom, as students are on their phones at night and their attention is affected by the quick dopamine hits from the videos they watch. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings in the context of the existing literature and offer recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study explored the perspectives and experiences of six teachers in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in the Pembina Trail School Division. Through semi-structured individual interviews, participants shared their experiences with the cell phone ban and its impact on their teaching and overall well-being. Teachers were also asked to share their perceptions of how this ban has impacted their students' well-being and academic outcomes. This chapter provides an overview of the study's key findings in relation to the research objectives, including a connection to the broader literature. Additionally, this chapter will include a description of potential implications, knowledge mobilization strategies, recommendations for future research, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

## **Discussion**

### ***Teachers' experiences and well-being***

Over the last decade, our world has grappled with technological advances and the draw that different apps and social media can have on us. As cell phones are now in the hands of our younger and most vulnerable generations, they have inevitably made their way into the classroom, reshaping social interactions, privacy, dynamics, and overall well-being. These devices are now a part of one's identity, making it much more challenging to restrict and control while at school. Before the ban, challenges stemming from parental and student pushback were prevalent, taking a toll on teachers in the classroom. Smale et al. (2021) describe the complexities of parents arguing that taking these devices away infringes on their constitutional right to stay connected to their child. However, the teachers in this study explained that once the province announced the ban, parents' pushbacks were drastically different from before. Many teachers noted that after the announcement, they didn't receive any pushback from parents. Findings from Adams (2020) and Selwyn & Aagaard (2021) were like those of the participating

teachers in this study, who noted that schools had greater leverage to restrict students' access to technology when backed by the government. Although participating teachers did not have direct proof of this relation, many believed it was part of the 'why' behind parent and student adherence.

When conducting preliminary research for this study, I found no previous research that explored teachers' experiences with cell phone bans and their impact on their well-being. The literature noted the lack of hearing from teachers about their input and insights on the ban. I found that, between participating teachers' views and those of the author Robertson et al. (2020), teachers felt much more comfortable promoting learning than policing cell phones. Several participants discussed this reality, explaining the added weight and strain that policing cell phones caused them, and that enforcement was assumed rather than requested. All these added responsibilities, along with the pre-ban negative shift in the classroom, impact teachers' overall well-being and joy in their profession. Through Foucault's Theory of Power, this can be interpreted as participants feeling relief at having greater clarity and consistency from the provincially mandated cell phone ban. This policy has helped to re-establish teachers' authority within the classroom. As students become accustomed to these new regulations, teachers are describing fewer challenges related to phone use, which has increased their ability to maintain connection and control within the classroom.

Findings from this study highlight that many facets impact one's well-being. What is noteworthy across all the interviews is that teachers entered this profession because of their love for teaching and the challenge of encouraging and building strong students for our future. The added weight of the pandemic and the presence of cell phones in the classroom caused strain and stress. The re-ignition of joy in the profession was sparked after the cell phone ban, when they

noticed that students were interacting more with each other, playing games, solving problems, running around and being physically active, listening, and enjoying their time at school. When teachers witnessed this shift in their students, it added to their enjoyment. Although most teachers continue to feel they have more responsibility than ever, witnessing ‘kids being kids’ again is incredibly gratifying. From a cognitive load perspective, teachers describe a profound shift in their classroom dynamics due to the cell phone ban. Teachers have observed improvements in students’ presence, engagement, and social interactions, which may be linked to the added burden that cell phones place on students. When phones were present in the classroom, students had to navigate their academic tasks while dealing with the draw and potential distractions of their phones, placing an added cognitive load on students and teachers. Teachers also reported a reduction in their cognitive and emotional load, as they no longer had to monitor, police, and redirect students’ attention. This has allowed teachers to focus more on building relationships and instruction.

Teachers also described their experiences with their own cell phones, both in and out of school, highlighting the empathy they feel for their students. Although it was apparent that some teachers who have been teaching for most of their careers have stronger opinions about technology use than younger, less experienced teachers, they could all understand the draw of technology that students face every day. There was expressed frustration among more seasoned teachers in this study about noticing that younger teachers rely quite heavily on technology in their lessons. This narrative is consistent with O’Bannon and Thomas (2015)’s study around technology being more accepted as a learning tool for younger teachers, who may struggle to be more creative when technology is not in the classroom. However, younger teachers may be more empathetic toward students with the cell phone ban because they can relate to it more readily.

This can lead to important, critical thinking conversations within classrooms that wouldn't happen if teachers were understanding and empathetic toward their students' experience. These experiences add to a teacher's sense of purpose and well-being within their profession.

Interpreted through the lens of Social Learning Theory, students learn new behaviours through experience and observation. Before the ban, students were affected and followed suit when peers quickly completed tasks and then asked to use their phones. Now that these devices are unavailable, students have an opportunity to focus on the task at hand while also being influenced by their peers doing the same. Another aspect of this is that teachers are conscious of modelling the behaviour they want their students to see. When students see that teachers do not have their phones out either, it demonstrates a shared experience.

### ***Perceptions of Impacts on Students and Well-being***

Literature on the impact of cell phone bans on students' mental health is limited and inconsistent. The study by Nagata et al. (2024) found that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a 52% increase in the time adolescents spent on their cell phones. The pandemic was a recurring topic of discussion among participating teachers about why students are so glued to their devices and how this affects the classroom culture and students' learning. Teachers questioned how this time has made a blueprint in students' awareness, impacting their social interactions and addiction to their devices. Although limited studies show any impact of the cell phone ban on students' mental health, what is consistent with the literature is the impact that home life, few restrictions, and parental controls can have on students' mental health. All six teachers emphasized that when students do not have restrictions or technology boundaries at home, they see the effects in the classroom. Students are coming in tired, irritated, and not ready to learn. This narrative is

consistent with Goodyear et al. (2025), who also found that, outside the classroom, elevated phone use is associated with poorer mental health and sleep habits.

Therefore, one could argue that the ban gave their students a much-needed break from their devices at school. What was also consistent with Goodyear's study was that even with a break from devices during the school day, without interventions outside of school, this did not have any positive impact on students' overall well-being or mental health. Consistent with Teacher 4's observations of recess time pre-ban and the lack of play and interaction, this is similar to findings from Odgers and Jensen (2020), who emphasize that adolescents' access to mobile phone use can decrease their physical activity and interaction with others. The draw of these devices can be so strong, and in some ways, they cannot compete with face-to-face interaction. It was notable that the ban increased students' ability to engage in free play and not have the distraction or calling of their phone while at school.

Research on academic impacts from the cell phone ban is limited and inconsistent. In this study, comparing pre- and post-ban academic outcomes found that teachers noticed an improvement in their students' ability to engage and pay attention. This is a consistent finding with Böttger and Zierer (2024), who found that cell phone bans have a small but positive impact on reducing distractions, improving focus, engagement, and participation. Teacher 5 noted a complete shift in her classroom as it pertains to students wanting to finish their projects, asking to do more and enjoying the process. Potential impacts of cell phone usage on academic instant gratification and resilience were noted by Teacher 4 and 6. Although not verifiable, questions were raised about cell phone use and its role in students becoming more accustomed to quick results from watching short, engaging videos online. This is consistent with Wilmer et al. (2017) findings reporting impacts of cell phones on students' attention, memory and instant gratification.

This author explains that higher cell phone use tends to favour instant gratification over larger delayed rewards. This may help to explain why teachers are struggling with students' lack of patience, focus, and self-control in the classroom. This is consistent with Teacher 4's experience of students wanting instructions and answers "spoon-fed to them". What was mentioned by a few teachers is the ease that cell phones brought when they were available, because they could ask students to bring them out for certain tasks. It seemed that when cell phones were used appropriately, they could be beneficial. These findings relate to research showing that phones used for educational purposes can be quite effective (Grigic Magnusson et al., 2023).

Some informal observations that were not the specific focus of my study came from my data analysis. Here, I noted some interesting differences between teachers depending on their years of experience teaching and the grades taught. Because students in younger grades tended not to bring cell phones to school, these teachers' reflections on this time were more self-directed, expressing their desire to model what they wanted to see in their students. I also noted that teachers in younger grades were more critical of colleagues who used their devices during school hours. In addition, teachers with more years of experience were more critical of younger teachers and their over-reliance on technology. These more experienced teachers drew on their years of teaching before technology was commonplace and saw the ban as a good thing, as it helps newer teachers learn different teaching strategies that do not involve technology.

### ***Future considerations***

Although teachers were able to attribute positive changes in themselves and their students' post-ban, a few participants questioned whether a complete ban was the most effective approach. This is consistent with Gath et al. (2024) and Sheng and Lipscombe (2024), who suggest that cell phone use and technology are aspects of modern life and question whether

outright bans are the most effective way to achieve schools' goals. All teachers agree that they need some form of phone management while at school, but this is nuanced by the reality of our world's reliance on technology and the desire to educate on this. Similar findings from Gath et al. (2024) suggest that we should give students opportunities to develop critical-thinking skills and to learn about healthy cell phone use, and that banning these opportunities does not allow for learning about appropriate phone use and safety.

### **Practice Implications**

Findings from my thesis research offer several insights and practice implications, particularly regarding hearing from teachers at the forefront of implementation in the Pembina Trails School Division in Manitoba. This section outlines the practical implications that emerged from conversations with participating teachers, with the hope that they will inform future policy rollout.

One central finding from my study, emphasized by all teachers, was the need for a clear and consistent policy rollout. It was apparent that most teachers felt frustrated by the lack of information on this specific policy and guidance on implementation. Although teachers felt relieved once the ban was announced, questions remained about how it would be implemented and what it would look like. There was a consistent message of ‘we’ll figure this out as we go’; however, with a shift this big affecting all schools and classrooms, clear, consistent, and collectively outlined policies on technology are required, rather than leaving individual teachers to manage them on their own. Clear policies and guidelines help reduce teacher stress, minimize ambiguity, and help teachers feel supported.

Another finding from this study highlights the need to place teachers' well-being at the forefront when implementing classroom policies. It was apparent in my discussions that teachers

carry a heavy load, one that is much more than just academics. Teachers are finding that their roles are becoming broader due to the needs of the school and its students. Teachers feel a responsibility to foster and develop lifelong skills in their students, knowing that these skills may not be coming from home. These added responsibilities are what cause teachers to feel overlooked and unacknowledged. Teachers expressed the mentality of “we are told, and we do,” with little wiggle room to invite conversations about how different situations will impact one's well-being. This can inevitably lead teachers to feel overlooked and affect their professional sustainability. Input and conversation from teachers are necessary when developing policies, so they can express how this will impact them and their well-being.

The next finding from this study concerns teachers' perceptions of how a supportive administration affects policy discussion and implementation. Each school building can be seen as a separate microcosm, run by a leader who directs and supports those working under them. It was evident in my discussions with teachers that effective policy implementation and cohesion can only occur when a strong, supportive administration supports teachers. It was noted in my discussions that when administrative leadership is lacking or absent, this impacts teachers' sense of cohesion and leaves them working in silos. Although the province enforces this specific policy, there needs to be a strong, available administration to guide teachers in the building and provide consistent communication to help them feel supported and less isolated.

The next finding concerns the perceived impact of the cell phone ban on students' well-being, including physical and mental health, as well as academic outcomes. All teachers expressed the positive impact the cell phone ban has had on their classroom. These impacts are most evident among students, who are given an actual break from their devices, which forces them to interact face-to-face with each other, overcome adversity, and be more present in class. It

was evident that some students' academic resilience and desire to improve had shifted compared to prior years. Students want immediate results and seek outcomes spoon-fed to them. Some teachers raised questions about the impact of technology on students seeking instant gratification and attention. There may be a need for additional support to help students build their mental health and resilience. Most teachers discussed the impact of cell phone use outside of school on students' overall well-being in the classroom. Teachers reported that they have not seen much of a shift in students' mental health since the ban; however, students having more interactions and more fun at school are seen as protective factors for their overall well-being. What was apparent was the influence of home life and, in some cases, the lack of supervision and boundaries on students' devices when at home. Teachers are seeing the impact of home life and the lack of boundaries on students in the classroom. There was a strong desire for parents to come on board with the school; however, questions were raised about how to do so effectively.

The next finding addresses teachers' questions about whether school cell phone bans are the solution to this problem. Although seen as the easiest solution to the ongoing cell phone problem in schools, teachers raised concerns about whether this was the best way to handle it. Although the ban helps reduce classroom disruptions, broader questions remain about how to teach students about healthy technology habits, especially if they are not getting similar information at home. Schools are offering students educational seminars with guest speakers and school resource officers and are working to implement more education into their physical education curriculum. However, as some teachers noted, they need more parental support.

The final finding concerns the need for teachers' voices to be included in future policy development. It was apparent that the teachers' input was not involved in the conversation or directive from the province. Teachers were directed in their roles, with no room for discussion

about what that would look like. What is missing from this policy is their voices, perspectives, and input. Teachers' classroom experience and knowledge can provide valuable insight into the practical implications of banning cell phones, which could foster more fully thought-through policies.

### **Knowledge Mobilization**

The primary purpose of this study was to hear and amplify teachers' voices as they pertain to the cell phone ban within their kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in the Pembina Trails School Division. Given that the ban is in the second year of enforcement, it is imperative that teachers are asked questions about its impact on themselves and their perceived impact on their students. With the results of this study, it is hoped that the Pembina Trails School Division has an increased understanding of the voices of teachers and the overall impact the ban has brought. The hope is that not only the Pembina Trails School Division, but other Divisions in our province will begin to inquire more with teachers about the impact of this ban as it continues. With the recent announcement from our Manitoba Premier on the social media ban and AI chatbots, along with the Canadian federal government's Bill C-34, The Safe Social Media Act, future studies should inquire with teachers about their impact and why the rollout is happening at the start of the school year. Additionally, the results were intended to be useful to the Division regarding future policy rollouts and the need for teachers to be at the table to increase effectiveness and cohesion.

Each participating teacher has been provided with a summary of the results, with the hope that they can feel like their individual story is heard and portrayed. These results will also be shared with the Pembina Trails School Division along with disseminating my findings by publishing a manuscript and sharing the results more broadly with other divisions will be explored.

## Limitations

Given the chosen methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, sample sizes are smaller, allowing for in-depth exploration of one's lived experience. The sample size of six participants in this study is appropriate for IPA but not large. IPA study findings are not meant to be generalizable; therefore, these findings are specific and nuanced and reflect the experience of these teachers from this one division in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Because cell phones are typically not seen in younger years, there was an underlying assumption that teachers in older years would be able to offer more insight. Additionally, because participants were from across this division, the findings do not reflect the experiences of all teachers in different schools and grades. However, because this ban has not highlighted teachers' voices, it felt important to choose a methodology that would allow me to understand their personal experience with it.

I chose a qualitative inquiry to gather individuals' stories, and as a School Social Worker, I both enjoy and value hearing people's lived experiences. These are subjective experiences that explore one's personal beliefs and emotions. The notion that teachers' school culture, administration, and policy implementation all impact teachers' beliefs and experiences with the ban. However, these are the stories that have been missing from the literature regarding the cell phone ban. This is just a snapshot of what six teachers said about the ban within their classrooms. However, future studies may adopt more quantitative approaches to collect numerical data to better understand the impacts on students' academic performance and mental health.

This study allowed me to hear six individuals' reflections on their experiences with the cell phone ban in their classrooms. Teachers were able to share their perspectives on how they

think the ban is affecting their students; however, I did not directly examine students' voices, which are missing in this study. Future studies should incorporate students' voices.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

When exploring options for future research, it would be interesting to continue the qualitative exploration of more teachers' experiences and perceptions of the ban in different school divisions. Given that the current body of research does not explore these voices, more opportunities for teachers to speak to the ban's impact are warranted. This would allow divisions and governments to hear from frontline employees who implement this, deepening their understanding and enabling more robust collaboration around future policies. Additionally, hearing from other educators in the school including administration, educational assistants, custodians, support staff, and other clinicians (school social workers, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists).

This study focuses on kindergarten through Grade 8 because there is an outright ban on cell phones in schools. What is missing from this study is how the tiered cell phone ban is going in Grades 9–12. The decision not to include high school in this discussion was because students are still allowed to bring their phones to school and can use them during lunch and breaks. However, future studies in high school are important to determine whether a tiered approach yields differences or whether a full ban would be the next best step.

What is also missing from the research is the voices of students. This ban is still in its early stage of implementation, and there are curiosities around how this has positively and negatively impacted students. Do students see the ban as a break from their devices; does this come with some relief? Are they noticing any shifts in their ability to pay attention when they

don't have their device on them? By failing to capture students' voices, we are only able to assume and not fully understand.

Additionally, research has outlined a gap in the literature on hearing parental/guardian voices. It's important to hear about their experience of what it's been like to have this ban at school and the impact they've seen on their child. Are parents struggling to set limits and boundaries around technology use at home? What support do parents need? These discussions could lead to some understanding of how to better support parents and students through this process.

### **Conclusion**

This is the first qualitative study to highlight teachers' voices, lived experiences, and perceptions of the impact of the school cell phone ban on kindergarten to Grade 8 schools within

the Pembina Trails School Division. Participants shared information that is unique to their story but also consistent with the current literature on the cell phone ban in elementary and middle schools. This study highlights the need to hear and acknowledge teachers' voices when implementing policies within the school system.

This study makes a unique contribution to the cell phone ban policy in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools, as it is only in its second year of implementation. Most existing literature has focused on cell phone bans and their impacts; however, those studies are limited and inconsistent. The research made it evident that teachers' voices are missing in this. Drawing on in-depth experiences from teachers within the Pembina Trails School Division, the study offers one of the first in-depth explorations of the cell phone ban's impact on teachers' teaching practices and well-being, as well as their perceptions of its impact on their students.

The hope for those reading this study is to paint a picture of what the cell phone ban has been like for the six participating teachers and to offer a perspective on its impacts. It is also important to highlight all that teachers do each day to foster relationships and academic growth with students. It is not an easy job, and it is often overlooked. With the snapshots of these voices highlighted in this study, the need for their inclusion in future school policies is paramount to the school's success and professional satisfaction.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A



Faculty of Social Work  
521 Tier Building  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada, R3T 2N2  
Telephone: 204-474-7594

TO: Senior Administration Team  
Pembina Trails School Division

RE: MSW Thesis Project

My name is Adrienne Schellenberg, and in addition to being a School Social Worker in the Pembina Trails School Division, I am also completing my final year of my MSW, which involves a thesis project. My focus is on interviewing teachers in our division employed at kindergarten to Grade 8 schools regarding the recent cell phone ban.

As I work in several schools, I have observed the complexities and benefits of this ban. This research aims to use qualitative in-depth interviews to understand how teachers feel the bans have affected their teaching, well-being, the classroom environment, and their perceptions of the impact on students' academic performance and well-being.

I am writing to inform you of this study and welcome any resulting conversations. After my thesis proposal is approved by my committee and the Research and Ethics Board, I will reconnect with you to discuss the next steps. I hope the knowledge gained from this project will help amplify teachers' voices regarding current and future policy rollouts.

Thank you for your support and collaboration. I look forward to continuing the conversation.  
Sincerely,

Adrienne Schellenberg BSW, RSW  
University of Manitoba, MSW Candidate

Academic Advisor: Ashley Stewart-Tufescu, PhD, RSW  
Email: [Ashley.Stewart-Tufescu@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Ashley.Stewart-Tufescu@umanitoba.ca)

## Appendix B



# MANITOBA'S K-8 CELL PHONE BAN TEACHER PERSPECTIVES NEEDED!

**Are you a teacher currently working in K-8 schools in the Pembina Trails School Division? Your experiences and insights matter!**

This research project will focus on teachers' perceptions and experiences of the new cell phone ban in K-8 schools within the Pembina Trails School Division. With limited research available on this emerging policy, your perspective can make a meaningful contribution.

**Note: This study is independent of the Pembina Trails School Division**

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

- K-8 teachers working in the Pembina Trails School Division
- At least 2 years of teaching experience before the cell phone ban began (Sept 2024)
- Willing to share detailed experiences about the ban and its impact

## WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- Willing to be audio-recorded
- A one-on-one interview (60 - 90 minutes) followed by a one-on-one review of the researcher's interpretation (30 - 45 minutes)
- Flexible scheduling (online or in-person)
- Voluntary and confidential participation

## WHY PARTICIPATE?

- Share your experiences and concerns
- Contribute to emerging educational research
- Help inform future practice and policy
- Receive a \$65 honorarium



## INTERESTED? HAVE QUESTIONS?

**Contact: Adrienne Schellenberg, MSW Principal Researcher**  
**Email: [schell41@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:schell41@myumanitoba.ca)**  
**University of Manitoba**

**Academic Advisor: Ashley Stewart-Tufescu, PhD, RSW**  
**Email: [Ashley.Stewart-Tufescu@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Ashley.Stewart-Tufescu@umanitoba.ca)**

**This study is approved by**  
**UM Research & Ethics**  
**Board**

## Appendix C



### RECRUITMENT EMAIL

My name is Adrienne Schellenberg, and I am a Master's student in Social Work at the University of Manitoba. I am engaged in a research project exploring teachers' perceptions and experiences of the recent cell phone ban in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools, implemented in the 2024-2025 school year by the Pembina Trails School Division. Please forward the following message to teachers you know who might be interested in participating in this exciting research project. Thank you!

Are you a teacher at an elementary or middle school interested in discussing and exploring your perceptions and experiences regarding the recent cell phone ban? Have you been teaching for two years (since 2022) before the cell phone ban was implemented? Are you willing to be audio-recorded during the interview? Would you like to contribute to the ongoing understanding of the impact of cell phone bans on your teaching experience and classroom dynamics? If so, come be a part of this exciting research project that will explore these important perspectives.

This project will begin with an initial one-on-one interview (60-90 minutes) with me, in person or virtually. You will receive an opportunity to reflect on and explore your individual experience as it pertains to this ban. All information will be kept confidential, and any final write-up identifier will be replaced with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. You will also receive a \$50 honorarium for participating. This will be followed by a second one-on-one interview, during which you will hear my interpretations of your experience. You will receive an additional \$15 honorarium for participating. For more information, contact the researcher Adrienne Schellenberg: [schell41@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:schell41@myumanitoba.ca) or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Adrienne Schellenberg

## Appendix D



**University of Manitoba** | Human Research Ethics

Human Research Ethics - Fort Garry  
66 Chancellors Circle  
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2  
[humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca)

### Participant Informed Consent Form

**Study Title:** Exploring Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of the Kindergarten to Grade 8 School Cell Phone Ban in the Pembina Trails School Division

**Student Principal Investigator:** Adrienne Schellenberg, Master's Student, Faculty of Social Work, [REDACTED] [schell41@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:schell41@myumanitoba.ca)

**Student Advisor:** Dr. Ashley Stewart-Tufescu, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work, 204-474-7876, [Ashley.Stewart-Tufescu@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Ashley.Stewart-Tufescu@umanitoba.ca)

**Conflicts of Interest and Undue Influence:** This study is independent of the Pembina Trails School Division, and the Division will not know who will participate. All information from interviews will be kept confidential, safeguarded in a locked cabinet, and anonymized throughout the data analysis process. School administrators will have no role in the recruitment process and will not be informed about the identities of those who choose to participate. Interviews will be scheduled outside work hours, at times chosen by participants, ensuring convenience and privacy. Additionally, Adrienne Schellenberg may be your School Social Worker at your school. To address the perceived conflict of interest and potential power imbalance due to my role as a School Social Worker within the same division as prospective participants, several measures will be implemented to ensure voluntary participation and protect participants from any sense of obligation or fear of professional repercussions. Teachers with whom I have a current, close professional relationship or active collaboration will not be directly recruited for this study. Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask Adrienne or the advisor. Please take the time to read this document and any accompanying information carefully. It is very important that you understand:

- what is being asked of you
- what the risks and benefits of participation are, and
- how the information you provide will be used and stored.

**Purpose of the Study:** I am doing this research for a thesis project under the supervision of Dr. Ashley Stewart-Tufescu. This research study explores teachers' perspectives and experiences with the current cell phone ban in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in the Pembina Trails School

Division. We hope to learn about the differing perspectives the cell phone ban has had on teachers' themselves and classroom environments, as well as how they perceive this ban affecting their students' well-being and academics. Professional dissemination may include presenting the findings to the Senior Administration Team in the Pembina Trails Division.

**Study Procedures:** If you decide to take part in the study, we will meet for an initial 60-90-minute interview at a private location that feels comfortable for you. There will be an option to meet via UM Zoom, although in-person is preferred. I will record our meeting using an audio recording. After your interview, you will have the chance to review the transcript (the document of what you said). You can add, change, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit. I will email you a copy of the transcript, and you will have two weeks to respond. If I don't hear from you within those two weeks, I will assume that you are okay with the transcript as is. A second follow-up interview (30-45 minutes) will be scheduled following this to allow the researcher to present the interview interpretation for member checking and accuracy purposes. This consent form is to be signed by participants who agree to partake in both the first and second interview. This form will be reviewed before each meeting to verify consent.

**Study Risks:** A potential risk is that you may feel uncomfortable being upfront about how the cell phone ban has been implemented or how it has affected you. To maintain confidentiality, any identifying information (e.g. name, school name) will be anonymized or omitted throughout the process to maintain your anonymity. A list of mental health resources will be given to each participant to reach out to if this would be helpful.

**Study Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study, but we hope to learn more about the current cell phone ban to enhance understanding of its impact and to help inform future policy implementation, thereby better understanding the impact it can have on teachers'.

**Compensation:** Through your participation in this study, I will give you a \$50.00 cash honorarium for the first interview and a \$ 15.00 cash honorarium for the second follow-up interview. The researcher will keep track of the honorarium dispersion separately from any research information. This honorarium information will be kept in a secure location for 7 years in case the University of Manitoba has to account for the money during a financial audit.

**Storage and Use of Data:** Interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription accuracy purposes only. Audio-recordings will be transcribed using Temi, a University of Manitoba approved transcription software. Interviews will be recorded on the principal researcher's phone. These audio recordings will then be transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms applied. The audio recording will then be permanently deleted from the researcher's phone. The de-identified transcripts will then be transferred to the secure password protected U of M OneDrive and the original transcript will be maintained until August 2026, at which point the raw data will be permanently deleted. De-identified transcripts and anonymized data will be securely retained for five years after the end of the study (September 2031), in accordance with University of Manitoba policy, after which they will be permanently deleted. The only individuals who will have access to the raw

data and de-identified data are myself and my thesis advisor, Dr. Ashley Stewart-Tufescu. Participants will have the opportunity to review a summary of the final research findings once the analysis is complete. Participants can choose to receive this information (either by email or in print). Participants will have the opportunity to review a summary of the research findings once the analysis is complete. Results will not include any identifying information and will be brief while highlighting the key themes and findings of the study. Participants can expect to receive the summary of results by August 2026.

**Dissemination:** The data from the interviews will be used in the researcher's thesis. Direct quotes will be anonymized with any identifiers omitted before the final report is submitted. Findings will be reported in a thematic structure, with each theme being supported by participant-level interpretation. The results of the study will be shared through 1) the publication of a master's thesis; 2) journal publication; 3) a summarized report of the study be shared with Senior Administration Team so they can understand the impact of the cell phone ban on teachers. For safety, your information will still be kept on a UM-approved secure platform. We will do our best to keep your personal information safe. However, it is not possible to guarantee confidentiality. We will only share your personal information if the law requires us to.

**Withdrawing:** Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You can choose to do only the activities and/or answer only the questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the study for any reason until the data analysis begins. You will not be penalized in any way. Should you withdraw before data analysis begins, all the responses gathered will be destroyed. After this date, I will start analyzing the information, and withdrawals will no longer be possible. To withdraw, please contact Adrienne Schellenberg or thesis advisor, Dr. Ashley Stewart-Tufescu, at the phone number or email address above.

**Questions or Concerns:** This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research and Ethics Board. However, this does not mean that participation is risk-free. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, you may contact any members of the research team listed on the first page or the Office of Human Research Ethics at [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca) or (204) 474-7122.

**Consent:**

By signing this document, I agree that:

- I have read the above information or had it read to me.
- I have had the opportunity to ask and have had all my questions answered.
- I understand what is being asked of me.
- I will be taking part in a research study.
- I may freely stop or leave the research study activities at any time.
- I understand what the researchers will do with the information I give them.
- I do not waive my legal rights by participating in the study.

## Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information

Your personal information is being collected under the authority of *The University of Manitoba Act*. The University of Manitoba is committed to preserving your right to privacy. The information you provide will be used by the University to support our research. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* or *The Personal Health Information Act*. If you have any questions about the collection of personal information: Ph: 204-474-9462 or Email: [fippa@umanitoba.ca](mailto:fippa@umanitoba.ca)

The University of Manitoba wants you to know that the information you share with our researchers will only be used in the ways explained in this form and as Manitoba privacy laws allow. If you have questions, you can call 204-474-9462 or Email: [fippa@umanitoba.ca](mailto:fippa@umanitoba.ca).

Please review the following statements. For each statement, please check if you agree or do not agree.

|                                                                         |                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| I agree to participate in this study (first and second interview)       | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| I agree to be audio-recorded in this study (first and second interview) | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

---

Name of Participant

Participant's Signature

Date

### Summary of Results:

Please provide an email address below if you would like to be sent a summary of the study results and/or my individual results which will be made available by September, 2026.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The following questions (and suggested prompting questions) will guide participant interviews:

#### Background questions:

- When did you learn about the ban?
- How did you hear about the ban?
- What information/education did you receive about its implementation?
- Has your scope/role changed since the ban's implementation?
  - What does this look like? How does this feel?
- Do you feel there is a spectrum of adherence within your school staff to this ban?

#### 1. What are teachers' experiences teaching with the cell phone ban, and how has this impacted their teaching practices and well-being?

##### Prompts:

- What is it like to be at the forefront of implementing this ban?
- How has the cell phone ban influenced how you experience yourself in your role as a teacher?
- How do you experience changes in your emotional state, stress, or sense of ease while teaching since the ban?
- How do you experience classroom presence and focus during classroom lessons since the ban has been in effect? Is this different than before the ban?
- Do you have a hard time upholding the ban? What does this look like?
- Do you feel supported by your administration, and have they provided clear guidelines on this ban?

##### Well-being prompts

- How do you describe your day-to-day emotional experiences in the classroom following the cell phone ban?
- How do you experience changes in mental effort, attention, or stress during teaching since the implementation of the ban?
- How has the ban influenced how you experience yourself in their role as a teacher?

#### 2. What are teachers' perceptions of the impact the cell phone ban has had on their students' well-being (physical and mental health) and academic outcomes?

##### Prompts:

- Has your classroom environment changed since the ban?

- How do you describe students' day-to-day engagement in the classroom following the ban?
- How do you experience students' emotional states and behaviours in the classroom since the ban?
- Have you noticed academic shifts/changes in students' performance since the ban?
- Have you noticed any differences in their interactions with others?
- Do students seem less distracted?
- What do we do instead of an outright ban?
- What do we replace the ban with within the classroom?

## Appendix F

**Cash Honorarium Declaration**

I certify that I, \_\_\_\_\_  
Name

am receiving a Cash Honorarium in the amount of \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount

on \_\_\_\_\_ at/for the \_\_\_\_\_  
Date (Event)

Signature of the Recipient: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix G**

### **Mental Health Resources**

Employment Assistance Program (EAP) for Pembina Trails School Division Teaching Staff  
Kii Health Access code: AVA1022B 1-866-814-0018

Klinic Crisis Line (24/7)  
Phone: 204-786-8686 or 1-888-322-3019

Shared Health Adult Crisis Response Centre (for Adults who are experiencing mental health crisis)  
Phone: 204-940-1781

Suicide Crisis Helpline Call: 9-8-8 (toll-free, 24/7)

Aulneau Renewal Centre (provides therapeutic services to individuals, couples and families)  
Phone: 204-987-7090

Aurora Family Therapy (sliding scale therapy services)  
Phone: 204-786-9251

Family Dynamics (sliding scale therapy services)  
Phone: 204-947-1401

Mount Carmel Clinic (counselling support services)  
Phone: 204-582-2311

New Directions: Adults, Families & Children (virtual and phone counselling services)  
Phone: 204-786-7051  
Website: <https://newdirections.mb.ca/therapy-and-clinical>