Dear Students,

Welcome! I hope you have all enjoyed a wonderful summer! This letter represents the reflection and exploration of myself and a similarly minded group of teachers wishing to improve emotional and intellectual experiences in the classroom for our students. Technology offers countless benefits, but there are considerations for how to use it responsibly. This group of teachers has taken time to examine research and communicate about the impacts we have seen cell phones have in the classroom. I present this letter articulating some of our findings and our vision for this school year. Research is ongoing and we will continue to explore it. It is our aim to individually and jointly achieve excellence. Aristotle once commented that “[e]xcellence is an art won by training and habituation...We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.” Below you will find cited scholarly research and protocols for our class.

**More Easily Distracted**

Ophir, Eyal, Nass, Clifford, and Wagner, Anthony. (2009). “Cognitive control in media multitaskers.”

*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*. Volume 106, Number 37: 15583-15587.

* Heavy media multitaskers, even when not multitasking, are more easily distracted by irrelevant environmental stimuli.
  + - Meaning, that the more often you ask your brain to multitask, the less your brain is able to focus on one thing, like your homework. This reduces your ability to shut-out distractions and do your best work.

**Impairs Working Memory**

Uncapher, Melina, Thieu, Monica, and Wagner, Anthony. (2016). “Media multitasking and memory:

Differences in working memory and long-term memory.” *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*. 483-490, DOI: 10.3758/s13423-015-0907-3.

* Heavy media multitaskers (HMMs) exhibit lower working memory (WM) performance regardless of whether external distraction was present or absent.
  + Working memory is the agent of your brain in charge of taking in information, processing that information, then matching it up with what you know in your long-term memory.
    - If your working memory is compromised because it is worn out / altered from repeated multitasking, you limit your performance academically and socially! And that happens whether or not there are actual distractions around you.
    - Therefore, processing and applying new learning to new tasks becomes more difficult because your brain is not optimally processing and retaining information due to your distractibility.

**Mere Presence of Cell Phones Distracts Subjects**

Thornton, Bill, Faires, Alyson, Robbins, Maija and Rollins, Eric. (2014). “The Mere Presence of a Cell

Phone May be Distracting: Implications for Attention and Task Performance.” *Social Psychology*. 45. 479-488. 10.1027/1864-9335/a000216.

* The “mere presence’’ of a cell phone produced diminished attention and deficits in task-performance of subjects, specifically for tasks with greater attentional and cognitive demands.
  + Even having the phone on the desk face down, makes everyone hyper-aware of its presence and you become distracted wondering what you are “missing” on your phone or compare the frequency of your phone buzzing to the one on the desk.
  + Especially when you need to accomplish a task that is challenging and requires more attention, even just seeing a phone limits your best work!
  + “The mere presence of a cell phone is like the sound of our names. They are constantly calling to us, exerting a gravitational pull on our attention.” [Kristen Duke, Adrian Ward, Ayelet Gneezy, and Maarten Bos, *Harvard Business Review* (2018)](https://hbr.org/2018/03/having-your-smartphone-nearby-takes-a-toll-on-your-thinking)
    - Not only does a phone in your proximity diminish your academic awareness but it also may heighten your social anxiety. Early research on social-emotional impacts of technology use suggests they increase the weight of the pressure and anxiety you feel to have your self-worth connected to your “likes” and “streaks.”

Habitual use of various technologies appears to be altering how we shape and choose to interact with our worlds. Adam Gazzaley and Larry Rosen in their book, *The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World*, discuss how the rapid pace of texting, online task switching, email traffic, video and audio consumption, and the like may be decreasing the time associated with the onset of boredom. In other words, by consuming more and more streams of information and experiences we feel sufficiently stimulated. However, limitations of our cognitive bandwidth only allow for more cursory explorations of this information rather than deeper experiences and learning.

I experience similar struggles in my personal and professional life. I recognize this endeavor may be challenging for all of us but I hope to enhance our individual and collective potentials. The following protocols reflect what this group of concerned teachers believes are reasonable guidelines to foster productive and meaningful classroom environments for the upcoming year. Let us strive for excellence with the following habits!

**Cell Phone Protocols**

1. **Upon entering the classroom, silence your cell phones and place them in the hanging pouch organizer.**
2. **Periodically, we may use cell phones for specific classroom activities that will be clearly described at the time of those activities.**
3. **As a class, we will define times and procedures for accessing the phones to record assignments and access information.**