

School-Based Cell Phone Policy Implementation Review Year-End Report to the Board

**Board Policy 09.4261
Administrative Procedure 09.4261 AP.11**



**Internal Audit
July 21, 2026**

Recap: Summary of Midyear Results

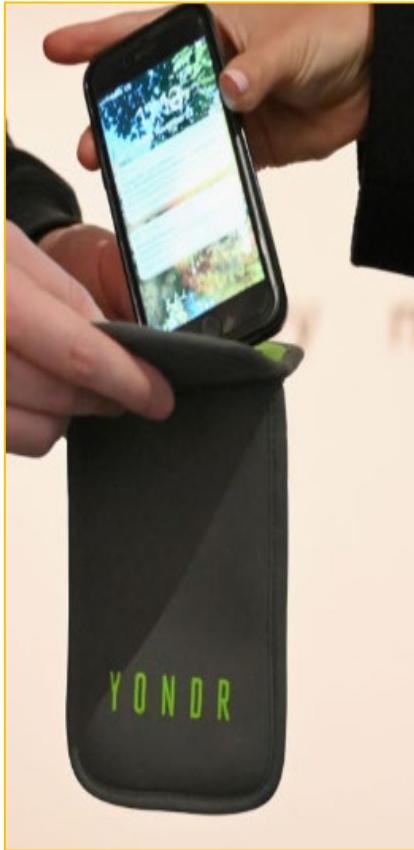
Midyear Focus: Assess the fidelity of implementation of school-based cell phone policies in accordance with Board Policy 09.4261 and Administrative Procedure 09.4261 AP.11. The review did **not** include an evaluation of policy effectiveness or outcomes.

- All (100%) schools adopted a written cell phone policy.
- Policies generally aligned with Board Policy and Administrative Procedure requirements.
- District guidance and templates supported school policy development.
- Schools generally demonstrated implementation through communication, operational procedures, and school-level enforcement practices.
- Schools generally implemented operational procedures to support and sustain their policies.

Purpose of the Year-End Review

- Administrative Procedure 09.4261 AP.11 directs the Internal Audit Department to conduct a midyear and year-end review of implementation and report results to the Board.
- Year-End Focus: Assess directional changes in student behavior, engagement, and culture/climate, as well as sustainability associated with school-based cell phone policies in accordance with Board Policy 09.4261 and Administrative Procedure 09.4261 AP.11.

Objectives of the Year-End Review



Objective 1:

Assess whether student behavior and discipline referral patterns reflect changes following the implementation of school-based cell phone policies.



Objective 2:

Assess whether indicators of student engagement and access to learning reflect directional changes following implementation.



Objective 3:

Assess whether school-level stakeholders perceive the cell phone policy as having had an effect on school culture and climate.



Objective 4:

Assess the extent to which schools have sustained implementation and identify challenges and emerging practices.

Scope and Methodology

Scope

The scope of this engagement was limited to school-level implementation activities occurring during school year 2026. This review examined directional changes in discipline referral, engagement, culture/climate, and sustainability data following districtwide implementation of the cell phone policy.

Methodology

- ❖ Discipline referral and violation/resolution data reviewed for FY24–FY26
- ❖ Library usage and digital engagement data reviewed districtwide
- ❖ Staff survey administered to Assistant Principals, Counselors, Mental Health Practitioners, and Safety Administrators
- ❖ Interviews conducted with school-based staff and Schools / Academics leadership

Summary of Year-end Results

Key findings from the first year of the school-based cell phone policy review

Discipline

Referral rates increased during the ban year, particularly phone-related referrals in secondary schools.

Engagement

Engagement indicators remained stable to positive.

Culture & Climate

Staff perceptions were consistently favorable across every surveyed role.

Enforcement

Enforcement consistency was rated favorably overall, though a meaningful minority of schools showed a rockier year-long trajectory.

Key Insight

There was a need to balance enforcing the policy and simultaneously reducing referrals.

Objective 1: Student Behavior and Discipline Referral Patterns

Assess whether student behavior and discipline referral patterns reflect changes following the implementation of school-based cell phone policies.

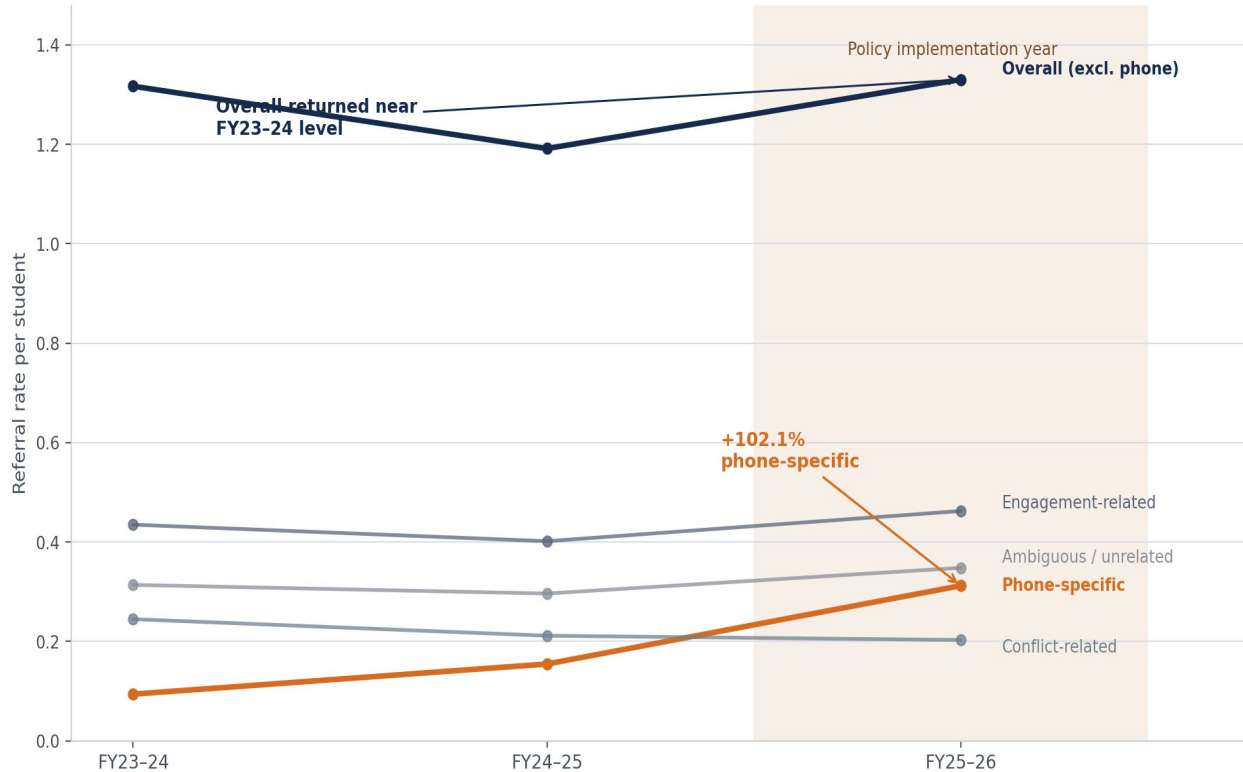
- ❖ Overall discipline referral rate (excluding phone-specific) declined 9.5% in 2024-25, then rose **11.7%** in 2025-26, the ban year, returning to roughly the 2023-24 level.
 - ❖ Phone-specific referrals rose sharply and as expected: combined referrals under the two phone-related violation codes more than doubled districtwide (**102.1%**) in the ban year.
 - This increase was concentrated in secondary schools. High school referrals rose **150.5%**, middle school **162.1%**, while elementary schools showed negligible activity.
-
- ❖ Staff perception was more favorable than referral data alone.

Interpretation: Findings are directional and do not establish that the cell phone policy caused changes in non-phone-specific discipline referrals

Objective 1: Referral Trends by Category

Districtwide referral rate per student, FY23–24 through FY25–26

Referral trends showed limited change outside phone-specific violations.



What the data shows

Overall referrals returned to approximately the FY23–24 level after declining in FY24–25.

Phone-specific referrals more than doubled in the implementation year (+102.1%).

Other categories remained relatively stable, with no clear, consistent directional shift corresponding with implementation.

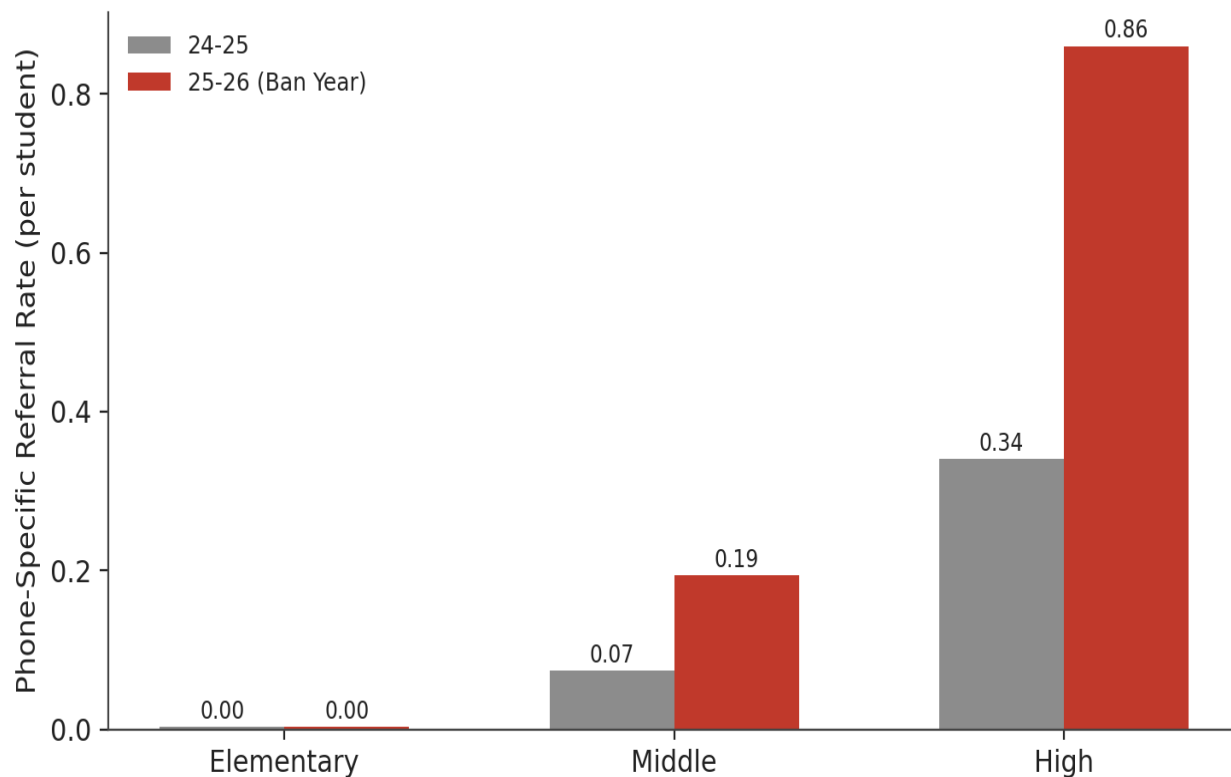
Interpretation

The chart supports a directional finding; it does not isolate the policy as the cause of non-phone-specific referral changes.

Note: Overall excludes phone-specific referrals. Rates are calculated using districtwide referral counts divided by total annual enrollment from the workbook.

Objective 1: Referral Trends

Phone-Specific Referral Rate by School Level



Source: JCPS referral records (FY2024–25 through FY2025–26). Phone-specific referral rates aggregated by school level.

Key Findings

Middle and High School

- Experienced a substantial increase.

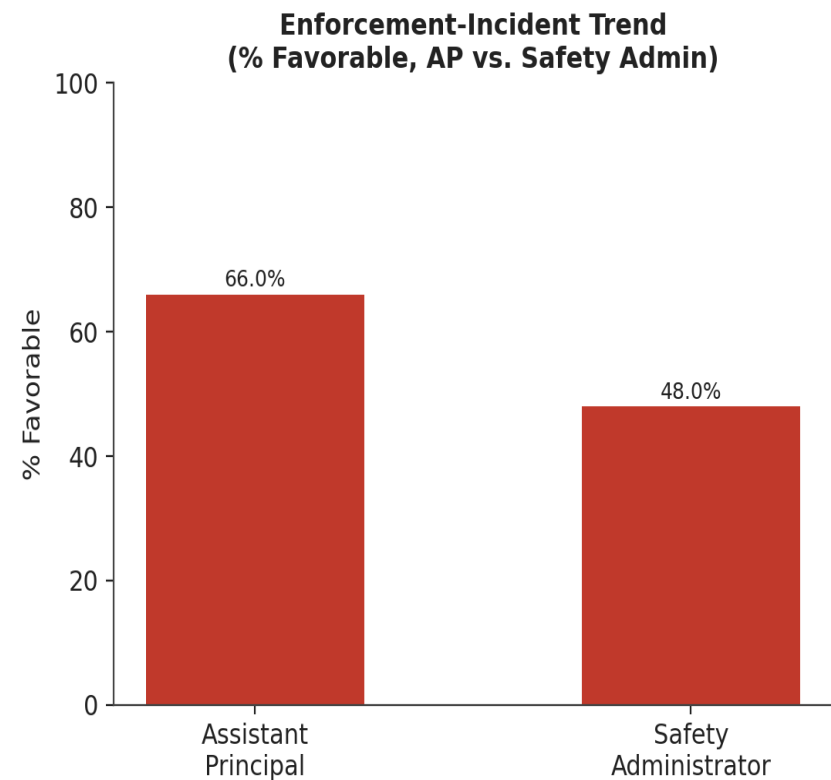
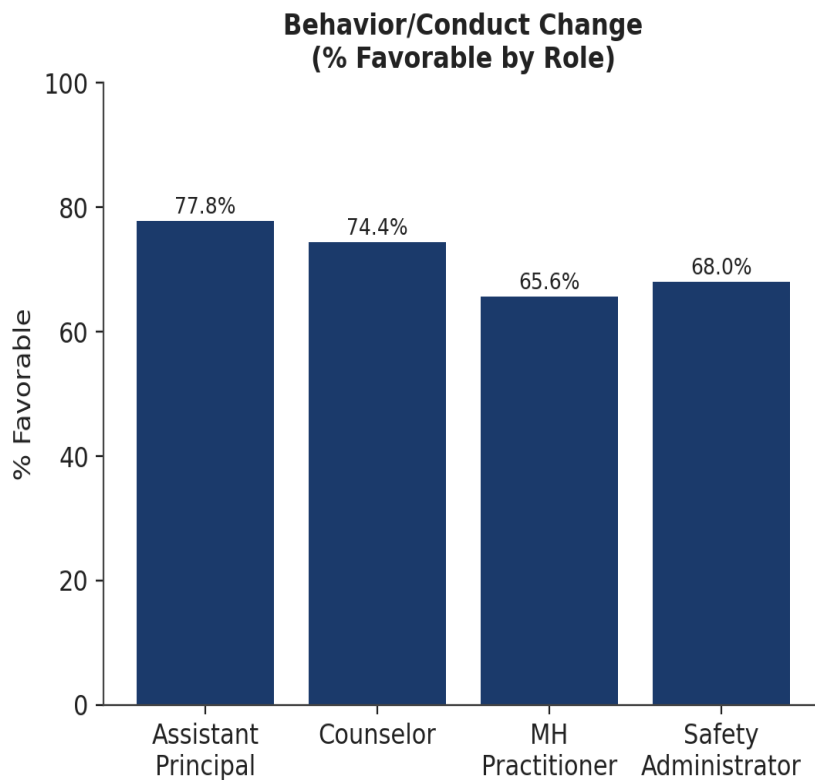
Elementary Schools

- Referral rates changed very little.
- Suggests phone-related discipline issues remained comparatively uncommon.

Objective 1: Staff Perception vs. Referral Data

Key Take Away: Across all four staff roles surveyed, a majority reported a favorable change in student behavior and conduct since the policy took effect.

Assistant Principals and Safety Administrators had a less positive response regarding the frequency of enforcement-related incidents than the general behavior question.



Objective 1: Opportunity – Goal Alignment

CONDITION: Schools are required to enforce the cell phone policy, while operating under a separate directive to reduce overall referral rates.

MANAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION: Reconcile the district-wide referral reduction target with the phone-specific violation codes, either by excluding these referrals from reduction-rate calculations or adjusting the target to reflect this new category of enforcement activity.

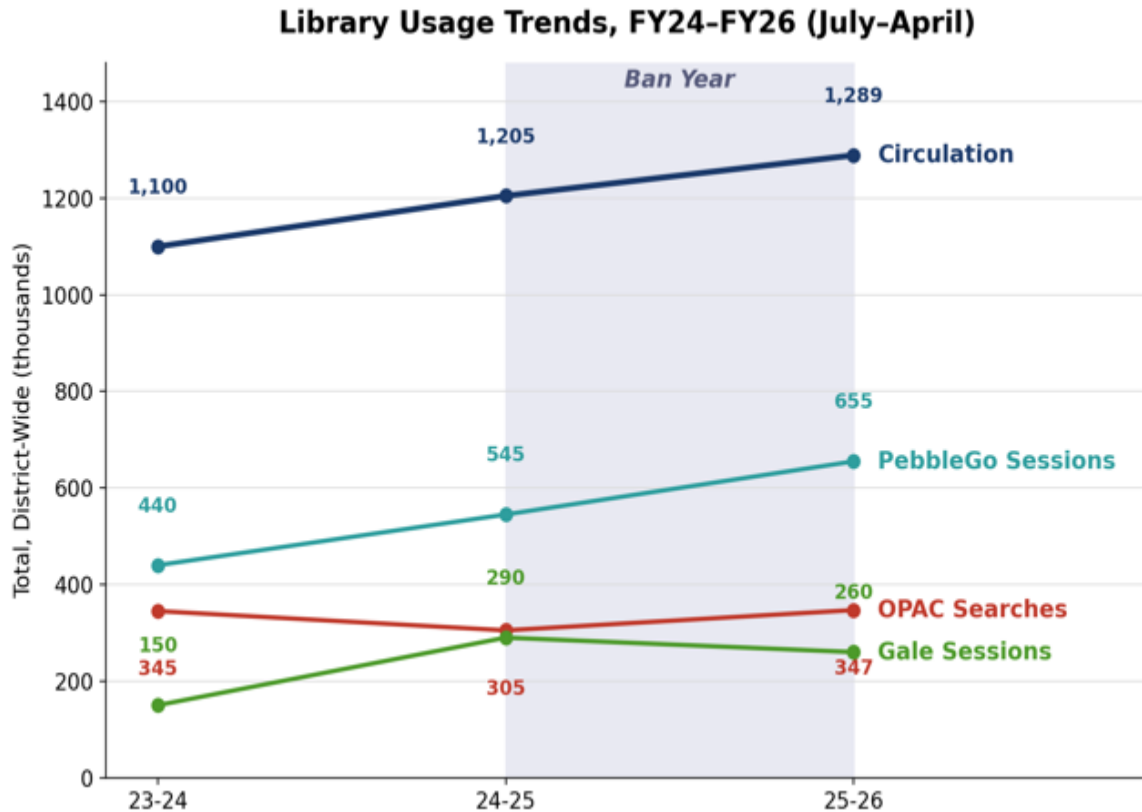
Objective 2: Student Engagement and Access to Learning

Assess whether indicators of student engagement and access to learning reflect directional changes following implementation.

- ❖ Library use was stable to positive districtwide: checkouts rose **7.0%**, online catalog searches rose 13.6% in the ban year.
- ❖ Staff surveys point the same direction: **70–84%** of staff across all four roles reported a favorable change in student focus and engagement.
- ❖ Schools that enforced the policy more heavily did not show stronger engagement gains, no measurable connection between enforcement intensity and library-use gains.

Interpretation: These findings should be read as directional, not as a final word on how the policy affected student engagement.

Objective 2: Engagement Trends



Key Take Away

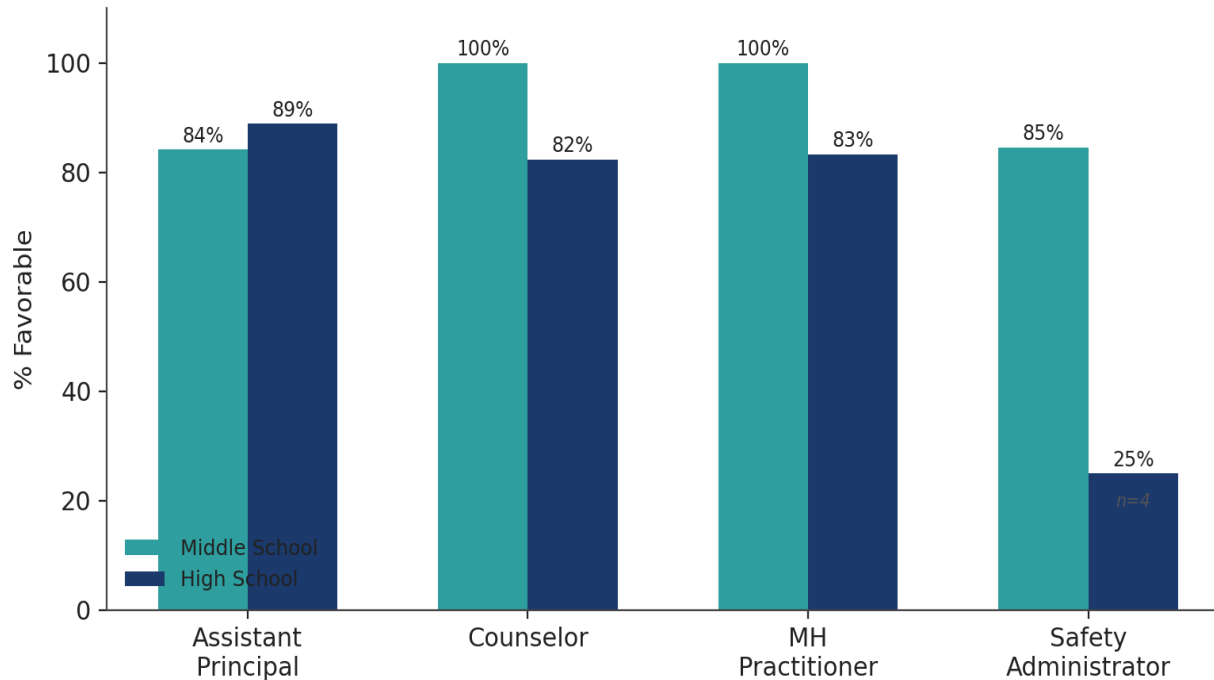
Library use was stable to positive.

Band Year (FY26): checkouts rose **7.0%** and online catalog searches rose **13.6%**, both continuing trends already underway before the policy took effect.

Digital research database use (Gale) dipped modestly after a large jump the year before.

Objective 2: A Middle School vs. High School

Focus/Engagement Change (Q3), % Favorable
by School Level and Survey Role



Key Take Away:

- Staff surveys point the other way: three of four roles felt more positive about student focus at the middle school level than the high school level. However, roles were generally favorable across school levels.
- The high-school subgroup is only n=4, too small to draw a reliable conclusion from.

Objective 2: What Staff Told Us: Engagement in Their Own Words

Increased peer socialization. Staff across roles and school levels described louder, more socially active cafeterias and courtyards: students talking, playing cards or games, and spending unstructured time interacting face-to-face rather than on phones.

Increased classroom engagement. Several Assistant Principals specifically linked the policy to noticeably higher student focus and engagement during instructional time, not just unstructured periods.

A recurring caveat. Many staff, across nearly every role, said social-media-driven conflict hasn't disappeared so much as shifted outside the school day. Drama that starts at home or overnight often still carries into the building the next morning.



“Students were interacting more in common areas and at lunch — some even bringing in old-school games or cards to play and interact with one another.”

— Counselor

Favorable focus/engagement ratings across all four survey roles: 70–84%

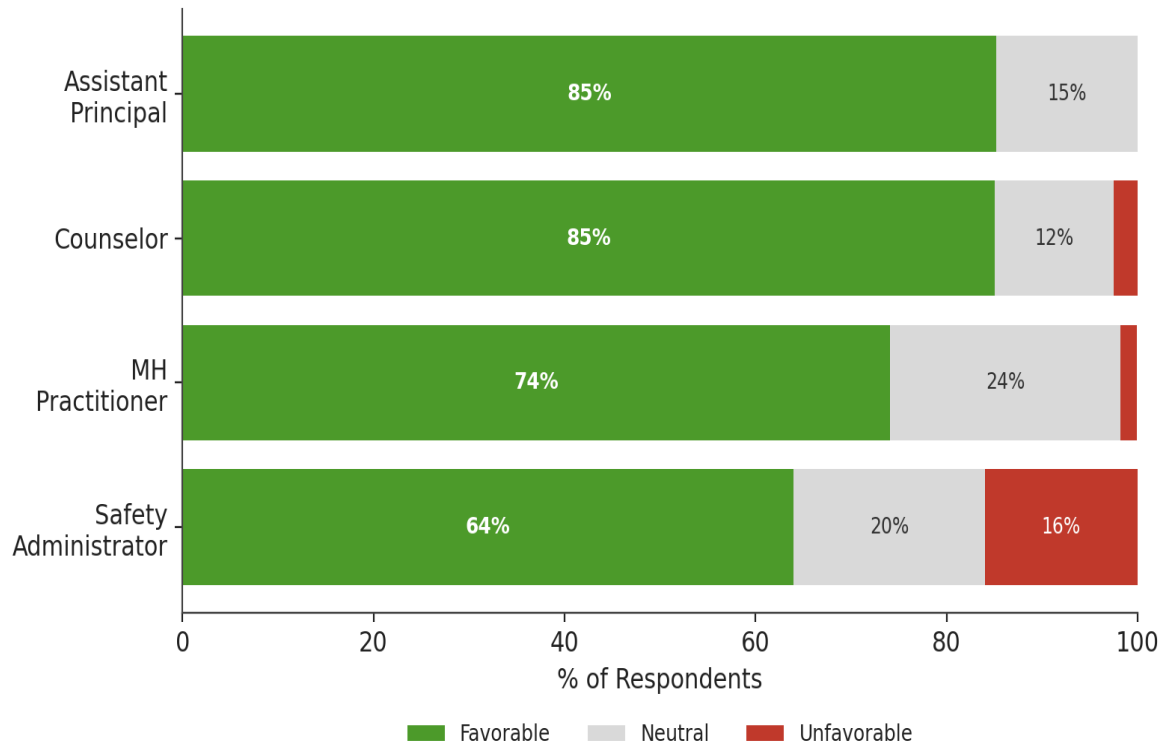
Objective 3: School Culture and Climate

Assess whether school-level stakeholders perceive the cell phone policy as having had an effect on school culture and climate.

- ❖ A majority of staff across all four roles reported a favorable effect on school culture and climate, ranging from 64% to 85% favorable, the most consistently positive finding of the review.
- ❖ Engagement, culture/climate perception does not divide meaningfully by school level.
- ❖ Consistent adult follow-through, not the specific enforcement tool or storage system used, is the central driver of whether the policy is experienced as fair and well governed.

Objective 3: Culture and Climate Perception

Culture/Climate Effect (Q1), by Role



Key Takeaway

Highly favorable across roles

Safety Administrators

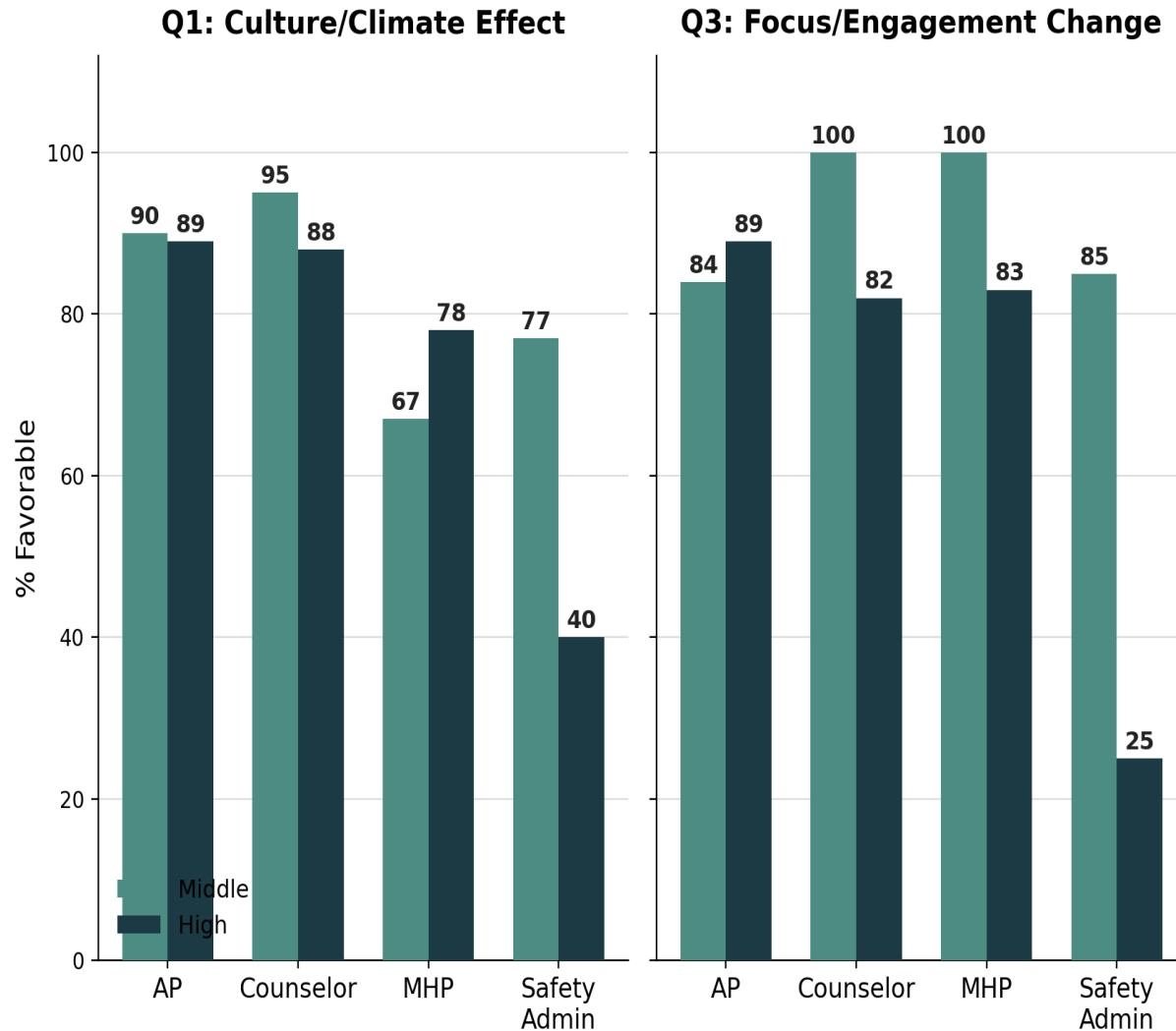
Lowest favorable rating (**64%**) and the only role with a substantial unfavorable share (**16%**, vs. **0–3%** elsewhere).

MH Practitioners

Their lower favorable score (**74%**) shifts mostly into neutral (**24%**), not unfavorable.

Objective 3: Culture and Climate Perception

Middle vs. High School: Most Roles Show Only Modest, Inconsistent Differences



Key Takeaway

Most roles: no real school-level pattern

APs, Counselors, and MH Practitioners show only modest gaps (roughly 1–18 points),

Safety Administrators: a caveat, not a conclusion

Their gap is much larger in both questions, but the high-school subgroup is only n=4, too small to draw a reliable conclusion from.

Objective 3: Opportunity - Mental Health

- ❖ Some staff described reduced student anxiety since the ban.
- ❖ Others, working directly in counseling or mental health roles, raised concerns that some students lost a phone-based coping mechanism.

Both perspectives come from staff with direct, relevant experience, and this review does not resolve which effect predominates.



MANAGEMENT

OPPORTUNITY: Consider a targeted follow-up with counseling and mental health staff on the coping-mechanism and executive-functioning concerns raised in this review, before drawing broader conclusions about the policy's mental health effects.

Objective 3: Opportunity - Full-Day vs. Carve-Out Enforcement

- ❖ Staff at some schools favor a uniform, no-exceptions approach as easier to enforce consistently.
- ❖ Others favor carve-outs for lunch periods and hallway transitions.

BOARD

OPPORTUNITY: Consider a formal cost-benefit assessment of the district's full-day enforcement approach against an instructional-time-only standard consistent with the underlying state law.

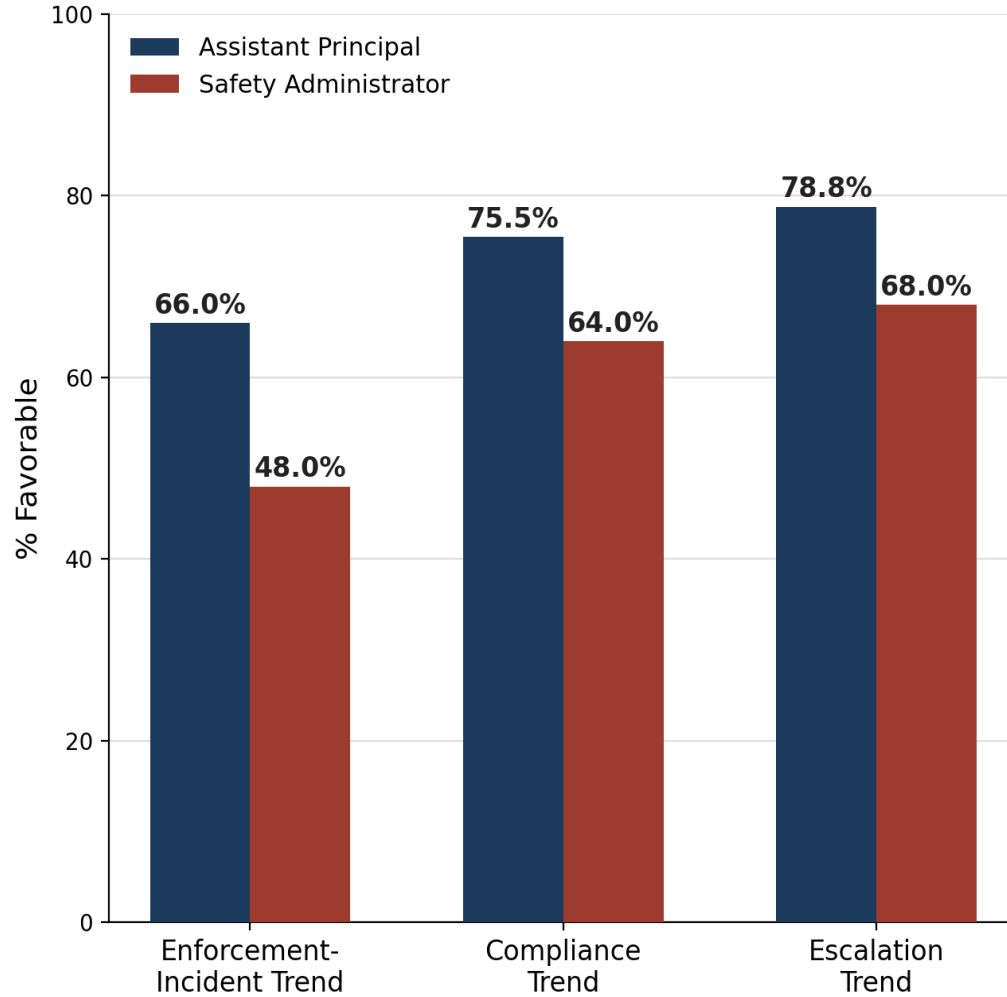
Objective 4: Sustainability of Implementation

Assess the extent to which schools have sustained implementation and identify challenges and emerging practices.

- ❖ Staff across every role rated enforcement consistency favorably, 80% to 91%, the tightest cross-role agreement of the entire engagement.
- ❖ More specific questions about the year's trajectory (asked of Assistant Principals and Safety Administrators) show declining favorability and a rockier picture than the topline rating suggests.

Objective 4: Enforcement Patterns Over the Year

How the Year Unfolded: AP vs. Safety Administrator



Key Takeaway

Enforcement-Incident Trend (Q6)

“How has the frequency of enforcement-related incidents (e.g., confiscations, student refusals to comply) changed over the course of this school year?”

AP 66.0% vs. Safety Admin 48.0%

Compliance Trend (Q7)

“Describe student compliance with the cell phone policy over the course of this school year?”

AP 75.5% vs. Safety Admin 64.0%

Escalation Trend (Q8)

“How has the frequency of behavioral escalations or altercations that appear connected to cell phone use, such as conflicts stemming from texting, social media, or phone-related interactions, changed?”

AP 78.8% vs. Safety Admin 68.0%

Objective 4: What Staff Told Us: Sustainability & Enforcement in Their Own Words

- ❖ **Where it held, it became routine.** Staff at consistently-enforced schools described the policy becoming self-sustaining, not just easy to launch.
- ❖ **But consistency didn't hold everywhere.** Several staff described a strong start giving way to real fatigue: adults becoming inconsistent as the year wore on, and students noticing and testing the gaps.
- ❖ **In some cases, enforcement broke down outright.** Some staff described teachers not enforcing the policy consistently, with students remaining noncompliant as a result.

A SUCCESS STORY

“Our policy was clear on the expectations and the consequence continuum - extremely effective in decreasing cell phone-related incidents and increasing student engagement.”

— Assistant Principal

A CAUTIONARY EXAMPLE

“APs stopped trying to enforce the policy before Christmas. Students openly walk the halls using their phones, defying directives. Until everyone buys in to enforce it, nothing will change.”

— Safety Administrator

Consistency favorability ranged **80–91%** across roles, a majority sustained it well, but not universally.

Objective 4: Opportunity - Device-Storage Equipment Gap

- ❖ A shortage of device-storage equipment was a widely documented barrier to sustained enforcement, raised independently at multiple schools.

MANAGEMENT

OPPORTUNITY: Evaluate options for closing the device-storage equipment gap, for example, a dedicated budget line, or clearer guidance on prioritizing this equipment within schools' existing discretionary funds.

Objective 4: Opportunity - Device Policy Coverage

CONDITION: Although Board Policy 09.4261 already covers tablets and other personal telecommunications devices by definition, storage equipment and enforcement routines at some schools were built primarily around phones, allowing students to substitute a tablet in practice.

MANAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION: Ensure device-storage equipment specifications and enforcement routines explicitly account for tablets and other covered devices and reinforce with schools that the existing policy already applies to the full range of devices defined in Board Policy 09.4261.

Objective 4: Opportunity - District-Wide Standardization

One recommendation was proposed independently by school-based staff and district leadership, without coordination: a single, consistent district-wide enforcement protocol. Common factors cited by schools with stronger, more durable outcomes:

- A storage device assigned to every student, individually tracked
- A structured, scheduled routine for collecting and returning devices
- A clear, consistently-applied escalating consequence structure
- Enforcement that accounts for all covered devices, not phones alone
- Defined staff responsibilities across every setting a student moves through
- Sustained, visible leadership engagement throughout the full school year

OPPORTUNITY: Pursue development of a single, consistent district-wide enforcement protocol to replace school-by-school discretion within minimum requirements.

BOARD/MANAGEMENT

Conclusion

- This presentation summarizes Internal Audit's year-end review of school-based cell phone policy implementation as required by Administrative Procedure 09.4261 AP.11.
- The picture is mixed: phone-specific enforcement rose sharply and as expected; engagement and culture/climate indicators were stable to favorable; sustainability succeeded at a majority of schools but was rockier at a meaningful minority.
- The need to balance the policy's enforcement requirements and the district's referral-reduction directive was corroborated at every level of the organization.

Questions

