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What 53,000 Students Reported About A.I., Screen Time, and What They Really Need from Adults



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STUDENT

INSIGHTS

Here's something that might surprise you: when we asked high schoolers how often they make phone calls, 69% said they do it weekly, matching the rate at which they text. Middle schoolers aren't far behind, with 57% making calls and 58% using FaceTime weekly.

In a world where we often worry kids have forgotten how to actually *talk* to each other, this is encouraging news. But it's just one of many insights from our sixth annual [Student Insights Report](#), which captures the voices of more than 53,000 students and one million data points across grades 3-12.

For six years now, we've been asking students directly about their experiences with social media and technology, and right now the landscape is shifting faster than ever. From navigating artificial intelligence and understanding deepfakes to adapting to new school cell phone policies, today's students are dealing with challenges that didn't exist even just a few years ago. The good news: **students are telling us exactly what they need.** And when we listen, we can better equip them to thrive.

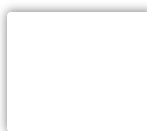
Students Want Clarity Around A.I.

As A.I. tools become more prevalent in education, students report confusion about how and when they are allowed to use it. **Nearly half of high schoolers say their school has some rules around A.I. use, but those rules aren't clear.**

Think about that from a student's perspective. A.I. is already part of their everyday lives, from sunup to sundown. They interact with A.I. when they unlock their phones using facial recognition, ask Siri for the weather, or receive a new music recommendation on Spotify, but when it comes to classroom use, they're unsure when it's okay to use it and when it crosses a line. This ambiguity creates stress and can lead to misuse or unintentional academic integrity issues.

What families can do:

- Ask your child how A.I. is discussed at school and whether expectations feel clear.
- Model positive use by showing what *is* allowed. For example, teach kids to use A.I. to double-check spelling and grammar or to create practice problems for an upcoming math test.



- Encourage reflection with questions like, “*How did this tool help you think or learn differently?*”

The goal isn’t to avoid A.I., but to help students use it thoughtfully, responsibly, and ethically.

Striking a Balance with Screen Time Matters to Kids, Too

Parents aren’t the only ones concerned about screen time. When we asked students about their biggest social media challenge, their answer was clear: **they spend too much time on it.**

This is an important reminder: kids are aware of the impact screens can have on their sleep, studies, and relationships. But balance doesn’t come from limits or lectures, it comes from habits, awareness, and support.

What families can do:

- **Model healthy use:** Kids notice when adults put phones away (or don’t), so model the same digital standards you set for your kids.
- **Create shared tech-free moments,** like meals or pre-bed routines, and stick to them together.
- **Normalize breaks:** A quick walk, stretch, or offline reset helps kids recognize when they need balance.

When balance becomes a shared family standard instead of a punishment, it’s more likely to last.

Students Want the “Why” Behind the Rules

Another theme shows up clearly in our data: students say tech rules exist at school, but communication around them is inconsistent, whether it’s using phones, social media, or A.I. during school.

In 2025, over 30 states required schools to have policies restricting student cell phone use. So we asked students how they feel about these policies:



- 24% feel very positive about their school's policy
- 45% feel pretty positive but wish there were some changes
- The rest have mixed or negative feelings

What does this tell us? Most students actually *appreciate* structure around phone use, and they want policies that make sense, are consistent, and allow for some flexibility.

What families can do:

- Review school policies together and talk through real-world examples.
- Encourage kids to explain the rules in their own words because teaching builds understanding.
- Firm up your own Family Social Standard Agreement and involve your kids in determining your family tech boundaries.

The bottom line

Technology will continue to evolve (faster than we may like!), but so will our ability to help students navigate it. When we listen to what students are telling us, provide clear guidance, and lock arms as parents and educators, we can empower them to use these ever-evolving tools in ways that fuel their health, happiness, and success. [Learn more about The Social Institute's resources for families here.](#)





Laura Tierney

Laura Tierney is Founder and CEO of The Social Institute, the leader in empowering students by understanding students.





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