



# Anchorage School District

## Begich Middle School

7440 Creekside Center Dr. • Anchorage, AK 99504 • 907-742-0500 • [www.asdk12.org/begich](http://www.asdk12.org/begich)

Principal Matthew Witthoeft • Assistant Principal Laura Carter • Assistant Principal Adrienne Grenier

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February 6th, 2025

Senator Bill Wielechowski  
1500 W. Benson Boulevard  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Dear Senator Wielechowski,

I am writing this letter to express my support for legislation surrounding the use of cellphones in schools. Sensible regulations around the use and access of cell phones in public schools will benefit both students and our communities.

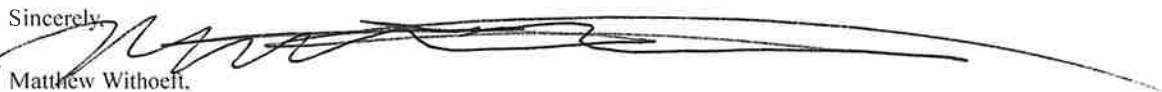
As principal of Begich middle school, I can speak firsthand to improvement in school safety, climate, and instruction by an enhanced cell phone policy implemented this school year. Starting with the 2024-2025 school year, Begich has instituted an "Off and away in your locker all day" policy. This simply means that students are required to keep their phones in their lockers for the duration of the Anchorage School District (ASD) middle school day that spans 9:30 - 4:00. For the last 5 months the feedback I have received from staff and the community has overwhelmingly been positive of this new school policy.

In our office, the number of incidents involving harassment of students and staff have been reduced. The personal and educational privacy of students has been better protected from online videos and posts sent from online social media accounts. The number of reports of vaping and suspected vaping in our bathrooms has been reduced, with a limited ability to arrange meet-ups in the bathroom using text and social media communication. Like Begich, many other ASD middle schools have worked with their communities to create an enhanced cell phone policy. The ASD school board has worked with district administration to draft brand new board policy that aligns with these efforts. Tentatively, these policies will be adopted by the board on February 18th, 2025.

Codifying limitations on unfettered cell phone access during the instructional day will signal legislative support for both educators in our schools and teen mental health. I am sure during this discussion, legislators will hear testimony and statistics about the mental health crises both in America, and Alaska. As leaders of this state, I believe that by creating a law or policy that takes the proverbial "fight/battle" over the device away from the educator, we can set an example that learning comes first. A school environment that is focused on learning, and is free from the distractions that ubiquitous cell phone access and use in the classroom create is what our community and staff have resoundingly communicated to me they desire.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I wish you well this legislative session.

Sincerely,

  
Matthew Witthoeft,  
Principal Begich Middle School  
Anchorage, Alaska

*Educating All Students for Success in Life*

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