# Taming Student Smartphones

**An eBook from EngageMode**
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**Smartphones are one of life's necessities.** Families need to reach each other. Students need to collaborate on schoolwork. Emergencies happen – from a flat tire to a tornado warning. Smartphones are the way we communicate, coordinate and handle life's interruptions.

**But smartphones are also a problem.** Smartphones in the classroom reduce student achievement – knocking down test scores by 5% in a recent study. Teachers say smartphones are one of their biggest discipline and engagement issues. Distracted driving is the single biggest safety risk for high-school students.

**Banning smartphones isn't an option.** The biggest school district in the USA tried banning smartphones a few years ago. It didn't work. Parents and students were loud and clear – they need the phones.

**How do you tame the smartphone?** How can you keep what's good about smartphones, and eliminate the downsides? And how do you take a positive approach that students, parents and teachers will buy into?

# The Problems are Real

**Smartphones in the classroom reduce achievement.** A recent study at Rutgers University showed that smartphones in the classroom led to at least a 5% reduction in test scores. Not only were students who used a smartphone affected, the students around them were also measurably affected. A study at the London School of Economics found a 6.41% reduction in end-of-year high-stakes test scores.

**Teachers consistently name smartphones as a top discipline and engagement issue.** It's also one of their least favorite things to deal with. Smartphone use is hidden, and you can't be an engaging teacher if you're spending your time looking for phones.

**Smartphones reduce studying productivity.** Studies at two universities had participants perform a timed task. Having the phone out on the desk resulted in a 26% drop in productivity as participants shifted into multi-tasking mode. *The phones didn't even alert during the study!*

**Smartphone use and driving is the top safety risk for teens.** Teens are distracted by the phone at twice the rate of older drivers, and car accidents are the number one cause of death for teens in the US.

# Why it Takes an App to Tame the Smartphone

**Paper smartphone policies don't work.**  They don't get buy-in from students – who see nothing to gain from following the policy.  Teachers get the unpleasant task of watching for smartphones and punishing students. Ultimately, students learn to hide their smartphone use and everyone pretends the problem doesn't exist.

**There's another way.**  What if you could measure smartphone use, right there on the phone?  And give points, badges and rewards to students who stay off the phone?  And get parents involved, so they can see the data?

**You can move to a positive approach.**  With an app to measure, you can move from surveillance and punishment, to gamification and rewards.  You can run challenges and competitions, and use positive peer pressure to change the culture.

**Parents are your biggest allies.**  They give out the smartphones, and pay the bill each month.  They want students to get the most out of classtime, and get their homework done on time.  They worry about students being safe on the roads.  They are happy to provide the coaching and accountability that students may need.

**You can't manage what you don't measure.**  That's why it takes an App to tame the smartphone.

# How Does the App Tame the Smartphone?

**EngageMode tames the smartphone by tracking the right things.**

**Tracking Screen Time:** EngageMode knows when students are at school based on the phone's location. It tracks the time periods the phone is locked. The longer the phone is locked – the more points they can earn. Graphical reports show, at a glance, how the phone was used during the school day.

**Call and Text Log:** EngageMode creates a log of phone calls and text messages while students are at school. The content of calls and texts is *not* tracked.

**Network Connection:** EngageMode tracks whether students are connected to the school's Wi-Fi (that you monitor and control) or to the cellular data network.

**Tracking Driving:** EngageMode tracks distracted driving – anytime students unlock the phone while in a moving vehicle. It also tracks things like speeding, hard braking, and aggressive maneuvering. The accelerometers and GPS/location sensors deliver this data. Students earn a driving score based on all these factors.

**Individual and Aggregate Reports:** EngageMode delivers individual reports for each student. We email home the unique URL, so parents can access a student's reports. EngageMode also delivers aggregate reports across groups or across the school.

# How to Get the App onto Students' Phones

**Incentives and Competition:**  Students need the App in order to earn points, badges and rewards for staying off the smartphone.  You can run challenges and competitions to drive positive peer pressure and watch students encourage each other to participate.

**Parents will Help:**  They want the data and accountability that the App provides.  They will work with their kids to get the App onto the phones and look at the data to see that the App stays running.

**Daily Check-ins:**  When the App detects that the student has arrived at school, it can remind students to open the app and "Check In", which earns points for them and can send a notification to their parents that they arrived safely at school.   Daily check-ins ensure that the App is installed, running, and tracking at the start of each day.

**Update Your Smartphone Policy.**  If students want to bring their smartphone on campus, it needs to have the App.  EngageMode is their ticket to having their smartphone at school.  We can help you explain the policy to parents and students.

**Stickers can help:**  We can mail out holographic EngageMode stickers to identify students who have EngageMode on their phones. It's much faster and easier to see if phones have the sticker on the outside, than make sure they have apps on the inside.

# Protecting Privacy

**EngageMode doesn't track anything private.**  It's not tracking what students say in their text messages or phone calls.   It's not tracking what websites they visit, or what they type into Facebook or SnapChat.

**Age Restrictions:**  EngageMode is designed for students 13 and up.  We don't accept participants who are under 13, for privacy and compliance reasons.

**Students are in Control:**  Students have buttons to Start Tracking and Stop Tracking within the App.  (Reports will show you and their parents whether they are using EngageMode every day as they're supposed to.)   Our approach is to put students in control, but send notifications to Start Tracking when students arrive at school, and when school hours begin.

**Reports have Privacy Built In:**  Parents need a specific link to see their student's report.  The URL link includes a passcode, so it can't be guessed from the student's name. Teachers and administrators have a UserID and Password to access students' reports and aggregate reports across the school.

# Conclusion

**Taming the Smartphone** is the biggest thing you can do this year for student achievement *and* student safety. And it's the biggest present you can give your teachers and the parents to send their kids to your school.

**Your teachers will cheer.** Teachers don't like to be on smartphone patrol. They don't like having to stop the lesson and take away someone's phone. They just want to see engaged faces in class as students pay attention to them instead of the smartphone. And that's how test scores and student achievement will improve.

**Parents will thank you.** Parents are worried about their teens driving safely. They want to know if their kids are paying attention in class. They want to know if their students are focused during study hall. Parents will thank you for giving them the data they need to help their kids be safe on the roads and focused in the classroom.

**Students will be happier.** There's a large body of research showing that kids who are glued to their smartphones are more isolated and less happy. They need that personal interaction and engagement – and school is the best place to start.

**Let's Talk!** We'd love to learn about your school and your unique needs.
Schedule your discovery call today!

# About EngageMode

EngageMode is a new App, designed to help employers and schools tame the smartphone.  It also includes a web portal with the tools and reports that Administrators and Teachers need to solve smartphone distraction.

EngageMode is created by Extracon Science LLC, a leading employee wellness technology company.  We have more than 10 years experience creating engaging, gamified wellness programs and apps for employers all across the USA.  Our clients range from the Fortune 500 and major health plans, down to smaller organizations with 200 or fewer employees.

# About the Author

**Jesse Hercules**

Jesse Hercules is the President of Extracon Science LLC, a leading employee wellness technology firm.  Mr. Hercules is a frequent speaker and writer within the industry, including speaking at the American Journal of Health Promotion's annual conference,  and the American Heart Association's annual Worksite Wellness Conference.