

School Health Advisory Committee January 15, 2025

Voting Members	Non-Voting Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ailani, Jessica (P) • Peterson, Jessica (A) • Behar, Dave (P) • Rogers Kirby, Mary (P) • Fernandez, Kelly (A) • Royal, Liz (A) • Goldel, Robert (P) • Shirley, Cara (P) • Greata, Kevin (P) • Silvia-Torma, Brenda (P) • Smith, Ann Manderfield (P) • Han, Luke (P) • Steiner, Jen (P) • Hochstrasser, Brian (A) • Yergin-Doniger, Ilana (P) • Hughes, Alyssa (A) • Ueng, Li-Hui (A) • McAvoy, Keena (P) • Mladenovic, Marija (A) • Moyer, Katie (P) • Nguyen, Tuc (P) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demers, Bethany (A) • Edmunds-Heard, Terri (A) • Lady, Robyn (A) • Reynolds, Carrie (P) • Skurpski, Lea (P) • Hanson, Saray (P)

Call to Order

Keena McAvoy called the meeting to order at 7:09 pm.

Public Comment: None

December Minutes: Ilana Yergin-Doniger indicated that she was present and was currently listed as being absent from the December meeting. Ilana made a motion to make this revision to the December minutes. Brenda Silvia- Torma seconded it. Unanimously approved. Ilana moved to approve the December minutes with this revision; Keena seconded the motion. Unanimously approved.

FCPS Updates: None

Committee Presentation

Provided by Tara Thiagarajan, Founder and Chief Scientist for Sapien Labs, School for Strong Minds. Sapien Labs is a non-profit located in Arlington. Dr. Thiagarajan presented “Shaping the Future of Mind Health” to the committee.

- **Mind Health:** The ability to navigate life’s challenges and function productively.

Six Components of Mind Health and Well-Being:

- **Mood and Outlook** - Your ability to manage and regulate your emotions effectively and to have a constructive or optimistic outlook for the future.
- **Adaptability/Resilience** - Your ability to shift your behavior and outlook in response to changing circumstances and cope with the challenges and setbacks that you encounter.
- **Social self:** How we see ourselves and relate to others.
- **Drive and motivation** - Your ability to work towards achieving your desired goals and to initiate, persevere, and complete activities in your daily life.
- **Cognition** - the action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses
- **Mind-Body Connection** - connection between person’s mental state and physical health

Sapien Labs tracks trend and explores the impact of modern life on the human brain and mind. They measure 47 aspects of mind health including:

- Adversities/Traumas
- Biochemistry
- Brain Physiology
- Demographics
- Diet
- Exercise/Sleep
- Faith
- Family
- Friendships
- Substance Use
- Tech Use

Sapien Labs Research Studies:

- **The Global Mind Project:** Largest and most comprehensive database on mind health and wellbeing in the world. Tracks trends across 1.8 million people from 70 countries. The study includes 17 languages. Their annual report is published in the [Mental State of the World Report \(March 2024\)](#). It *“provides trends and insights on the mental well-being of Internet-enabled populations around the globe.”*
- **[Centers for Human Brain and Mind](#):** Established in 2023, it is the largest brain bio-evaluation program in the world. The study’s authors are on the forefront of identifying trends, uncovering root causes of poor mind health, and quantifying relative contributions. The study provides real-time data insights to help schools, companies, healthcare, and governments prioritize and allocate resources to optimize mind health. Research has been published in a variety of publications. For more information, visit: <https://sapienlabs.org/research-and-reports/reports/>
- **Our Changing Mind Health:** The study results include:
 - 2008 Mood and Outlook by Age

- **Wellbeing:** People aged 18-21 are always doing the best; Mid-life 50-53 goes way down and then age 82-85 is better. The trend is called the U-shaped Scale of Happiness.
- 13- to 17-year-olds are getting worse...it's not just a US problem. It's all in the last 15 years. How can this profound shift take place in a short period of time.
- Male/Female gap is growing compared to older age groups. Females are doing worse than males.

Emerging Symptoms: Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ) 9, General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) 7; Fastest growing symptoms are not the usual ones. They include aggression towards others, hallucinations, anger, and suicidal thoughts. While sadness and anxiety are most prevalent, they are not the fastest-growing symptoms.

Report: Anger levels are rising in males and females. These levels are growing fast in young people. Sapien Labs is identifying potential causes including:

- **Chemical Environment:** Ultra-processed food, plastics, and plasticizers. While Red Dye #3 was recently banned, there are still many more chemicals that still need to be banned.
 - [Rapid Report | Ultra-processed food | Sapien Labs](#)
- **Techno Cultural-Environment:** Smartphones, sedentary lives, family relationships.
 - Obtaining a smartphone at a young age impacts student distress.
 - When a person obtains a smartphone by age 5-6, equates to a negative MHQ score (5 clinically relevant symptoms).
 - 80% of females will have mental health problems by age 18. Males are likely to have mental health problems, but not as much as females.
 - **Detached from reality, aggression, suicidal thoughts.** Sapien Labs did not capture data in 2008—their research began in 2019.
 - **Sleep:** Children who obtained a smartphone earlier in life were likelier to sleep worse as an adult.
 - **Family relationships** are diminished. This is more prevalent in young girls being sexually abused/cyberbullied who received a phone at an early age.

Additional Studies

1. **Maine Teen Summer Camp Study:** In the Summer 2024, the Maine Teen Camp (12-17 yr olds) was held. Each cabin housed 12 people for 3 weeks. Researchers looked at how things changed from before the camp to after the camp. They found that the environment changed campers to be more social. Researchers found that behaviors can be rewired and changed during a short period of time. The study authors hoped that if schools can change their environments, students may benefit (no phones or other home-provided tech use during the school day).

Other Insights from the Maine Teen Summer Camp Study:

- **Sleep and Exercise:** During camp, kids were getting more exercise and sleeping better than before camp. Campers' sense of belonging was better at camp than at school. People found it easier to make friends. Larger schools have difficulty in building a sense of belonging.
- **Being Tech-Free:** 56% enjoyed not having their phones. Six percent of campers struggled with not having their phones.
- **Camp is expensive,** so kids who were involved in this camp likely from families with higher socioeconomic factors than the average US public school kid.
- **Participation was optional:** Campers agreed to participate. This agreement may have impacted their results.

- **Lower pre-camp Mental Health Quotient (MHQ) scores:** Campers had large score improvement! The environment can be very impactful.
- **Pre-score/Post-Score Differences:** Cognition, adaptability and resilience, mind-body connection all improved. In addition, so did focus, concentration, sleep quality, less restlessness/hyperactivity, fear, anxiety, and coping with life better.

Social Cognition with Electroencephalogram (EEG):

- **Social Self:** This term is defined as how we can relate with others. People are lonely and have a difficult time connecting with others. Massive decline of people with friends who you can count on...more than half will say they have nobody.
- Sapien Labs thinks that the **students are not experiencing** social learning/tone of voice, touch, group dynamics. Students must do the work to improve in these areas. They spend 5-6 hours a day online. Online connections do **not help** students with developing necessary social skills.
- **Social learning:** Opportunities for social skill development—in hallways, playing games, recess, typical group dynamics (i.e., who goes first/taking turns). People take for granted that these skills are innately understood. But they need to be developed with an actual experience.

Task Used for hyper-scanning EEG analysis: Each camper first looks at scenery and then looks at the faces on the camera. The camper then looks at people's faces.

- **RESULTS:** Looking at the face =brain to brain interaction helps study participants to connect physiologically with a person.

2. **Schools for Strong Minds:** They worked with schools and the evaluation was done after the phones were removed. They found that implementation has an issue. 15% of the middle school students are using phones in class, but the school says there aren't any phones.

Goals: *To find ways to solve the deforestation at the top to stop the avalanche. How do we stop the avalanche from occurring (prevention versus having to treat students for health issues). This concept is what prevention is all about.*

The study authors conduct an assessment on the same day. Students receive their reported results. It's anonymous and at the end, the student gets a personalized report and a list of support networks. If the students are eating a lot of processed foods, that might explain why they are experiencing certain symptoms. The schools receive aggregated information. Each school is different and is dealing with different issues. The schools can identify what the major factors are for their students and determine where they should focus their efforts. Sapien Labs is starting to partner with other groups including:

- **Teachers:** Schools have wanted to understand teachers and how their "mind health" is. In general, teachers seem to be doing well.
3. **Eat Real:** Schools can add healthy food options, inform their 5-year strategic plan, measure the impact of a phone ban, educate students on mental health and well-being, and help to understand their teachers' mind health. Schools are trying to figure out what works.

Committee Discussion About Presentation

Jenn Steiner: What about tablets at early ages? Is there any data about tablet use? They do, it's similar but not as strong. If you have internet access—that is the key.

1. Maine Teen Camp: Are the students being followed up with after the kids return to their regular lives? They want to, but they are hoping to repeat ...have a larger number of students.
2. Two communities Strong Mind: There wasn't a touch to parents, adults in the room. Parents don't recognize that the parents are addicted to the technology too. They are working with JHU to build a package for both schools and parents.

****Cara Shirley:** Asked if the Gabb phone makes a difference. A few restricted apps instead?

SMART phones are portable and have internet access. Implementation of the cell phone policies is difficult.

Keena: Arlington Public Schools implemented a policy bell to bell for all grade levels, but they can check their phone at a very specific time and location in the school. (not during lunch and passing).

What are the consequences? In India, no one brings a phone to school. The principal says that he takes the phone away from the kids....and not return the phones until the end of the school year.

Keena: Orange County school in Florida has an intense policy where staff goes around on golf carts and confiscates phones. It takes a lot of effort to make it work.

Jennifer wonders if the "compulsion" looks like addiction when schools make these policy changes. Are we pairing our consequences with support—if you are addicted to anything, you are not coping well. Kids are more resilient. They are talking more with each other...

Ilana: School has Yonder pouches—this year they cannot have their phones.... As a result, students play outside at recess rather than looking at their phones. When phones are removed from the environment, students interact with each other.

Dr. Thiagarajan: When kids don't get a phone by 14, they are excluded. If there is a structured way to get kids to be connected, that is helpful.

Collaborate opportunities are welcomed by Sapien Labs.

Dr. Thiagarajan's presentation and discussion concluded at 8:10 pm.

Committee Discussion

Robert Goldel: Student Experience Survey. We can obtain answers from 6th graders but it's not a lot of information. And students are not asked about sleep. Would like to get better data for 6th graders about Youth Risk Survey.

Are there disparities between different schools? Get further analytics for tech use, sleep, and mental health. Questions are being asked for 8, 10, 12th graders.

Lea said that there is a link or SHAC can also forward questions to Lea.

Ilana: Reminder to everyone that the experience survey questions about technology are leading and do not allow students to answer in a negative way.

To Do:

- Keena will collect the questions from SHAC committee members and forward it to ORSI. SHAC Committee members will forward questions to Keena.

- Keena reminded SHAC Committee that during SHAC meetings, members will turn their name tents vertically to ask questions,

Cell Phone Policy Discussion:

- Dr. Tuc Nguyen asked if pilot data will be given to SHAC. Keena agreed that we do need to get data from them. There is a presentation that will be given to Dr. Michelle Reid on March 1, 2025. Keena is trying to confirm that and will reach out to the school board clerk.
- Keena shared a letter written by Annette Anderson, Deputy Director for Safe and Healthy Schools
- Katie Moyer and Keena drafted a letter to the school boards.
- Cara shares concern from Fairfax County Council of Parent Teachers Association (FCCPTA) constituents about Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and 504s and they would be socially outed if they need to use their phone.
- Kevin Greata. We have other ways to get in touch with people. There are high school events in the evening...everyone is using their cell phone all the time...In addition to the IEPs, and you have these technical advances to use. We're transitioning students to full independence. How do we balance supporting their social interactions and yet prepare them for the life after graduation. Parental controls only allow students to have access for a certain period. There is nothing that says that you can have 10 hours a week—to help students develop self-regulation. A part of high school is communicating responsibly. Questions: We need to have infrastructure in place.
- **Ilana:** responding to Kevin: To help their kids learn to self-regulate technology, our family friend gives their kids a certain number of poker chips per week. They turn the chips in for screen time. It's up to the kids whether they use the chips all at once or throughout the week, so the point is to teach them to self-regulate their technology use.
- **Jennifer:** Certain infrastructures are gone (payphones) but just because they are, it doesn't mean that it must be. We have social media, and we use it to communicate with kids. Create new infrastructure...put signs up instead of using technology. Some of these places (social media) are not supposed to be on social media. Teach people not to be dependent on social media.
- **Brain Development periods:** 0-3 and prepubescent times are incredibly important...Maybe we suggest dumb phones instead.
- **Cara:** Many parents are not like the rest of us—they do not have any idea as to what their kids are doing on their phones. We can share information with them about neuroscience, but they are just trying to survive. We don't have parent buy-in. Making recommendations—who must do the enforcement in the schools? If we recommend that they take the phones...that causes confrontation. teachers are struggling.... some students will attack their teachers if the phone is taken away.
- We need to recognize the communities and understand their concerns.
- **Luke Han:** An outright ban could be potentially dangerous...if an addict tried to stop, they are going to use the phone the rest of the day, outside of school.
- **Brenda:** Having a student who is addicted to their phone is not just impacting the teacher, but also the students—it can be scary to see a person get angry and scream.

- **Dr. Nguyen:** Children need to learn how to do tasks to help them be adults. Taking cell phones away is not the answer, it needs to be teaching them how to use it.
- Put them on a graduated schedule for using their phone (9th and 10th are one group, 11th and 12th can drive a car and they should be able to have access to their phone). Give consequences (take phone away and parents need to come and pick it up). It shouldn't be a blanket ban for the entire county. Change is hard...we should go slow, tweak it and adjust.
- **Jen:** Cell phone use for phone use or SMART phone use. Would “dumb” phones be banned as well?
- **Dave Behar:** K-6 Cell phone banned...no cell phones. 7th/8th grade learn about cell phones—and how your cell phone is addictive. Seeing a kid scream because they can't have their phone is upsetting. Cell phone is vital use of technology. Teenage years is when we support teens growing into adults. Perhaps help them to have gradual use.
- **Robert Goldel:** If we're compressing their tech use into a few hours (after school), will that negatively impact their ability and interest in completing homework?
- Can we get those questions answered? **Kevin G.** said he will research the student and parent voice as to these types of questions.
- What about consequences, where you get the phone back at the end of the period, end of the day, return the phone to the office for a month...most students are compliant after one infraction. The number of students who are non-compliant are less than 1%.
- **Katie:** We want to support Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). That is better for the students. If we don't want to go as far as the complete ban, that's okay. We need data about enforcement/discipline. Is it easier for kids to enforce the rule for the Yonder pouch? Concern that Bell-to-Bell ban is not wanted.
- **Keena:** The bell-to-bell policy is in 22 districts.
- **Ilana:** Everyone has different work cultures...not checking phone during breaks because there needs to be time for connecting with others.
- **Brenda's Follow-up questions:** Do all high schools have the same enforcement policy? Need to be mindful that whatever the rules are, teachers and staff should follow...it's not fair and may cause frustration.

Motion to adjourn: Ann Manderfield Smith made a motion to dismiss, and Jennifer Steiner seconded the motion. All approved.

Meeting adjourned: 9:07 pm

Meeting Notes: Taken by Brenda M. Silvia-Torma