

Administrators consider advisery technology ban

Students critical of proposed device ban for next year

by Elizabeth Johnson

For the upcoming 2018-2019 school year, it is possible that adviseries will see a no-technology policy instituted.

The administration is actively discussing a ban on personal device usage in advisery.

"We are seriously considering it," said Assistant Principal for Student Services Scott Williams.

Currently, the use of technology by students at the Winnetka Campus in advisery is up to the adviser, similar to any classroom.

Some adviseries have unlimited use of smartphones, iPads, or laptops, but other advisers control the amount of time advisees spend on their devices.

Before making any decisions, said Williams, "We need to finalize some of our thoughts about it and communicate with advisers."

One motivation for the change is to increase socialization between students with their peers and adviser.

"Adviser room is a place that can really facilitate lots of face-to-face conversations and connecting between students, not only with each other, but with their adviser,"



J. Keenan, T. Kamin, A. Kuhn, N. Lievano and N. Thammavijitdej share a laugh over a snapchat during advisery | Staff

said Junior Adviser Chair Patricia Sheridan.

"This is an opportunity for us to think about what amount of time is spent on phones in the building and what time is spent learning how to connect with other kids and socializing," she said.

A no-technology policy could be the answer to increasing socialization within adviseries. The administration is also considering the change to help students' mental health and wellness.

According to Sheridan, there is research showing that technology, especially social media, is having an impact on students' feelings of happiness and connectedness to

others.

"There are a lot of studies to suggest that empathy is lost when people are on their screens because you are not really connecting and not understanding how people are interacting around you," said Sheridan.

By limiting the use of technology in advisery, there is a chance students will be impacted in a positive way.

However, some students are concerned about the possibility of a no-technology policy. Many use advisery time to finish homework, which often requires the use of iPads and laptops.

Junior Mia Papoutsis said she

uses her technology for homework most mornings.

"If we couldn't use technology, it would make me mad because I finish up homework in advisery," Ssid Papoutsis. "If the school gives us iPads, we should be able to use them during our free time—like during advisery."

Most students identified that the motivation behind a no-technology policy would be to increase communication among advisees. However, many of them felt that the policy would not help.

"By the time we get to this campus, we've played all the name games we need to play. Everyone

knows each other. Taking away technology won't change much in my opinion," said Papoutsis.

Junior Pallavi Simhambhatla spoke to the potential benefits to students' mental health if they cannot access their technology.

"Social media can change my mood for the worse. But I don't think the 25 minutes of advisery without it is going to make a difference," she said. "If students are going to use social media, they're going to use social media. No one is going to suddenly become happier because they can't see it during advisery."

Advisers are torn when it comes to the policy. Many see the rationale for it, but are unsure how it will change the atmosphere of advisery.

"I can understand why they want to do it, but I think it will be a hard translation. I think grandfathering it in could make sense. But for me as a senior adviser it would be really hard to implement," said KW teacher and adviser Lucy Riner.

Other advisers feel that a policy limiting devices is what is needed.

"I think by setting the standard to not have technology [in advisery] will allow teachers to let students use technology occasionally. We need to start from a total ban and come back from there. This is a step in the right direction," said Spanish teacher and adviser Josh Sollie.

Testing accommodations four times national average

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"I can usually detect it because they say the words that are in textbooks and on websites. It stems from the academic pressure and stresses put on them at New Trier. There are other psychiatrists in the area that still prescribe medication to these adolescents and it has become a big problem in our community," said Grosrenaud.

A diagnosis can be tempting for many, as extended time on the ACT could vastly improve a score, giving the student a better opportunity at gaining acceptance into prestigious universities.

But this might not be just a "New Trier thing."

A California audit in 2000 revealed that students receiving accommodations in the state were disproportionately white and affluent even though kids growing up in adverse circumstances are more likely to have a disability like ADHD, according to the CDC.

Even so, New Trier still has a higher special education population than schools located in impoverished areas. 82 percent of students at Senn High School in Chicago qualified for free or reduced lunch in 2016, but only 6 percent were enrolled in special education.

The opposite happens at New Trier and other similar schools, where just 4 percent of students qualified for reduced lunch. Even neighboring Evanston saw a smaller number of students in special education programs, despite 43 percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch.

Journalist Alan Schwarz, who authored the book "ADHD Nation," which reveals the widespread misdiagnosis of ADHD, sees this same disparity.

"Parents in communities like New Trier—and mine, I grew up in

Westchester County, New York -- will do anything to get their kids into the best colleges, and if that means an extra hour on the SATs for a questionable (if not downright bogus) diagnosis, then so be it."

There's no getting around the fact that New Trier and its students gain an advantage over other less advantaged high schools. In 2012, there were several Chicago Public Schools that saw no students receive accommodations.

According to Linda Knier, New Trier Academic Services Director, the school works to support students who need it, based on evidence that shows they have special needs that need to be met.

"At New Trier, we are the facilitators, not the judges. It is the job of psychiatrists and other doctors to properly diagnose disorders such as ADHD, and if they are misdiagnosing them, that's their fault, not ours," she said.

Many students have been adamant about the unfair advantage others gain from receiving extended time, especially on an such a time-constrained test like the ACT.

A high percentage of kids with accommodations aren't trying just to get their scores above the college readiness benchmark of 20, many of these students aim for scores in the 30s and compete with other students for acceptance into some of the more prestigious universities in the country.

"I watched my sister struggle with an IEP for years so it really makes me mad when I look over my shoulder and see kids in my honors classes getting extra time on tests and getting better grades than I do," said junior Lilly Frentzel. "I even know someone who got extended time on the ACT for her birthday. It's ridiculous and infuriating for me. Who is gonna get extended time at his or her job?"

Some accommodation recipients even claim that their extended time gives them a better opportunity to score higher on the test. The science section on the ACT, which asks 40 questions in 35 minutes, can be much easier for students who have more time to read through the passages.

"The science section is supposed to be extremely time constrained, but with my extra time, I can read through the passage a few times and gain a full understanding," said an anonymous student. "There isn't any reason I should get a question wrong."

Knier claims New Trier's superior scores are due primarily to the intelligence and education of our student body, not by the number of students receiving accommodations.

"It's really the talent pool and the education that students receive here at New Trier. Students here are surprised at how college-ready they are when they go to college. That's what I attribute our high scores to," she said.

Some, like Knier, claim that the number of students with accommodations is irrelevant because standardized tests aren't meant to be equal, they are meant to be equitable.

While equality is just making sure that everyone is treated the exact same way, "equity" makes sure that every student gets what they need to be successful.

Colleges say they want to see how students complete assignments under timed conditions, or else they wouldn't consider the test in the application process. When perhaps a quarter of the grade gets accommodations, some claim it can actually be inequitable for those who have to prove their skills to the same schools under standard conditions.

"The disparity between us and other high schools is alarming," said an anonymous student. "I think it might be unfair for kids without extended time just because the kids with it could skew the results of people taking

it normally. If accommodations are going to be allowed, then the colleges should know when takers receive them."

But that can't happen. According to the American Disabilities Act (ADA), college applicants don't have to release information about a learning disability if they don't want to, so when someone takes a test with an accommodation, the colleges have no idea.

Certain professors and doctors, some more controversial than others, even debate whether any accommodations are appropriate for something claiming to be standard. Boston University professor Ari Trachtenberg said that since accommodations have no set criteria, the entire process loses its credibility.

"Accommodations must be specific to circumstances, and transparently published for specific disabilities, just like grading rubrics and curves," he said. "This dilutes the integrity of the academic process without providing a definable benefit, either to those students who are disabled, or to those who are not."

Northwestern research and clinical neuropsychologist Elena Labkovsky Ph.D. questions whether a 4-hour test is actually appropriate to test the college readiness of high school students.

"There is a formula suggesting that attention span when actively paying attention under cognitive load, like sitting in class or doing homework, can be calculated as about 3-5 minutes for each year of a person's age."

Thus, for a 17-year-old high school student, the length of class, homework, or a test should be around 51-85 mins.

"So, you can see that psycho-physiologically defined testing

time for a high school test-taker is supposed to be much shorter than 4 hours. After about 2-2.5 hours the productivity drops drastically as it becomes more and more difficult to stay focused, level of stress increases, and fatigue accumulates," said Labrovsky

While standardized tests clearly have their flaws, students in affluent high school communities, like New Trier, have better resources and opportunities to receive proper medical and educational treatment of learning disabilities, a privilege they evidently have taken advantage of, and at times abused.

In the song "So Appalled," rapper Jay-Z asks, "Would you rather be underpaid or overrated?" This may not seem like a complicated question, taking more money over losing some integrity may be the easy answer for most. But it can get complicated.

Each year New Trier sends hundreds more accommodation requests to testing companies than most other high schools in the state.

For some this begs the question if it is fair that New Trier has higher test scores and receives a higher ranking than schools with lower test scores and less accommodations. Which leads to the complication: what does it mean to achieve such high test scores if a significantly higher than average percentage of students feel the need to push for an ADHD diagnosis to get them?

"There are just too many variables to consider when making special accommodations for students to make the test truly equitable," said Knier. "The best thing would be to give an option for students with special needs to get exempt from the mandatory assessment. Right now we are just here for the students. If they have evidence that they need an accommodation, we will try to the best of our ability to get that for them."