

# Akron Beacon Journal

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## EDUCATION

# Akron Public Schools to expand use of Yondr bags to lock up students' cellphones

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Akron Public Schools is taking Yondr bags districtwide at the secondary level.

The school board on Monday voted on a three-year lease of more than 10,000 cellphone locking bags from Yondr Inc. to keep students in 13 middle and high schools away from their phones during the day starting this fall.

Three schools, Ellet, East and Buchtel community learning centers, piloted the bags for the last few months of last school year with the goal of making schools safer and students more engaged in the classroom.

The following schools will now have Yondr bags:

Buchtel CLC

East CLC

Hyre CLC

Innes CLC

Jennings CLC

Litchfield CLC

Miller South School for the Visual and Performing Arts

National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM Middle School

National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM High School

Ellet CLC

Firestone CLC

Garfield CLC

North High School

Most of the schools on the list serve grades six and above, but Miller South starts at grade four, and all students in the school will have their phones locked, if they have them, APS Chief Financial Officer Steve Thompson said. Thompson was previously the chief of operations and still oversees facilities. The I Promise School, which has both elementary and middle school students, is not yet slated to have Yondr bags.

Each student in the 13 schools will have their own pouch that their cellphone must go into when they enter the building if they bring one to school. When they leave the building for the day, students will walk past a magnetic unlocking station near the front door and the pouch will open with a quick tap.

The district will make exceptions for students with medical issues, who will receive a Yondr bag that closes with Velcro and does not lock, and schools have worked with students who have mental health concerns that are helped by being able to call home during the day.

The cost will be \$180,636 the first year and \$141,021 for the following two school years. The first year will use federal stimulus dollars and an Ohio School Safety Grant, but the second and third year spending will come from the district's general fund.

"In our view, administratively, this is an investment worth making moving forward," Thompson said. "We just feel like the returns from our pilot suggest that it is working and making a difference."

## **Teachers will get security badges in more Akron schools**

The district is also expanding its use of security badges for teachers that have an emergency button that immediately notifies central office staff of an issue and the location. The badges, from security company Centegix, were piloted at Garfield CLC and Innes CLC, a high school and middle school, last year. They can be used in a medical emergency or for a safety concern like a fight.

The following 15 schools will utilize the badges next year:

Bridges Learning Center

Buchtel CLC

East CLC

Hyre CLC

Jennings CLC

Litchfield CLC

Miller South  
NIHF-STEM Middle School  
Innes CLC  
I Promise School  
Akron Alternative Academy/SOAR  
Ellet CLC  
Firestone CLC  
Garfield CLC  
North High School

The board approved a three-year agreement with Centegix for \$224,500 for the first year and \$136,000 each of the following two years, for a total cost of \$496,500, to be paid for with federal stimulus and general fund dollars.

## **Teachers union notes 'drastic improvement' after use of security badges, cellphone bags**

The administration, along with Akron Education Association President Pat Shipe, presented the board Monday with survey results on the Yondr bags, showing strong support from teachers to continue the program.

Shipe, along with Thompson and Director of Safety and Security Don Zesiger, said the Yondr bags and the badges combined, along with other security measures implemented over the second half of the school year, had made significant improvements to safety and security in Akron schools.

Shipe said the schools had "been to the edge" when it came to safety, but noted since the changes were made, "I have seen a drastic improvement in both the response to students, to staff, and the response to safety issues in our buildings."

The district also added more metal detectors and will be adding bag scanners, which were previously approved and ordered but have not yet arrived due to supply issues, Zesiger said.

Each school's glass entrance has been reinforced with a bullet-resistant film that takes almost a minute to break through, even with multiple shots fired through it, according to a video from company 3M played for board members Monday. That film will be added around the first floor of every building, and has already been added to each classroom's door where there is glass.