

CONNECTION

LOST

The editorial is an opinion held by the editorial board of the newspaper and is a collaboration of the board. It needs a simple majority to pass. The approval vote was 7-1

The Black & White Newspaper's Editorial Board calls for public access Wi-Fi for students and faculty during the school day.

When it comes to innovation and technology, our school is highly ranked. Each student is given an iPad for daily educational use as well as limited access to computer labs that hold Apple desktop computers. The school district strives to be the metro's leader in advanced technological learning, and despite this, students and faculty are still left without adequate Wi-Fi and cellular connection to the outside world.

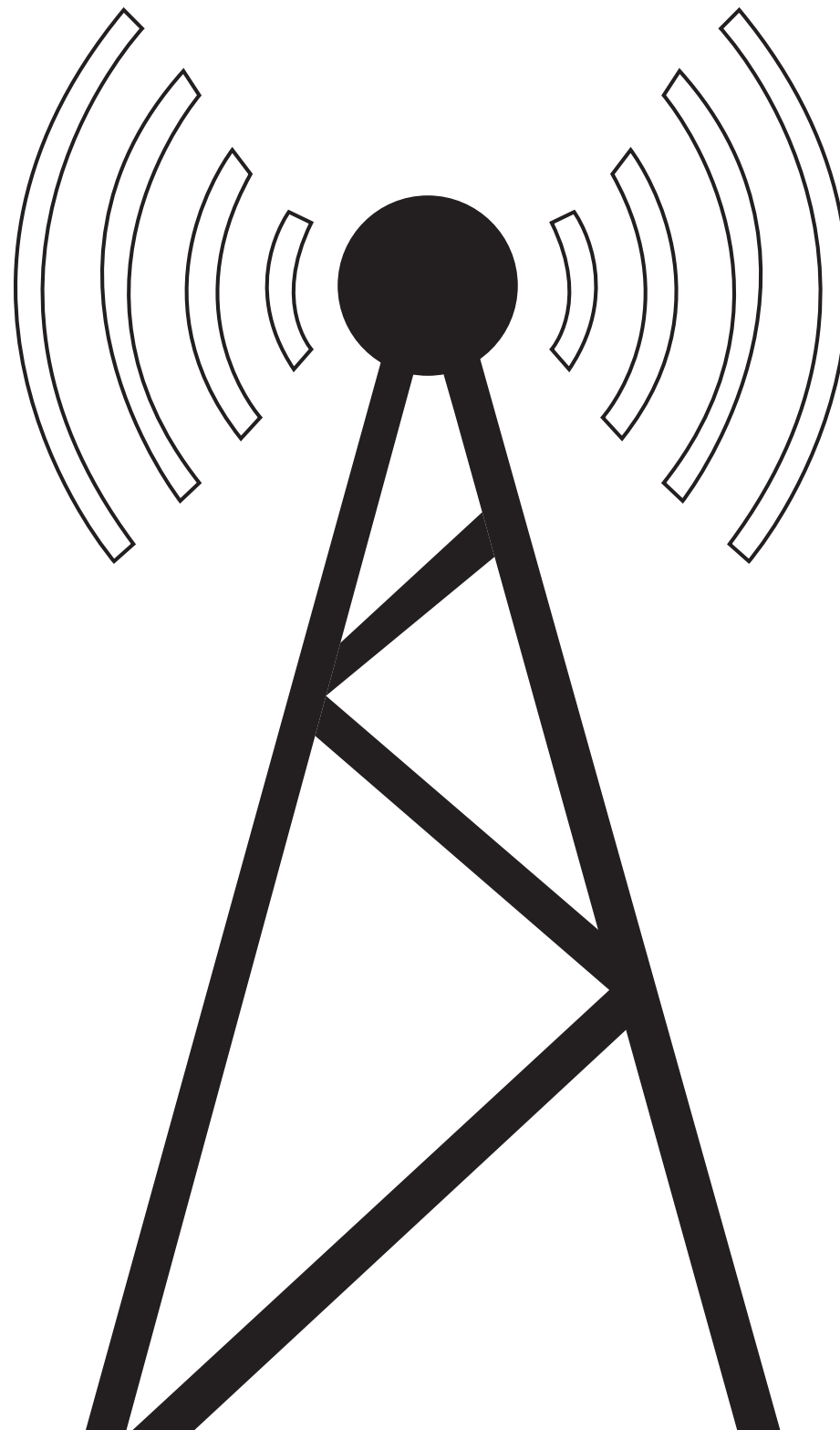
"My understanding is that concrete and glass create problems for cellular signals," said High School Principal Ryan Woods. This creates a 'Cellular Dead Zone' which, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is an area where cell phone reception is very poor or unavailable. Without cellular connection or accessible Wi-Fi, a safety concern is created. In the event of an emergency, very few people can communicate with the outside world, and virtually no one can connect with the occupants inside. "My concern is for the simple communication with family and being able to make calls in and out," said Business Teacher Micheal Barta. "There can be situations that happen with family and they can't get ahold of you or you're unable to communicate with them, so I think that's the world we live in, and I know everywhere I go within my life, I'm able to connect to Wi-Fi pretty much anywhere, or get service and use my data."

But teachers and faculty are not the only ones concerned with not being able to communicate with the outside world during the school day. Student also share the same valid concerns. "If there is an emergency or an intruder, if you don't have service and you are trying to text your parents...that can be very dangerous," said Ava Glennon

'23. Although the use of phones during an intruder situation is discouraged in order to help keep lines of communication for school officials and emergency services open, the ability to text 'I'm okay' can remedy unneeded worry. "That's my mom's worst fear, an intruder, and she can't get ahold of me," Glennon said. Woods also worries about the safety of students during emergency situations. "We [administrators] even talked about our drills, or tornado shelters, if we all go down there, can anyone get service," woods said. The absence of accessible Wi-Fi and cellular service can make an already uneasy situation even harder to handle.

Not having Wi-Fi connections during the school day creates more issues than just safety, it is a missed opportunity for students to learn and become more responsible. As students graduate and move to go off to college they will find that college campuses have public access Wi-Fi in every building. We are taking away the opportunity to learn how to lock in and focus when it is needed. "It's part of the kid's commitment to their learning," said Barta. "Part of it is like a skill to be like 'I know when I need to use this device for certain things and when I need to lock in, and that is a skill we can start to teach, the ability to overcome a temptation."

Students also see it as a choice for themselves and peers to make. "If kids don't want to pay attention that's their own issue, but if you're using it responsibly, then that's your decision," said Glennon. But the issue of students being on phones and not paying attention would not be exacerbated by having Wi-Fi accessible to students and faculty. "The lack of Wi-Fi isn't eliminating kids with phones. I don't think the problem is going to be worse with Wi-Fi," said Barta.



Wi-Fi Password x

"Johnston usually follows Waukee, Ankeny and Urbandale, I feel like if anything we should get Wi-Fi here too."

Riya Shamra '22

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NEWS

Other Metro High Schools have Wi-Fi for students & faculty to access during the school day, such as...

- Waukee High School
- Waukee Northwest High School
- Urbandale High School
- Southeast Polk High School
- Valley High School
- East High School
- Lincoln High School
- Roosevelt High School

Some students want accessible Wi-Fi, not only to connect their phone but also to use it as a tool to help better their ability to learn. While the district provides each student with an iPad, some students benefit from bringing their laptops or bigger tablets to help them study, take notes, write papers, and more. The school's current policy does not allow that. "If that's another way [students] can get their school work done, then [the school] should let them have access to [Wi-Fi], especially if they have a valid reason!" Glennon said.

According to the school district's Technology Administrator Anthony Sparks, the need for students and faculty to have accessible Wi-Fi during the school day is stopped by the Federal Communications Commission's E-rate rules. "It is against Federal E-Rate laws to allow personal devices to access the Internet during regular school hours," Spark said in a statement. The federal E-Rate program, headed by the FCC, provides discounts of up to 90% to schools for affordable telecommunications and internet access, and according to Sparks, the FCC has reimbursed over \$800,000 to the district over the past 14 years. That is about 50% of the school's internet bill.

But unlike our school, other school districts such as Waukee and Urbandale allow students and faculty to access the internet during the school day. The Urbandale Community School District (UCSD) allows students and faculty to access Wi-Fi during school hours. UCSD's IT Department and Communications director Dena Claire said in a statement, "Our UCSD Guest Wi-Fi is content-filtered and rate-limited, so no inappropriate sites

are accessible and individual devices don't noticeably impact our overall bandwidth. Positive effects are fairly self-evident – given the choice between a data plan and Wi-Fi, most people will choose Wi-Fi." Waukee Community School District (WCSD) also allows students and faculty to access Wi-Fi during school hours. According to WCSD Executive Director of Communications Amy Varcoe, and WCSD's CFO and IT Director, they are still within compliance with the FCC despite allowing student and staff to access Wi-Fi during the school day. In a statement, they said, "We are in compliance with E-Rate due to filters we have in place on our Wi-Fi. We also have our 1:1 devices that are on our network internet. The usage of our Wi-Fi by staff and students we believe is minimal but would be in line with E-Rate regulations."

According to Sparks, they are following an emergency proclamation made for schools when they are closed. "That proclamation is no longer relevant since our District is not closed," Sparks said. He also noted that the school district goes off of FCC E-Rate documents from 2010. "I cannot speak to how the WCSD interprets and enforces the E-Rate rules," said Sparks. "The Johnston Community Schools will work off the official 2010 E-Rate rules in regards to educational purposes."

If the goal of the school district is to be the leader in technology, we should start with the basics: accessible Wi-Fi for students and faculty. It will allow for better communication in and outside of the building, eliminating safety concerns, as well as give students the ability to learn accountability.