

One Year After Texas Phone-Free Schools, McKinney Therapist Says the Biggest Adjustment May Be Happening at Home

Licensed professional counselor Xiaoli "Ally" Wang shares what families are asking about communication, independence, anxiety, and healthy technology habits.

MCKINNEY, TX, UNITED STATES, August 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As students across Texas return to school this fall, many families are entering their second academic year under House Bill 1481, the statewide law requiring public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to adopt policies prohibiting students' use of personal communication devices on school property during the school day.



Back-to-school transitions are easier when children know they can still talk openly, ask for help, and trust the adults around them.

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The goal is helping children and families learn to use it intentionally while continuing to build strong relationships, confidence, and emotional resilience.”

*Xiaoli "Ally" Wang, LPC-S,
Founder and Clinical Director*

Since the law took effect, much of the public conversation has focused on reducing classroom distractions, improving student engagement, and helping teachers manage technology in the classroom. Less discussed, however, is how families continue to adjust after students return home.

According to Xiaoli "Ally" Wang, LPC-S, Founder and Clinical Director of MindLift Alliance Counseling, Assessment & Education Services in McKinney, many of the most meaningful conversations today are no longer about the policy itself. Instead, parents are asking how to help their children adapt to changing routines while maintaining

healthy communication, emotional well-being, and self-confidence.

“A year ago, many parents wanted to understand how schools would implement the policy,” Wang said. “Today, the conversation has shifted. Families are asking how to help their children become more independent, communicate effectively, and build healthy technology habits while still feeling connected and supported.”

As a licensed professional counselor supervisor who works with children, teens, adults, couples, and families throughout North Texas, Wang says the adjustment often extends beyond the classroom.

“One thing that has stood out to me is that many parents are adjusting right alongside their children,” she said. “For years, many families became accustomed to communicating throughout the day. Losing that immediate connection can naturally create uncertainty, not because parents disagree with the policy, but because staying connected has become part of modern parenting.”

Understanding House Bill 1481
House Bill 1481, passed during the 89th Texas Legislative Session, took effect on June 20, 2025, and required school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to adopt policies addressing student use of personal communication devices. The law applies to devices such as cell phones, smartwatches, tablets, and other devices capable of digital communication, while providing exceptions for documented medical needs, students with qualifying IEPs or Section 504 plans, and other circumstances permitted by law.

While implementation varies by district, many schools now require students to keep personal devices stored away throughout the school day.

According to Wang, the conversations families bring into therapy often reflect concerns that go



A little uncertainty is normal when routines change, and learning to navigate it can be part of growing into greater confidence and independence.



Small routines like putting phones away during family meals can create more opportunities for connection, conversation, and trust.

far beyond the devices themselves.

“Parents aren’t simply asking about phones,” Wang explained. “They’re asking how to help their children build confidence, strengthen communication skills, navigate friendships, manage anxiety, and develop healthy relationships with technology. Those conversations continue long after the school day ends.”

The Questions Families Are Bringing Into Therapy

Over the past year, Wang says many conversations with parents have centered on practical concerns rather than the policy itself.

Some of the most common questions include:

- How can I help my child adjust to spending the school day without a phone?
- How do I encourage independence while still helping my child feel safe?
- Is it normal for my child to feel anxious during this transition?
- How can our family develop healthier technology routines at home?
- How do I know when normal adjustment becomes something that may require additional support?

Practical Guidance for Families

Wang encourages parents to focus on preparation, communication, and trust as children adjust to spending the school day without a phone. For children who are accustomed to contacting their parents throughout the day, the change may initially feel uncomfortable. Reviewing the school’s communication procedures together, identifying trusted adults a child can approach, and establishing a predictable check-in routine before and after school can reinforce that support remains available even when a child does not have immediate access to a phone.

Independence, Wang notes, develops gradually through preparation, practice, and trust. Parents can help children build confidence by talking through common situations before they happen, including what to do if they feel sick, miss transportation, experience a conflict, or need help from an adult. Reassuring children that support is available while also expressing confidence in their ability to solve age-appropriate problems can help them develop greater independence.

Some temporary anxiety during the transition is also normal. Children may worry about being unable to reach a parent, missing important information, or feeling disconnected from friends. Wang encourages parents to validate those concerns without reinforcing the fear, noting that anxiety often decreases as children become more familiar with the routine and develop greater confidence.

At home, Wang recommends that families establish technology routines that are consistent, realistic, and modeled by the entire household. Phone-free meals, limiting device use before

bedtime, charging devices outside bedrooms, and setting aside time for face-to-face conversation can help children develop healthier relationships with technology.

Parents should also pay attention to the intensity, duration, and impact of their child's symptoms. Additional support may be appropriate when anxiety, irritability, sleep problems, school avoidance, social withdrawal, frequent physical complaints, or significant mood changes continue for several weeks or begin interfering with school, relationships, or daily functioning. A licensed mental health professional can help determine whether a child is experiencing a temporary adjustment or may benefit from counseling.

Looking Beyond the Screen

Rather than viewing technology as the problem, Wang encourages families to focus on building healthy communication, emotional resilience, and trust.

"Technology is part of modern life," she said. "The goal isn't to eliminate it. The goal is helping children and families learn to use it intentionally while continuing to build strong relationships, confidence, and emotional resilience."

As another school year begins, Wang encourages parents to make time for meaningful conversations after school, ask open-ended questions about friendships and emotional well-being, and recognize that periods of adjustment often look different for every child.

Parents should consider speaking with a licensed mental health professional if anxiety, emotional distress, school avoidance, or significant changes in mood or behavior persist beyond the normal adjustment period or begin affecting daily life.

"The most important thing parents can do," Wang said, "is create an environment where children feel comfortable talking. Those conversations build trust, strengthen resilience, and help families navigate change together."

About MindLift Alliance Counseling, Assessment & Education Services

MindLift Alliance Counseling, Assessment & Education Services is a McKinney, Texas counseling practice providing evidence-informed therapy for children, adolescents, adults, couples, and families throughout Texas. Led by Xiaoli "Ally" Wang, LPC-S, the practice specializes in teen counseling, child counseling, anxiety therapy, trauma-informed care, family counseling, couples counseling, and secure online therapy. Mandarin-speaking counseling services and continuing education programs through MindLift Academy are also available.

Learn more at <https://mindliftalliance.com/>.

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