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EDUCATION

Akron Public Schools to pilot locking cellphone bags in three buildings within weeks

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Students on three Akron Public Schools campuses will have to lock up their cellphones during the school day under a new pilot program.

The school board on Monday approved a contract agreement for a limited pilot program for the rest of the school year with Yondr Inc. for \$43,450 to lease 2,475 locking pouches, which will debut within weeks at East, Buchtel and Ellet community learning centers. East and Buchtel's campuses include grades six through 12, and Ellet is nine through 12.

The earliest the bags would be ready for use is Feb. 27, Chief of Operations Stephen Thompson told the board. Leading up to the launch, the district will hold meetings with parents at each school and professional development for teachers.

Superintendent resigns: Christine Fowler Mack resigns from Akron Public Schools, board approves separation agreement

The vote was 5-1 with board member N.J. Akbar dissenting and Bruce Alexander absent.

The pilot program comes after a contingent of administrators and teachers union representatives traveled to Dayton to see the Yondr bags in action. The Dayton district implemented the Yondr bags, which have been adopted in about 1,000 school districts across the nation, at the beginning of this school year.

Each student will have their own pouch that their cellphone must go into when they enter the building, if a student has a phone and chooses to bring it 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 pilot program comes as the district continues to search for ways to make buildings safer for students and staff and classrooms more conducive to learning.

"I believe it's a game-changer, in a positive way," Akron Education Association President Pat Shipe said.

Violence in schools: 'All of us are frustrated': What people are saying about violence in Akron schools

The board also approved a contract with another school security company, Centegix, for \$15,000 for a pilot program that will supply teachers with a way to quickly page safety team members and central office staff about an emergency. The pilot will roll out at Garfield and Innes community learning centers, a high school and middle school.

Teachers will wear a lanyard with a kind of key card at the end. Pressing it three times will send a code to the phones of safety and front office staff alerting them to an emergency at the teacher's location. Teachers can use it for any kind of emergency, including fights and medical emergencies.

This article will be updated.

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