**[Saco Middle School Principal's Blog](https://sacomiddle.wordpress.com/%22%20%5Co%20%22Saco%20Middle%20School%20Principal%27s%20Blog)**

[DISTRICT INFORMATION AND LINKS](https://sacomiddle.wordpress.com/district-information-and-links/)



(This principal’s blog is a communication device about Saco Middle School and the good work we’re doing.  It is also a resource for parents and teachers who might be interested in learning more about middle schools and middle-school aged students.)

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# [The dilemma of headphones in class](https://sacomiddle.wordpress.com/2013/03/03/the-dilemma-of-headphones-in-class/)

I would like to share with our parents and community a recent dialogue and vote that was taken among the staff of SMS.  The question came up about whether or not we should allow students to listen to music, with permission, at certain times in our classes.  This may seem like an easy issue to think about and decide but it is, in fact, a hot topic among teachers.  As I see it, it is a microcosm of the tensions at play with regards to students’ use of technology: what is good technology and how do we protect our children from the negative effects of unbridled access to the wonders of the internet.

Teachers across the country have long discussed the pros and cons of students listening to music through headphones while working on individual tasks in classes.  The issues on the con side are posed as questions such as: Should kids be allowed to listen to music while reading and writing?  Don’t those tasks require cognitive focus such that there can be no room for the distractions of music in their ears?  Are we helping or hurting kids by encouraging them to “work” through the distraction of that music?  We know they do it at home and outside of school but shouldn’t we help them learn to concentrate on one task at a time?  And, perhaps most importantly, what can we do about the toxic impact of music that is racist, sexist and violent?  Isn’t it our responsibility to support parents who wish to protect their children from such negative influences and, if parents don’t mind, isn’t it our responsibility to set a higher standard at school?

On the pro side, we have some of the following questions to contend with:  what about the students who make a clear and compelling argument that they actually concentrate better when they have music to help them focus?  Is it our job to police what our students listen to, especially in the face of the reality that our culture provides them with hundreds of opportunities every single day to access worse things than offensive music?  And, what about the beauties of music and the students who value the best that our boundless musical world has to offer?  Can we deny them the calming and soothing and uplifting benefits afforded by listening to good music that touches their souls?  If it helps make school a more positive place to be, should we deny them that?

I can assure you that all these issues were discussed during our faculty meeting in February.  And when various members of our faculty had offered their thoughts on the matter, we voted.  The result was the policy that follows.  This policy statement was read to students before February vacation and is in effect now.  If you have questions or concerns, please contact us for further discussion.  It is a challenging issue, and perhaps just the very tip of the iceberg with regards to our students’ access to technology, and all that it has to offer.

***SMS Policy on the Use of Headphones in the Classroom:***

For a long time, SMS has had a policy that students are not allowed to listen to music in classes or study halls.  Recently, the staff voted to make a change to that policy.  It was agreed that each teacher may now make a policy within his or her own classroom.  This means that some teachers in the building may now allow students to listen to music on their laptops at different times during class.  Some teachers may decide for very good reasons that their classroom will continue to be a no headphone zone.  Because listening to recreational music is a privilege and not a right, there are still a few limitations that I want to share with you:

The music you’re listening to cannot be loud enough that others nearby can hear it; a teacher or staff member may ask you to lower the volume or turn it off if it can be heard from elsewhere in the room.

Music may only come off your laptop; no iPods or phones allowed.

If a parent or guardian does not want their student to be allowed access to recreational music during the day, we will accept that request and teachers will be informed.

All music must be appropriate for the school setting.  The teachers and staff of SMS feel strongly that there is some music that promotes violence and contains other cultural messages that are negative and degrading and that accessing such music at school is inappropriate.  At any time, a teacher may ask to listen to the music you’re listening to and may ask you to turn it off if it has inappropriate content.

Here are some resources regarding our concerns about some forms of popular music:

<http://www.webmd.com/baby/news/20030303/does-rap-put-teens-at-risk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYaD7v-0N-8>

<http://www.journal-for-young-scientists.net/content/view/27/>

<http://drdavewalsh.com/posts/39>