NEA NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION | Health and Safety PROGRAM

Sample Policy on Limiting Student Personal Device Use in Schools

Implementing a policy to restrict student use of personal devices in schools creates clear communication and expectations for the school community. Use NEA's sample policy to get started.

Purpose

Students often have access to personal devices, such as cellphones, in schools, which can provide educational benefits and supportive social connections. Students using personal devices can also be a source of disruption in school, hinder social skill development, promote bullying, and facilitate excessive exposure to social media content that can be mentally and physically harmful. Limiting student personal device use during the school day will support student health, minimize distractions, and facilitate a safe, welcoming school conducive to learning and engagement.

The [SCHOOL DISTRICT] (hereinafter, "District") recognizes the importance of and is obligated to ensuring the privacy and safety of all students and educators in all schools and on school grounds. Limiting the use of student personal devices creates safer schools that are more conducive to learning environments and support the academic, physical, and mental well-being of all students.

Definitions

[TO BE ADJUSTED AS NECESSARY TO CORRESPOND TO APPLICABLE POLICY, BARGAINING LANGUAGE, OR LAW]

Instructional Time: Educator-led time dedicated to teaching and learning.

Personal Devices: Devices (including cellphones, smartphones, and other personal electronic devices, such as headphones or audio earpieces, handheld games, smartwatches, and tablets) used by a student for the purpose of creating, accessing, processing, protecting, monitoring, storing, retrieving, displaying, or transmitting data;[1]

School Day: Time from the first bell to dismissal bell (bell-to-bell) during which instruction can be provided, including lunch time, in-between classes passing time, and recess;

School Grounds: A school building, property on which a school building or facility is located, and property that is owned, leased, or used by a school for a school-sponsored activity, function, program, instruction, or training, including school-organized transportation.[2]

Storage Options: Identified place, determined by school administration, where student personal devices are stored during the school day that students are able to access and retrieve at the identified appropriate times. This could include, but is not limited to, a student's backpack or locker, a locked pouch, or other designated school space.

Limiting Student Personal Device Use

During the school day, bell-to-bell, students are restricted from unauthorized access to and use of their personal devices. While students may bring a personal device to school, the device must be silenced, turned off, and stored in the identified place determined by the school administration. Personal devices will be stored for the duration of the school day or until students otherwise leave the school grounds.

The school administration, working with educators and families, will develop procedures to implement this Policy, including: (1) storage options that may require additional school space or school staff; (2) enforcement and appropriate progressive disciplinary rules and procedures; and (3) documentation of exceptions for medical and other approved needs, as described below. Additional procedures will be developed for school-sponsored events outside of the school day that may include field trips, sporting events, and club activities.

Exceptions

The District shall make exceptions for student personal device use that provide the assistive technology necessary to comply with individualized student 504 plans, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and/or plans to support emergent multilingual learners (MLs) with appropriate language access programs and services to ensure the provision of appropriate, meaningful public education. The allowable exceptions must be written into the student's identified plan and approved by the appropriate team or coordinator. The Policy must be implemented equitably to ensure that students who use personal devices are fully included and not subject to stigma. Students who receive an exception to this Policy should participate alongside all other students and not be separated unless in accordance with their plan. The District shall also make exceptions for student medical and/or family emergency needs in accordance with this Policy.

Communication About the Policy

The Policy shall be distributed to students, families, educators, and staff, at a minimum, annually. The Policy will be included in the student code of conduct and student handbook and listed on school and district websites. The Policy shall be developed and distributed in formats and languages that are accessible and reflect the school community through multiple communication modes—such as letters, emails, social media, orientation sessions, and meetings—to ensure that the breadth of the school community has reasonable opportunity to learn about, comment on, and comply with the Policy.

As part of the school emergency planning, schools will have in place a comprehensive communications plan utilizing school-provided communication tools, such as school phones, when students and families need to communicate with each other during the school day. The school's emergency plans will include a crisis response team to support students, manage communication, and aid decision-making. The plan will be maintained with the most up-to-date contact information to expedite communication during catastrophic events—such as natural disasters or security threats—and when contacting families for routine issues as well as during family emergencies. Students and families will be informed of the plan in the student handbook, on the school website, and when information is being provided on the Policy.

Policy Compliance

The District recognizes the importance of administrative leadership in setting expectations and creating a climate that is safe, conducive to learning, and non-discriminatory. The school administration is responsible for upholding and enforcing the Policy. In consultation with school employees and their representatives, administration will devise a student compliance plan to provide the necessary support to all educators and staff for effective schoolwide policy implementation. School staff will not experience any disciplinary action for the appropriate enforcement of this Policy.

Assessment of Policy

The District, in collaboration with educators, students, and families, will periodically review the Policy and make updates as necessary.

Endnotes

1 "Personal Devices Definition," (2025). *Law Insider.* Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/personal-devices.

2 "School grounds Definition: 440 Samples," (n.d.). *Law Insider*. Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/school-grounds.