NEA NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION | Health and Safety PROGRAM

Sample Resolution on Limiting Student Personal Device Use in Schools

This sample school board resolution on student personal device restrictions in schools is grounded in current research and clear reasoning about how limiting personal devices supports safety, focus, and healthier learning environments.

WHEREAS, educators have identified personal devices—including, but not limited to, cellphones—used at any time by students during the school day as disruptive, noted that they negatively affect the mental health of students due to social media access,[1] and indicated that they impede the development of social skills by reducing social interactions between students;[2,3] and

WHEREAS, the online harassment through the use of technology—such as cellphones, computers, social media, and gaming platforms—to bully, threaten, or aggressively hassle[4] students can create hostile education environments that may impair students' ability to access their education; and

WHEREAS, the [SCHOOL DISTRICT] (hereinafter, "District") has obligations under federal and [STATE] law to prevent and address online harassment in schools to ensure an environment free of discrimination and harassment based on protected characteristics, such as sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, and pregnancy),[5] race, color, national origin,[6] religion,[7] and disability status;[8] and

WHEREAS, in 2023, the United States Surgeon General issued the *Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health*, which highlights the troubling relationship between excessive, unrestricted social media use and increased mental health challenges in youth;[9] and

WHEREAS, in 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 77 percent of students who engaged in frequent social media use also experienced a higher prevalence of bullying victimization on school property, were bullied electronically (texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media), had persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and posed some suicide risk;[10] and

WHEREAS, a schoolwide policy limiting student personal device use, implemented consistently and uniformly within the school, can reduce disruption during the school day and improve academic performance,[11] limit social media access, reduce exposure to negative mental health concerns—such as cyberbullying—and increase opportunities for interpersonal interactions to support social skill development;[12] and

WHEREAS, the potential risks of social media usage to young people are likely to be greater in early adolescence—a period of greater biological, social, and psychological transitions—than in late adolescence and early adulthood,[13] age-appropriate support for digital literacy and the healthy use of social media and personal devices is crucial; and

WHEREAS, exceptions must be provided on an individualized basis for students with disabilities to the extent that a student requires essential assistive technology for communication, organization, and learning accommodations to support their educational needs; and

WHEREAS, exceptions must be provided on an individualized basis for students who have an ongoing medical condition to the extent that a student requires essential assistive technology to maintain their optimal health; and

WHEREAS, any exceptions for appropriate technology should be clearly documented as part of the applicable 504 plan[5] or Individualized Educational Program (IEP);[14] and

WHEREAS, policies limiting student personal device use must be implemented equitably to avoid stigmatizing students who require these tools, while ensuring educators and administrators are adequately trained to support these accommodations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and

WHEREAS, exceptions must be provided on an individualized basis for students who are emergent multilingual learners (MLs) to the extent that a student requires the support of a personal device, ensuring any exception for appropriate technology is documented as part of the plan to support the emergent ML with appropriate language programs and services;[3] and

WHEREAS, exceptions also must be provided on an individualized basis for students with a medical and/or family emergency need approved in accordance with district policy; and

WHEREAS, using technology in the educational process can improve learning opportunities and students must have fair and equitable access to school-provided technology when needed for academic purposes,[15] alternative technology solutions or instructional approaches that do not include individual student devices must be implemented if school-provided devices are not accessible; and

WHEREAS, the District is responsible for developing and implementing policy that is fair, provides for the respectful treatment of all students, is free from the effects of implicit or explicit bias, and promotes restorative and trauma-informed approaches to discipline, and this policy must be implemented without resorting to police- or justice system-related response to student behavior;[16] and

WHEREAS, members of the school community—including students, families, educators, school administrators, librarians, coaches, school psychologists, sociologists, counselors, school nurses, and other school-based health professionals—have valuable insight on student use of personal devices, the school community should be engaged to provide policy recommendations for limiting student personal device use in schools; and

WHEREAS, to address student, family, and school community concerns regarding communication during an emergency, all schools should have a school emergency plan that includes comprehensive communication procedures for internal and external audiences describing how schools will contact students, families, and other community members related to school emergencies;[17] and

WHEREAS, during school emergencies, students with personal devices can cause distraction and hinder the attention of students when safety and emergency response directions are being given, amplify rumors and misinformation and cause panic, impede or disrupt the public safety response, increase the danger faced by the school community—including through the promotion of rumors or misinformation, provision of inaccurate or inappropriate directives from unauthorized sources, and the generation of additional traffic on roads or school property—and reveal the location of students and educators during school emergencies; and

WHEREAS, the effective implementation of policy limiting the use of student personal devices requires the District and schools to routinely educate the school community about the reasons for and process related to the policy; and

WHEREAS, creating safe, welcoming schools requires non-exclusionary discipline and enforcement that does not expose students to the justice system; however, at times, enforcement of this policy may require appropriate progressive disciplinary rules and procedures;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that, on [DATE] of [MONTH, YEAR], by the [SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD] (hereinafter, "Board), the District shall develop and adopt policy limiting student personal device use during the school day, implemented schoolwide, with approved exceptions determined by student medical, family emergency, disability status, and/or language-proficiency needs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the District shall periodically collaborate with educators, students, and families to review and update the policy, as necessary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that as part of the development of this policy, the District shall adopt appropriate progressive disciplinary rules and procedures that may increase in severity but will not include the justice system or suspension or exclusion from school activities—such as sports teams and clubs—and may require a parent/guardian to be involved, specifically when a student must recoup a personal device confiscated by the school; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that administrators and educators shall not be disciplined for enforcing this policy, including, if appropriate under the policy, requiring that a student relinquish their personal device to a school administrator or educator.

Endnotes

1 Sala, A., et al. "Social Media Use and Adolescents' Mental Health and Well-Being: An Umbrella Review." (2024). Computers in Human Behavior Reports 14 (2024) 100404. Accessed May 16, 2024. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S245195882400037X

2 National Education Association. "Impact of Social Media and Personal Devices on Mental Health." (August 2024). Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://www.nea.org/resource-library/impact-social-media-and-personal-devices-mental-health

3 Khalaf, A.M., Alubied, A.A., et al. "The Impact of Social Media on the Mental Health of Adolescents and Young Adults: A Systematic Review." *Cureus.* (2023) Aug 5; 15(8):e42990. Accessed May 16, 2025: doi:10.7759/cureus.42990

4 "What Is Online Harassment?" (2022). Common Sense Media. Accessed on May 16, 2025: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/what-is-online-harassment

5 Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 et seq., "Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance," 34 CFR Part 106 (2020). Accessed May 30, 2025: https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-I/part-106

6 Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d.

7 Title IV of the Civil Right Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000c et seq.

8 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794; 34 C.F.R. Part 104; Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12131; 28 C.F.R. Part 35.

9 Office of the Surgeon General. "Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory." (2023). Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf

10 Young, E., et al. "Frequent Social Media Use and Experiences with Bullying Victimization, Persistent Feelings of Sadness or Hopelessness, and Suicide Risk Among High School Students–Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023." *MMWR Supplements,* 73(4), 23–30. Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7304a3

11 Smale, W.T., et al."Cell Phones, Student Rights, and School Safety: Finding the Right Balance." (2021). *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 195, 49-6. Accessed May 16, 2025: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1287931.pdf

12 Dwyer, R., et al. "Smartphone use undermines enjoyment of face-to-face social interactions." (2017). *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. Accessed May 16, 2025: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.10.007

13 American Psychological Association. "Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence." (May 2023). Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use.pdf

14 IDEA (2017). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. U.S. Department of Education. Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/

15 Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies. (2020). American Academy of Pediatrics. https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/center-of-excellence-on-social-media-and-youth-mental-health/resource-guide-for-pediatricians-school-phone-policies/

16 National Association of School Psychologists. (2018). Effective school discipline policies and practices: Supporting student learning [Research summary]. Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Advocacy%20Resources/School_Discipline_Congressional_Briefing.pdf

17 National Education Association. NEA's School Crisis Guide. (January 2018). Accessed on January 31, 2025: https://www.nea.org/resource-library/neas-school-crisis-guide