

MIDDLE SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY

Information about WMS Technology Use

At Westside Community Schools, technology use will be **intentional** and **educational**, ensuring students are **active participants** in learning. From this guiding principle, we are committed to implementing high-quality tools that are purposefully designed to have a positive impact on student growth.

Our approach is intended to put teachers in the driver's seat, support families with transparent information, and keep student wellbeing at the center of every decision we make.

What we do

WCS uses technology to improve learning outcomes, meet state established learning standards across the curriculum, to include specific technology and computer science objectives, and provide experiences that wouldn't otherwise be possible.

At the middle school level, students use the iPad across the curriculum to complete creative activities, engage with digital resources, review and practice key concepts, and complete assessments. This can allow more personalization to help meet each individual learner's academic needs.

Why we do it

At WCS, we believe every student deserves an exceptional education and the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. That belief has guided our work for generations, leading us to establish one of the first Special Education departments, as well as a robust gifted and talented program. Today, our dedicated educators collaborate with experts across disciplines to deliver best-practice instruction, celebrate growth, and help every student make meaningful progress. Innovative tools like IXL further support this work by adapting to each student's learning level, reinforcing essential skills, and giving teachers real-time insights to personalize support. Our internal research supports the effectiveness of these tools. **By combining expert instruction, purposeful technology, and a steadfast belief in every child, we ensure every learner is supported, challenged, and empowered to achieve more than they thought possible.**

How we do it

Technology use in our district is intentional and educational, ensuring students are **active participants** in learning rather than passive consumers. Every student in grades 7-8 has an assigned device they can use at teacher discretion. Each student also has access to a Logitech Crayon stylus for handwriting, note taking, drawing, and interactive learning.

We analyze our use of technology on an annual basis. **Some adjustments we are making this school year include disabling YouTube Shorts on all K-12 devices. We will begin piloting alternatives to direct YouTube access for audio-visual content at WMS, limiting unrestricted access on school-issued devices.** Students will continue to have access to teacher-approved instructional videos through approved platforms, ensuring educational content remains readily available while reducing access to non-instructional content.

Research in Nebraska and across the country shows schools with the highest levels of IXL usage outperformed others. At WCS, research has shown a positive correlation between IXL progress and increased gains in MAP student achievement. You can check out national IXL research conducted by third-party researchers, including Johns Hopkins and others, as well as studies by IXL staff. <https://www.ixl.com/membership/teachers/research>

ONLINE SAFETY FOR STUDENTS

In order to help keep students focused and safe online, WCS utilizes a web content filter and on-device restrictions. The system works by categorizing websites and then allowing or blocking access based on the user. We constantly monitor and adjust our filter and block non-educational sites in order to respond to the ever changing environment.

Westside-owned devices have on-device restrictions that limit the ability to install games and applications that have not been approved by WCS. For student iPads, this also includes restricting several built-in apps, such as the App Store, Phone, Messages, FaceTime, Game Center, and Find My. Westside devices have access to Mosyle Manager, our custom app store where only Westside-approved apps are available.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Westside's AI Goals

1. Build Artificial Intelligence Literacy
2. Ensuring Safety & Security
3. Enhancing Staff Artificial Intelligence Literacy to Improve Efficiency
4. Enhancing Teaching & Learning with Artificial Intelligence
5. Transparency & Community Engagement: Raising Awareness of Artificial Intelligence's Impact

Westside Community Schools does not require any students or staff to use Artificial intelligence.

However, AI is quickly becoming part of many students and school staff's everyday life, showing up in search engines, chatbots, and the apps they already use. AI can be a genuinely useful tool: it can explain a tricky math concept, brainstorm ideas for a project, or help a student get unstuck when they're staring at a blank page. **AI should not be a replacement for personalized thinking.**

Our goal is to help interested students and staff use AI ethically and efficiently. That means talking about when it's appropriate to use (checking their work versus writing the whole assignment), reminding them that AI can sound confident while being wrong, and encouraging them to treat it as a starting point they still question and build on. The most powerful thing you can do is stay curious and keep the conversation open: ask what tools they're using, try them out together, and help them build the judgment to use AI as a support for their own learning rather than a shortcut around it.

To assist our students and teachers, we've put tools in place to help student focus. Only recommended, educational focused tools are allowed on student devices. Non-approved tools like ChatGPT, Grok and Perplexity are now blocked on student devices K-12.

You can read more about AI at Westside on our district's AI website: <https://teachers.technology/ai-at-westside/>

Technology — a shared responsibility

WCS is committed to being a thoughtful steward of your child's screen time during the school day, and we encourage families to carry that same intentionality into the home. **With clear expectations, open conversations about media use, and a focus on balance, we can make sure technology serves our children well, inside the classroom and beyond.** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) updated its guidance in January 2026, shifting focus from how long to the quality and context of digital media use.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Nearly all U.S. teens are active on at least one platform, and kids typically start using social media around age 11. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recognizes that these tools can support learning, creativity, and connection, but that many platforms are designed to keep kids engaged as long as possible. Rather than focusing only on the clock, the AAP's latest guidance encourages families to pay attention to what kids are doing online, how it fits into the rest of their day, and keeping the conversation open. Below are the key recommendations to help your middle schooler build a healthy relationship with social media.

Key recommendations

Make a family media plan. The AAP recommends developing a media plan tailored to your child's age, health, personality, and developmental stage, and revisiting it as they grow.

- Protect sleep, activity, and downtime. All children and teens need adequate sleep (8–12 hours depending on age), about an hour of physical activity, and time away from screens each day. Check whether media use is crowding out these essentials.
- Focus on quality and habits, not just minutes. Research suggests household rules centered on balance, content, co-viewing, and communication lead to better well-being than rules focused on screen time alone. American Academy of Pediatrics
- Create device-free times and zones. Designate media-free times together—such as dinner or car rides—and media-free locations like bedrooms.
- Keep talking—and keep it two-way. Ask your teen to show you what they found funny or interesting, and treat it as a dialogue about what they're seeing and what it means to them. Have ongoing conversations about online citizenship, safety, and treating others with respect both online and off.
- Watch for cyberbullying. Kids can be targets—or sources—of cyberbullying, which can cause social, academic, and health harms; stay aware and keep lines of communication open.
- Be a media mentor and model. How parents use media shapes how kids use it, so set your own boundaries and protect uninterrupted family and sleep time. Encourage offline sources of connection like sports, creative activities, or volunteering.
- Watch for warning signs. Teens who spend a great deal of time on social media can report higher symptoms of loneliness, depression, and anxiety; if you notice changes in mood, sleep, or behavior, check in and consider talking with your pediatrician.

TIPS FOR FAMILIES

- Model healthy screen habits yourself - children notice and follow what adults do.
- Watch and explore digital content together when possible.
- Create tech-free times at home, such as during meals and one hour before bedtime.
- Reach out to your child's teacher with any questions about how devices are used.
- Ask your child what they used their iPad for at school today - it opens great conversations.