

Cell Phones in School

The Rockbridge County School Board recognizes that many, if not most, students have regular access to cell phones and other personal electronic communication devices. It is imperative, however, that students, families, and staff understand there are appropriate and inappropriate times for the use of such devices. Schools must provide a learning environment free from unnecessary distraction and disruption. The Rockbridge County School Board establishes expectations for student conduct, including the use of such devices, which promotes a respectful atmosphere during the school day free from disruption and threat to persons or property, and supportive of individual rights.

Expectations for Students

Except as specifically provided for in this policy, the use of cell phones, as defined below, and all other personal electronic communication devices, as defined below, is prohibited during the “regular school day,” as defined below. Upon students’ arrival at school and continuing throughout the regular school day until dismissal from school, cell phones and other personal electronic communication devices are required to be “stored,” as defined in this policy, and powered off.

Definitions Applicable in this Policy

“Cell Phone” means a personal device capable of making calls, transmitting pictures or video, or sending or receiving messages through electronic means. The definition of cell phone is inclusive of a non-smart phone that is limited to making phone calls or text messages, a smart phone that encompasses the above features, and other future personal electronic communication devices with the abovementioned characteristics.

“Personal Electronic Communication Device” means any personal device capable of connecting to a smart phone, the Internet, a cellular or Wi-Fi network, or directly connects to another similar device. Personal electronic communication devices may include some wearable devices such as smart watches, as well as personal headphones, earbuds, laptops, tablets, other Bluetooth enabled devices, and other future personal electronic communication devices with the abovementioned characteristics.

“Regular School Day” means from when the first bell rings at the start of the school day to begin instructional time until the dismissal bell rings at the end of the academic school day, and includes lunch time and time in between classes.

“Stored” means a cell phone or personal electronic devices powered off and not being carried on the student's person, including not in the student's pocket. Storage options include in the student's backpack/book bag, in the student's locker, or in a designated place in the classroom, if offered.

The following requirements regarding cell phones and personal electronic communication devices apply to students at all Rockbridge County Public Schools:

Cell phones and other personal electronic communication devices must be powered off and stored in the student's backpack/book bag.

Failure to comply with this policy and expectation will result in the following actions:

First Offense	Verbal reminder/warning for student to place the device in their backpack/book bag.
Second Offense	Parent/Guardian will be contacted and the device will be confiscated by a school employee until the end of the school day. When a device is confiscated, it should be labelled with the student's name, turned over to a school administrator as soon as reasonably possible, and stored in a safe location. The student may retrieve the device at that end of the school day.
Third Offense	Parent/Guardian will be contacted and the device will be confiscated by a school employee until the end of the school day. When a device is confiscated, it should be labelled with the student's name, turned over to a school administrator as soon as reasonably possible, and stored in a safe location. The parent/guardian must retrieve the device from the school and meet with school administration regarding the offense.
Fourth Offense	Parent/Guardian will be contacted, the device will be confiscated by a school employee until the end of the school day. When a device is confiscated, it should be labelled with the student's name, turned over to a school administrator as soon as reasonably possible, and stored in a safe location. The parent/guardian must retrieve the device from the school and meet with school administration regarding the offense. In addition, for a period of 30 calendar days, the student shall be prohibited from possessing a cell phone or other personal electronic communication device at school during instructional hours. The student may either leave the device at home or will be required to check the device into the office at arrival and retrieve it following dismissal. Students who violate this restriction will be subject to further discipline that is consistent with other forms of insubordination.

Parental Involvement and Responsibility

Each parent/guardian of a student enrolled in Rockbridge County Public Schools has a duty to assist in enforcing this policy, along with the Standards of Student Conduct.

Expectations for Teachers and Other School Personnel

Teachers and other school personnel are expected to strictly enforce this regulation to make certain students experience consistent expectations and consequences in all school settings. Teachers and other school personnel who confiscate devices must store the device in a safe location until the first available opportunity to turn it over to school administration. Confiscated devices may be retrieved by the student or parent/guardian depending upon the number of offenses outlined in the action table above during normal office school hours or at times designated by the school administration.

Teachers and other school personnel are expected to model expectations and are prohibited from using

cell phones and other personal electronic communication devices during scheduled class time or other times when personnel are responsible for the instruction and/or direct supervision of students. Teachers and other school personnel may use cell phones and other personal electronic communication devices when on break, during planning time, and to communicate with staff on school-related issues.

Additional Prohibited Conduct

Students shall be prohibited from:

1. Using cell phones or other personal electronic communication devices to:
 - a. tease, bully, intimidate, threaten, or harass another individual;
 - b. collaborate with, encourage, or incite others to participate in violent or unlawful acts on school property or at school-sponsored activities. This includes, but is not limited to, creating and sharing video of an act in a manner that causes disruption and disturbance;
 - c. create, possess, exchange, distribute, post, photograph, or transmit any photograph, digitized image, or video of a person in any condition of nudity, or a person engaged in any sexual act;
 - d. engage in academic dishonesty and cheating;
 - e. taking videos or photographs of students or Rockbridge County Public Schools personnel.
2. Refusing to surrender a cell phone or other personal electronic device when directed to do so by school personnel.

Students engaged in such conduct of insubordination by failing to adhere to this policy are subject to disciplinary action. At a minimum, the cell phone or other personal electronic communication device will be confiscated and used as evidence, as appropriate, and depending on the level of infraction, the student may be restricted from possessing a cell phone or other personal electronic communication device at school for the remainder of the school year. Other consequences, including short or long term suspension or expulsion, may apply based on the outcome of the investigation.

Exemptions Applicable to this Policy

Exemptions to this policy are applicable in certain cases. When these rare exemptions are properly approved and in place, students must only use cell phones and personal electronic communication devices when appropriate and according to the exemption. Cell phone or device use outside of the exemption parameters is not permitted. Cell phones and personal electronic communication devices may be used when:

1. necessary to comply with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act). Viable alternatives to using a cell phone or personal electronic communication device should be explored and implemented in collaboration with the student's family. Allowable exemptions for cell phones and personal electronic communication devices must be written into the 504, IEP, and/or individualized health care plans. The Director of Special Education must approve all exemptions;

2. a student with a disability or an English Learner (EL) student with a documented language barrier is determined to require access to technology to ensure the provision of a free and appropriate public education, the student's IEP, Limited English Proficiency plan, or 504 teams will collaborate to consider appropriate identification and use of assistive technology to support a student's unique needs;
3. when students are attending non-instructional after school events/activities;
4. when students have a documented medical exception approved by the principal and school nurse;
5. when students are riding the school bus, as long as such use is not disruptive or distracting; students must use earbuds or headphones when listening to music or watching videos with sound while on the school bus.

When students are allowed to use cell phones and personal electronic communication devices per the exemptions of this policy, steps should be taken by staff members to ensure students are not stigmatized or have undue attention placed upon them.

Emergency Communications

RCPS has ***school-based emergency plans*** which outline required safety planning in a crisis or emergency situations and must be reviewed, revised, and adopted annually. RCPS coordinates with local law enforcement to develop these plans and uses the best practices outlined by the current Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services School Division Guide for Crisis Management Planning. These best practices include staff training, student drills, and parent re-unification and communication plans, as well as also ensuring that parents of students who are directly impacted or critically injured are contacted directly versus through a mass communication or recording. Therefore, while we understand the desire for parents to directly communicate with students during school, it is critical that during an emergency situation, students are focused, paying attention, and following the safety directions of their teacher, principal, other school personnel, or law enforcement. School and law enforcement personnel can better provide for the safety of students when students give their undivided attention to these authority figures in emergency situations.