



Personal Electronic Devices

Guidelines for Students and Parents

Personal electronic devices continue to be a distraction for students and their learning. Students of all ages are bringing their personal electronic devices into the school building on a daily basis.

- A **personal electronic device** is a wireless electronic communication device such as a telephone, personal digital assistant, paging device, text-messaging device, or other device similar in function that can be used to wirelessly communicate with another person. Cell phones and smart watches are the top two personal electronic devices found on campuses in Barnwell County School District.
- A **personal electronic device accessory** includes any wired or wireless accessory or wearable technology that connects to a personal electronic device and any other accessory commonly used in conjunction with a personal electronic device. Headphones and earbuds are the top two personal electronic device accessories found on campuses in Barnwell County School District.

Research has shown that cell phone usage at school distracts students from learning. In fact, a recent *Cell Phone Use in Schools* survey conducted in June of 2024 found that 95% of South Carolina teachers lose daily instructional time due to cell phone use or related distractions in the classroom. While disruption of the learning environment is the number one reason a personal electronic device policy has been put into place, other areas of concern exist, including but not limited to cheating on assessments, violating the privacy rights of students who are minors, and bullying.

Guideline of Use

Prior to a student entering the school building, his or her personal electronic device(s) must be shut off and stored out of sight. Personal electronic devices are not allowed in the hallways, classrooms, gym, library, or cafeteria. In fact, students may only use their personal electronic devices before and after school.

While on school buses, personal electronic devices must be shut off and stored out of sight (i.e., in pockets, bags, backpacks, etc.). All personal electronic devices will be confiscated, including devices discovered during searches of reasonable suspicion.

If a student needs to contact their parent or guardian, he or she may ask for permission to go to the office to make emergency phone calls only. In cases of an emergency, parents or guardians are asked to call the school. School personnel are proficient at relaying messages from parents/guardians to students during the appropriate time.

Consequences

Age-appropriate consequences for students who violate the personal electronic device policy are listed in the student code of conduct.

1. The personal electronic device will be confiscated and only returned to a parent or guardian.
2. The student will be disciplined according to the student code of conduct.
3. If a student refuses to submit their personal electronic device, he or she will receive out-of-school suspension.

Additional Guidance

- If a student refuses to give the device to an administrator, the infraction moves to the next level.
- An electronic device in a student's pocket is considered stored.
- The policy applies to smartwatches when the student is using the device to communicate.

Important Notes

South Carolina Department of Education Division of Legal Affairs

In late May (of 2024), State Superintendent of Education, Ellen Weaver, sent out a brief survey to all certified teachers regarding the use of cell phones in school. Hundreds of responses poured in within the first ten minutes: of the over 50,000 emails delivered, just shy of 10,000 educators completed the survey, a massive 20% response rate (standard survey responses average between 3-5%). As you can imagine, teachers had plenty of meaningful feedback to share about how cell phones impact their classrooms. A few survey highlights:

- 83% of high school teachers indicated that cell phones distract students daily in their classrooms.
- 92% of teachers support a policy limiting cell phone access, with 55% supporting a complete ban during the school day.
- Major themes that recurred in teacher comments included behavioral and social issues, cyberbullying, cheating/academic dishonesty, teacher morale, and lost learning.
- Perhaps most alarming was data surrounding the amount of instructional time missed due to cell phone distractions. The federal chronic absenteeism threshold (for when a student is absent from school) is set at 10% of instructional time missed. Applying that same methodology to teachers' estimations of learning time lost due to cell phones would mean that between 55-70% of students are "chronically absent" (while still being physically present) due to cell phone distractions.