

Good evening. First, I'd like to congratulate Dr. Jason Carmel on his new role within Columbia University's Irving Medical Center, and thank him for his service in his old role as Rye Neck's Board of Education President-- both notably working for children. We recognize that board service is a volunteer job with heavy responsibility that requires a great time commitment, and the presidency even more so. I appreciate his partnership and dedication to the students of our district. That mantle has now been shouldered by President Erica Wagner and I also congratulate and thank her for taking on this important leadership position.

Several weeks ago Governor Hochul proposed legislation that would restrict cell phone use in New York's public schools. The proposal includes "internet enabled devices" such as cell phones and smart watches, but excludes school-provided devices. If passed, this plan would take effect in September of 2025 and it would encompass the whole instructional school day and all areas of campus. The Governor says the law "allows schools to develop their own plans for storing smartphones during the day — giving administrators and teachers the flexibility to do what works best for their buildings and students."

While not a ban, per se, we would need to make some changes. The rules are generally consistent with Rye Neck's rules for Kindergarten through grade 8, where devices are not allowed during the school day and we are about to adopt a clarified version of our policy 5695 that describes what we do. But if passed, the law would affect our high school, so we will have a project that will require student and parent input and the expertise of our staff.

We meet most of the requirements already, including having main office phones for family contact and lockers to store student property. There are exceptions listed, including cell phone use if authorized by a teacher for an educational purpose; for a medical purpose; for translation; in an emergency; or as part of an IEP or 504. Our task will be to consider practical means to manage cell phone possession at school. We have already surveyed students and staff and will do so with parents, and we have a HS student contingent attending the Westchester County Youth Leadership's Digital Detox conference in March.

The legislature should vote on that and the rest of the Governor's Executive Budget Proposal next month.