

# **WEST VALLEY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRACTION-FREE POLICY**

## **BACKGROUND**

Governor Hochul pursued the Distraction-Free School initiative after engaging in a statewide listening tour with teachers, parents, and students, gathering findings to support the need for greater cellphone restriction in our schools.

Her report "[More Learning, Less Scrolling: Creating Distraction-Free Schools](#)" includes:

- Smartphones distract students and inhibit learning and creativity.
- Phone-free environments do not compromise student safety.
- Phone-free environments support the mental health of students and teachers.
- Open communication and direct guidance for all stakeholders is key for successful implementation.
- Schools must address any parent concerns about staying in contact with their children during the day.
- An effective distraction-free policy must focus on the entire school day, rather than solely on time in the classroom.
- Schools can strengthen their distraction-free environment by connecting more students with in-person engagement like clubs, sports, arts, and other programming.

## **NYS DISTRACTION-FREE SCHOOL LAW**

No unsanctioned use of smartphones and other internet-enabled personal devices on school grounds in K-12 schools for the entire school day (from “bell to bell”), including classroom time and other settings like lunch and study hall periods.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Internet-enabled devices:** Internet-enabled devices include any smartphone, tablet, smartwatch, or other device capable of connecting to the internet and enabling access to content on the internet, including social media applications. Internet-enabled devices do not include the following:

- Non-internet enabled devices such as cellular phones or other communication devices not capable of connecting to the internet or enabling the individual to access content on the internet.
- Internet-enabled devices supplied by the school district, charter school, or board of cooperative educational services (BOCES) that are used for an educational purpose.

**School Day:** The school day shall mean the entirety of every instructional day, during all instructional and non-instructional time. This includes homeroom periods, lunch, recess, study halls, and passing time.

**School Grounds:** The school grounds shall mean in or within any building, structure, athletic playing field, playground, or land contained within the real property boundary line of a district elementary, intermediate, junior high, vocational, or high school, a charter school, or a BOCES facility.

## **PROCEDURES:**

To best implement New York State's Distraction Free Schools law, the West Valley Central School District strongly recommends and encourages students to keep their internet-enabled devices at home.

### **For students in Pre-K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade who bring their devices to school:**

The device must be powered off and stored in the students' designated storage area.

- For Pre-K-4<sup>th</sup> grade students this area is the cubbies within the classroom
- For 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, this area is designated as a coat room.

**For students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade who bring their devices to school:**

- Students will deposit their devices into a secure “cell phone” locker which will be located outside of the main office.
- The devices must be powered off and deposited into their designated locker slot before the start of the homeroom period.
- Students may retrieve their device from the secure “cell phone” locker at the end of the day.
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**For students in 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade who bring their devices to school:**

- Students must have their devices powered off and stored in their locker before homeroom until the end of the school day.
- Attendance at BOCES CTE programs is included in the bell-to-bell definition.

*\*Internet-enabled devices on field trips will be determined on a case-by-case basis.*

**EXCEPTIONS:**

- Authorization by a teacher, principal, or the school district, charter school, or BOCES for a specific educational purpose.
- Instances necessary for the management of a student’s healthcare.
- Usage in the event of an emergency.
- Usage of translation services.
- Usage on a case-by-case basis, upon review and determination by a school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor, for a student caregiver who is routinely responsible for the care and wellbeing of a family member.
- Or, where required by law.
- Additionally, the policy may not prohibit the use of an internet-enabled device where it is included in the student’s individualized education program (IEP) or section 504 plans.

**CONTACTING STUDENTS OR FAMILIES:**

- Families may contact their children anytime throughout the day by calling the main office and requesting to speak with their child.
- Students may contact their families at any time using a phone in the classroom, main office, nurse’s office, or counseling center.

## **PROGRESSIVE RESPONSE TO DISTRACTION-FREE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION:**

**1st offense:** Device turned into the main office and student may retrieve at the end of the day.

**2nd offense:** Detention and a parent/guardian must pick up the device at their earliest convenience.

**3rd offense:** Extended Detention and a parent/guardian must pick up the device at their earliest convenience.

**4th and/or subsequent offenses:** A progressive discipline approach will be utilized that may include but not limited to parent conferences, mandatory device turn-in at the beginning of each day, etc.

\*Refusal of a student to turn in a device is insubordination and may result in additional consequences.

## **ANNUAL REPORTING**

Beginning September 1st, 2026, each district, charter school, and BOCES must publish a report on its website summarizing enforcement of the policy during the previous school year. The report must include the following:

- Non-identifiable demographic data of students who have faced disciplinary actions for non-compliance, and
- An analysis of any demographic disparities in enforcement of the policy.

If statistically significant enforcement disparities are identified, the report must include a mitigation action plan.