

# Distraction Free School Policy

## *Update*

Board of Education Meeting  
July 22, 2025



# Why We Embrace Distraction-Free Learning

While this is now a legal requirement that we must follow in NYS, our commitment goes beyond simply following the law. A distraction-free environment supports our goal to maximize the potential of each student, every day:

## **Focus to Achieve**

- Deepen engagement and critical thinking
- Build stamina for learning and academic success

## **Wellness to Thrive**

- Lower stress and social pressure
- Support mental health and healthy tech habits

## **Connect to Belong**

- Strengthen face-to-face relationships
- Foster authentic connection and communication


## **Safety to Grow**

- Minimize disruptions and inappropriate use
- Promote digital responsibility and safe boundaries



# Timeline of Policy Development

- This ban is law, not just Orchard Park Policy
- First read of draft policy was during the June 10 Board of Education meeting
- On June 11, OPCSD sent out a feedback form to receive consultation from stakeholders
- OPCSD received over 600 responses



ORCHARD PARK CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

**New Distraction-Free Schools Law & Personal Technology Policy Feedback**


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**We Want Your Feedback: New Distraction-Free Schools Law & Personal Technology Policy**

New York State recently introduced legislation requiring schools to ban personal technology use during the school day starting in the 2025-2026 school year. The state's goal is to create distraction-free learning environments and support student well-being.

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. This form is designed to gather feedback from families, students, and staff as we implement updates to our Personal Technology Policy in alignment with the [New York State Distraction-Free Schools Law \(2025\)](#).

Please remember: *We are consulting to gather insights and perspectives. While all feedback will be thoughtfully reviewed, not all suggestions may result in changes to the policy.*

 [Click Here to Access the Distraction Free School DRAFT Policy OPCSD](#)





## Feedback Provided:

### In Favor of the Ban (approx. 55–60%)

- Primarily **elementary and middle school parents, teachers, and some high school parents.**
- **Support centers on:**
  - Reduced distractions for learning.
  - Improved student social interaction and focus.
  - Addressing discipline and safety concerns tied to inappropriate phone use.
  - Mental health concerns (anxiety, bullying, screen time).





## Feedback Provided:

### Opposed to the Ban (approx. 30–35%)

- Primarily **high school parents, high school students**, and some **middle school parents**.
- **Concerns focus on:**
  - Student and parent safety in emergency situations.
  - Overreach by NYS rather than a local decision.
  - Fears that removing phones will increase student anxiety or reduce personal agency.
  - Belief that students should be taught responsibility, not punished collectively.

### Neutral/Mixed Views (approx. 5–10%)

- Many expressed support for a distraction-free environment **during instruction**, but not for **total prohibition or removal from student possession**.



# Key Areas of Disagreement

## 1. Safety and Emergencies

- Many respondents (parents and students alike) emphasized the importance of **immediate access to phones in emergencies**, including:
  - Lockdowns or threats.
  - Mental health crises.
  - Changes in after-school plans or transportation.
  - Medical needs (e.g., diabetic monitoring apps).

## 2. Equity vs. Practicality

- Concerns that not all students have Chromebooks or consistent teacher rules.
- Frustration over **inconsistency of past enforcement**, leading to skepticism about the effectiveness of the new policy.





# Our Plan

- **Pre- K - Grade 5** - phones, smartwatches, and any internet enabled devices will be handled as they have been in the past. Off and away during the instructional day at the direction of the building principal and teacher.
- **Middle School** - consistent with how we have handled internet enabled devices in the past - off and away in student lockers.
- **High School** - locked pouches that students will carry with them during the day. This is due to the need for student access to backpacks and the many students that leave the building during the instructional day for programming (BOCES) or Open Campus for seniors in good standing.



# What is a Pouch?

- A lockable pouch that is designed to create phone-free spaces.
- Students place their phones inside the pouch at the start of the school day, and the pouch is magnetically locked.
- The pouches remain locked and with the student until the end of the school day, when they are unlocked using a magnetic base.
- If a student has an emergency that requires phone use, they are to talk with an adult and follow direction on if/when/how to access their phone.
- If a phone is required for instruction at the discretion of the teacher, students will remove the phone from the pouch.
- Pouch will be provided by the District (NYS is providing funding)







# Frequently Asked Questions

- **What happens if a student violates this policy?**
  - Progressive discipline following our Code of Conduct
    - Warnings
    - Confiscation of phone and returned to parent
    - Continued violations will lead to progressive disciplinary action
- **Can Smartwatches be worn?**
  - No - any device that has the potential to connect to the internet is not allowed per law.
- **What do I do if I need to reach my child?**
  - Contact the Main Office - this information will be shared with all families with our welcome back information.
- **This Ban Is Law, Not Just Orchard Park Policy:**
  - Several stakeholders were unclear or frustrated with the state mandate. This is a law and we have an **obligation to implement**, while **tailoring it locally**, as we have done.





# Frequently Asked Questions

- **Are their exemptions to the law and policy?**
  - Personal technology use by students is permitted during the school day for instructional purposes and/or in approved locations only. Teachers will indicate when and if classroom use is acceptable.
  - Use of devices for translation, emergency purposes, or to manage healthcare needs is permitted.
  - Device use that is part of a student's IEP or 504 Plan is also permitted, and the policy may not prohibit such use.
  - Additionally, on a case-by-case basis, use may be authorized for a student who is routinely responsible for the care and well-being of a family member, upon review and determination the district.

***Any questions/concerns regarding an exemption for your child should go to your child's principal and/or counselor***



# Final Read and Approval

- Reminder- much of what we need to have in policy is law
- Give flexibility to building administrators in implementation, but consistency at each level
- Day to day operations are regulation, not policy

