

7/28/25

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Technology has undoubtedly changed the landscape of parenting and education. It has created many opportunities, as well as unprecedented challenges for parents and educators as we try to navigate our new world. For students it has sparked a mental health crisis, fractured attention spans and contributed to a wave of learning and relational challenges.

As educators we strive to impact the lives of our students in positive ways. We serve as mentors, guides and inspirations. Providing a healthy community where students can learn the academic and life skills needed to transition to healthy, happy and thriving adults has always been at the core of our school community and our role as educators.

Phones have impaired our ability to provide a positive and safe environment for all students where learning, focus, safety, community and belonging are prioritized. The presence of personal devices such as cell phones, earbuds and smartwatches has undermined the educational experience and the core values we strive to uphold.

Our jobs have been, and always will be, to put the education and well-being of our students above all else and therefore we will be moving to a bell-to-bell phone-free school policy. This means that phones must be turned off and stored away for the entire school day. Schools that have implemented all day policies are seeing positive classroom changes such as increased focus, attention, comprehension, engagement, less cheating and improved academic performance.

Additionally, teachers and staff report enhanced face-to-face peer interactions, reduced cyberbullying, fewer fights, and a decrease in social media-induced drama. Students also experience less stress and anxiety.

Attached please find our new phone-free policy. We know you may have some questions or concerns, so we are including important information that will help make this a smooth transition and ease any concern you may have.

We also understand that there will be situations when you need to contact your child during the school day. Parents and guardians can call the main office to have a message delivered to their student. Please note there are also exceptions for students that require a cell phone for medical needs.

We are excited to move forward with this shared mission to provide the best educational experience possible for our students. As parents and guardians, you are a vital piece of our community, and we look forward to working together to create the healthy educational environment and experience that all of our students deserve.

Sincerely,

Glenda Sheffield, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

# JICJ PROHIBITION OF PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

*Issued 12/24*

The purpose of this policy is to create a phone-free school environment that fosters a positive learning experience free from electronic distractions. By prohibiting the use of personal electronic devices during the school day, this policy aims to provide an environment that enhances focus and engagement, allowing students to develop the college and career-ready skills outlined in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. Students will have more opportunities to engage in meaningful interactions, collaborate with peers, and cultivate the essential skills necessary for success in college, careers, and life.

This policy has been developed in compliance with the General Appropriations Bill, H. 5100 of 2024, Proviso 1.103 and is applicable to grades kindergarten through twelve for the 2024-2025 school year.

**Proviso 1.103** (SDE: Anti-Bullying/School Safety) To receive state funds allocated for State Aid to Classrooms, a school district shall implement a policy adopted by the State Board of Education that prohibits access to personal electronic communication devices by students during the school day. For purposes of this provision, a personal electronic communication device is considered to be a device not authorized for classroom use by a student, utilized to access the Internet, wi-fi, or cellular telephone signals.

## I. Definitions:

- A. "Personal electronic device," hereinafter referred to as "device," means any device utilized to access the internet, wi-fi, cellular telephone signals, or to capture images or video. This includes, but is not limited to, cell phones, smart watches, tablets, and gaming devices.
- B. "Personal Electronic Device accessories," hereinafter referred to as "device accessories," include any wired or wireless accessory or wearable technology that connects to a device and any other accessory commonly used in conjunction with a personal electronic device.
- C. "School day" is defined as the period of time that a student is present on the school campus from their arrival (i.e., tardy bell) until afternoon dismissal at the end of the instructional day. This policy may also apply to school buses, field trips, and athletic events. The applicability of this regulation to these activities will be determined by the school district.
- D. "Access" is defined as viewing, holding, wearing, or otherwise using a device for the purpose of communication, internet access, gaming, recording, or any other function commonly associated with devices. During the school day, devices should be powered off and stored as directed by the school district. Exceptions granted for medical necessity, authorized for classroom use, or other authorized reasons should be in writing and are not considered violations of this definition.
- E. "Authorized for Classroom Use" is defined as the use of a personal electronic device that is explicitly approved by the District Superintendent or his/her designee in writing. The approval must include alignment with a standards-aligned educational objective that cannot be reasonably achieved using district-owned devices. Students must be provided with clear instructions on the appropriate use of devices and ensure that their use aligns with the approved educational objectives. The District Superintendent or his/her designee may revoke approval at any time if it is determined that their use does not meet the intended educational objectives or is causing disruptions.

## II. Policy Implementation and Enforcement:

- A. During the school day, students are prohibited from accessing their personal electronic

devices, unless authorized for classroom use. Students may not wear or access device accessories during the school day. Students must store their devices and device accessories in lockers, backpacks, or otherwise as directed by the school district during the school day. Districts may forbid student possession of devices and device accessories on school property.

- B. If explicitly required by a student's IEP, Medical Plan, or 504 plan, the student shall be allowed to access their personal electronic device for medically or educationally necessary purposes described and required for administration of the IEP, Medical Plan or 504 plan.
- C. A student who is a member of a volunteer firefighting organization or emergency organization may be authorized to carry a device with written permission from the District Superintendent or his/her designee.
- D. If a student violates the preceding rules during the school day, the student will be subject to progressive consequences in the student code of conduct and disciplinary enforcement procedures.

Cf. JICDA

Adopted 12/17/24

Legal References:

S.C. Code of Laws, 1976, as amended:

Section [59-63-280](#) - Requires board to adopt a policy on student use of electronic devices.

General Appropriations Bill, H. 5100 of 2024

Proviso 1.103(SDE: Anti-Bullying/School Safety)

**Hampton County School District**

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# Introduction

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Dear Friends,

**Addiction.** It is a challenge to acknowledge... and an even bigger challenge to overcome. Yet when speaking with South Carolina students, they freely admit that they are addicted to their cell phones. (And if we're being honest, we adults far too often are as well!)

An uncontrolled, society-wide experiment has been unleashed on children and their still-developing brains in the form of the smartphone. While almost always connected through technology, our students have never been more disconnected from their studies, mental and physical health, and even meaningful relationships with their peers, families, and other trusted adults. Dr. Jonathan Haidt, in his book *The Anxious Generation*, provides data-based evidence of the damage this has caused.

The good news, however, is that we now have a meaningful opportunity to help our students break this addiction and free themselves to focus on real life: their academic journey, their friends, and their online and physical safety. It bears emphasizing that in the event of a school-based emergency, it is critical that a student be fully focused on the adults who are directing them to safety, not distracted by a device!

While South Carolina's phone-free school day policy does not ban phones from school campuses, it does require that they be off and away for the entirety of the school day. In doing so, we free teachers to focus on instruction and give our students a new lease on life. Implementing this policy successfully will require strong communication between administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students. But take heart: it has already been done by schools right here in South Carolina. And I'm confident the reward – students focused on their future – will be well worth the work! I hope this toolkit proves helpful on this shared journey.

Focused on SC's Bright Education Future,



Ellen E. Weaver  
State Superintendent of Education



Students of Rock Hill High School - Rock Hill, SC

“Kids are talking to each other again. Our school's culture has improved because of that, everyone is present with each other. Before it was just you and your phone. It's been very positive for us.”  
- Tim Sawyer, Assistant Principal  
Rock Hill High School

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## The Why

The purpose of this policy is to create a phone-free school environment that fosters a positive learning experience free from electronic distractions.

By prohibiting the use of personal electronic devices during the school day, this policy aims to enhance focus and engagement, allowing students to develop the college and career-ready skills outlined in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. Students will have more opportunities to engage in meaningful interactions, collaborate with peers, and cultivate the essential skills necessary for success in college, career, and life.



**The goal in Orangeburg County is to ensure that our environments are for students to learn and for teachers to teach. This policy allows our district to keep the main thing, the main thing.**

**- Dr. Shawn Foster, Superintendent  
Orangeburg County School District**

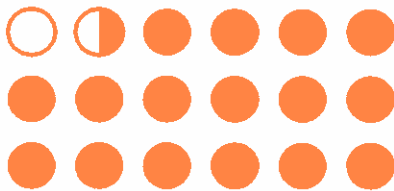


# Research Infographic

## 97%

**OF STUDENTS  
USE PHONES  
DURING SCHOOL**

An average of 43 minutes per day, spent primarily on social media, YouTube, and gaming



Common Sense Media

**SOCIAL MEDIA IS  
NEARLY UNIVERSAL**

## 40%

of 8 - 12 year olds are on social media

Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

## 95%

of teenagers are on social media

Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

TEENS SPEND NEARLY  
**FIVE HOURS** A DAY  
ON SOCIAL MEDIA APPS



Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

## 3+ HOURS

**PER DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

doubles the risk of poor mental health including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety

Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

NEA Poll

## 83% OF TEACHERS

**support an all day  
phone-free policy**

National Education Association



## 72%

**OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS  
REPORT CELLPHONES ARE A  
MAJOR DISTRACTION IN THE  
CLASSROOM**

The Mere Presence of a Cell Phone May be Distracting

## 50%+

**of kids get  
237 NOTIFICATIONS  
PER DAY**

**Some receive as many as**

## 4,500

**EVERY DAY**

**23% occur during school**

Common Sense Media



**Phones prevent face to  
face communication**

Research suggests that face-to-face communications are linked to better mental health

Psychology today

**Students not using their  
phones during class wrote  
down 62% more information**



They also scored a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple choice test

The Impact of Mobile Phone Usage on Student Learning

**RATE OF SCHOOL  
LONELINESS  
HAS DOUBLED  
SINCE 2012**

Worldwide Increases in Adolescent Loneliness

**SINCE 2010**

**134% ↑**

**Increase in anxiety**

**106% ↑**

**Increase in depression**

The Anxious Generation



**OF TEENS WITH THE HIGHEST SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE**  
rate their overall mental health as poor or very poor

American Psychological Association

**35%**

**of teens admit to using their cellphone to**

**CHEAT**

Common Sense Media

**22%**

**of high school students have SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED SUICIDE IN THE PAST YEAR**

**10%**

**HAVE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE IN THE PAST YEAR**

CDC, 2023

Adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were more than

**FOUR TIMES**

as likely to report thoughts of

**SUICIDE AND ATTEMPTS**

as those who didn't

National Institutes of Health



**Each additional hour of total screen time increases the odds of suicidal behavior**

Science Direct

**STEEP DROP IN BULLYING**

**46% & 43%**  
of girls of boys

**experienced a reduction of bullying after smartphone bans were enacted**

Smartphone Bans, Student Outcomes and Mental Health

**PORNOGRAPHY EXPOSURE**

**1/3 OF ALL TEENS**

**reported that they have been exposed to pornography during the school day**



Common Sense Media

**Youth reporting LONELINESS**

**are also more likely to drop out of school at the age of 16**

Loneliness During the School Years



**OF TEACHERS SAY ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IS A PROBLEM IN PUBLIC K-12 SCHOOLS**

National Education Association

**87%**

**of teachers said bullying is a problem in K-12 schools**

**34%**

**of middle school teachers call bullying a major problem**

National Education Association



**"BRAIN DRAIN"**

**The mere presence of one's own smartphone reduces available cognitive capability**

Brain Drain

# Benefits of SC's Free to Focus Policy

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Phone-Free Schools Movement's in depth discussions with administrators who have effectively implemented phone-free policies have consistently highlighted the same positive outcomes. Below are some of the tangible benefits noted by these administrators:

- **Fewer distractions:** Teachers report improved focus, attention, and comprehension leading to better skills and grades.
- **Less cyberbullying**
- **Fewer fights and social media related drama:** Administrators report spending less time on discipline referrals.
- **Increased engagement:** Students engage more with their peers and teachers both in and outside of the classroom.
- **Improved attendance:** Students aren't texting their parents to call them out of school.
- **Boosted efficiency:** Teachers report being ahead of schedule on their lesson plans because they aren't spending time policing phones, and because students are completing classwork and assignments faster.
- **More reading:** Phone-free schools report an increase in books checked out from their libraries.
- **Improved teacher morale and retention**
- **Less mid-class absenteeism:** Students request to use the restroom less frequently and trips to the restroom are shorter because students aren't using that time to be on their phones.
- **More vibrant lunchrooms:** Lunchrooms in a phone-free schools are markedly louder because students are having face-to-face conversations with their peers.
- **Less cheating**
- **Less reported stress among students:** School counselors are seeing a decrease in the rate of mental health-related student visits.

In summary, a bell-to-bell phone-free policy provides students with an average of seven hours each school day to be fully present and free from the pressures and harms of phones and social media. This policy helps them restore connections and reclaim a critical period in their development.



# SC State Board of Education's Model Policy

Adopted on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024

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## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to create a phone-free school environment that fosters a positive learning experience free from electronic distractions. By prohibiting the use of personal electronic devices during the school day, this policy aims to provide an environment that enhances focus and engagement, allowing students to develop the college and career-ready skills outlined in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. Students will have more opportunities to engage in meaningful interactions, collaborate with peers, and cultivate the essential skills necessary for success in college, careers, and life.

The Model Policy Prohibiting the Use of Personal Electronic Devices during the School Day has been developed in compliance with the General Appropriations Bill, H. 5100 of 2024, Proviso 1.103.

***Proviso 1.103. (SDE: Anti-Bullying/School Safety) To receive state funds allocated for State Aid to Classrooms, a school district shall implement a policy adopted by the State Board of Education that prohibits access to personal electronic communication devices by students during the school day. For purposes of this provision, a personal electronic communication device is considered to be a device not authorized for classroom use by a student, utilized to access the Internet, wi-fi, or cellular telephone signals.***

This proviso requires each local school district to adopt a policy adopted by the State Board of Education that prohibits access to personal electronic communication devices by students during the school day. This model policy must be adopted by districts and is applicable to grades kindergarten through twelve for the 2024-2025 school year. The local school board must ensure that this policy is included in the school district's publication of the comprehensive rules, procedures, and standards of conduct for schools and in the student handbook. Administrative support for teachers is critical for this or any policy to be successfully implemented.

School Districts may, but are not required to, publish additional guidance or administrative rules as may be necessary to implement this policy with fidelity. Any previous device or cell phone policies in conflict with this policy are superseded by this model policy.

# SC State Board of Education's Model Policy

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## Definitions

### ***"Personal Electronic Device"...***

hereinafter referred to as "device," means any device utilized to access the internet, wi-fi, cellular telephone signals, or to capture images or video. This includes, but is not limited to, cell phones, smart watches, tablets, and gaming devices.

### ***"Personal Electronic Device Accessories"...***

hereinafter referred to as "device accessories," include any wired or wireless accessory or wearable technology that connects to a device and any other accessory commonly used in conjunction with a personal electronic device.

### ***"School Day"...***

is defined as the period of time that a student is present on the school campus from their arrival (i.e., tardy bell) until afternoon dismissal at the end of the instructional day. This policy may also apply to school buses, field trips, and athletic events. The applicability of this regulation to these activities will be determined by the school district.

### ***"Access"...***

is defined as viewing, holding, wearing, or otherwise using a device for the purpose of communication, internet access, gaming, recording, or any other function commonly associated with devices. During the school day, devices should be powered off and stored as directed by the school district. Exceptions granted for medical necessity, authorized for classroom use, or other authorized reasons should be in writing and are not considered violations of this definition.

### ***"Authorized for Classroom Use"...***

is defined as the use of a personal electronic device that is explicitly approved by the District Superintendent or his/her designee in writing. The approval must include alignment with a standards-aligned educational objective that cannot be reasonably achieved using district-owned devices. Students must be provided with clear instructions on the appropriate use of devices and ensure that their use aligns with the approved educational objectives. The District Superintendent or his/her designee may revoke approval at any time if it is determined that their use does not meet the intended educational objectives or is causing disruptions.

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**It gives kids the opportunity to realize they don't need to be buried in their phones to be social.**

**- Jennifer Tomcheck, Parent  
Rock Hill High School**

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# SC State Board of Education's Model Policy

## Policy Implementation and Enforcement

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**1**

During the school day, students are prohibited from accessing their personal electronic devices, unless authorized for classroom use. Students may not wear or access device accessories during the school day. Students must store their devices and device accessories in lockers, backpacks, or otherwise as directed by the school district during the school day. Districts may forbid student possession of devices and device accessories on school property.

**2**

If explicitly required by a student's IEP, Medical Plan, or 504 plan, the student shall be allowed to access their personal electronic device for medically or educationally necessary purposes described and required for administration of the IEP, Medical Plan or 504 Plan.

**3**

A student who is a member of a volunteer firefighting organization or emergency organization may be authorized to carry a device with written permission from the District Superintendent or his/her designee.

**4**

If a student violates the preceding rules during the school day, the student will be subject to progressive consequences in the student code of conduct and disciplinary enforcement procedures.

**5**

Before the expiration or codification into state law of Proviso 1.103 (General Appropriations Bill, H. 5100 of 2024), a survey will be administered to all superintendents and other applicable personnel soliciting input and seeking what worked best and what can be improved upon within the proviso prior to the 2025-2026 school year. *This survey will be administered prior to April 30, 2025.*



# Sample FAQ

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The decision to restrict cell phone use in schools stems from a growing concern and substantial data showing that these devices can be a significant distraction that hinder students' ability to concentrate on their studies, interact with peers, and fully participate in classroom activities.

Additionally, schools aim to create a space where students are encouraged to develop essential social skills and minimize the potential for cyberbullying or inappropriate use of technology.

With limited exceptions, the policy adopted by the South Carolina State Board of Education prohibits students from using, wearing, viewing, or accessing cell phones and similar devices while on school property from their arrival at school to afternoon dismissal at the end of the instructional day.

The method and location in which the devices must be stored or secured during the school day will be determined by each district considering their unique facilities, personnel, and resources available to implement and enforce the policy in the way most suitable for that district.

This FAQ addresses frequent questions and concerns regarding the cell phone policy, explaining the reasoning behind the policy and how it benefits students and the school community.

## Why is our school adopting a phone-free policy?

Q1

The school day is when students need to be able to focus, learn, interact with each other, build in-person community, and engage with teachers. Study data shows that having a cell phone, even turned off in their backpack, decreases student test scores. A phone and social media free school gives students back many needed opportunities for development.

## What is included in a cell phone and personal electronic device definition?

Q2

- Cell phones (both phones that connect to the internet and non-internet connected phones that send and receive text messages, and make phone calls)
- Personal electronic devices such as electronic tablets and video games
- AirPods, earbuds and Bluetooth connected headphones
- Smartwatches and fitness trackers that connect to the internet

*additional definitions can be found on page 9 of this toolkit.*

## How do I contact my student during the school day?

(i.e. schedule change, after-school activity)

Q3

Parents and/or guardians who need to contact their student during the school day and or change the pick-up time of your child, may do so by calling the main office. Contacting your child via their cell phone during the school day distracts them from their studies and the needed in-person interaction with their teachers and peers. By having 24/7 access, we prevent growth opportunities that our children need educationally, socially, and developmentally. If students text their parents every time they have a question, they miss the opportunity to think for themselves and develop problem solving skills.



## What if my child needs their phone in case of a crisis or lockdown at the school?

School security experts say phones can make children less safe in crisis situations for the following reasons:

- Student use of cell phones during an unfolding emergency can distract their attention from safety and emergency response directions being given by school staff.
- Cell phone use by students can hamper rumor control and, in doing so, disrupt and delay effective public safety personnel response.
- Cell phone use by students can impede public safety response by accelerating parental and community arrival at the scene of an emergency during times when officials may be attempting to evacuate students to another site.
- Victims and worried family members trying to get through can jam communications, interfering with first responders.

Our goal is to keep students focused on the adult getting them to safety before they access their phones.

## How will I be notified if there is an emergency?

Each district has a comprehensive emergency plan in place based on the needs of their schools. Parents will be notified and updated in a timely manner regarding any emergency. Parents naturally worry about the potential for a worst-case scenario, but that focus makes it easy to overlook the everyday negative impacts that smart phones are having on students and their education. Furthermore, even in a worst-case scenario, the presence of cell phones can create significant safety concerns in the event of an emergency.

Contrary to popular assumptions, student cell phones often make the education environment less safe both physically and emotionally. Many schools and districts experience disruptive and unsafe learning environments in part because of student phone use, which is linked to distraction, bullying, physical violence, and hoax security threats.

It is understandable that families want to be able to quickly contact their students or to have their students be able to call for help or contact family members in an emergency. But students and families calling and texting one another during an emergency is more likely to decrease student safety, not enhance it, during a crisis or even during normal school operations:

- Cell phones and social media can be used to spread threats and coordinate acts of violence.
- Use of cell phones by students can accelerate the spread of misinformation, rumors, and fear.
- In an emergency lockdown situation, cell phones could ring or vibrate audibly at a time when students need to be quiet for safety reasons.
- Students on cell phones are less focused on listening to adults for directions on how to respond and stay safe.
- Cell phones can lead to families arriving at the school and make it more difficult for First Responders to facilitate safe evacuation and tactical and emergency response.
- Cell phones can delay or hinder timely and efficient family-student reunification and potentially put families into a zone of harm.

The proposed policy will not remove all cell phones from schools. Employees including school administrators, teachers, and crisis team members will have cell phones that they can use as an emergency management resource tool. In addition, school staff will have access to communication devices to contact the school office should emergency conditions arise. Finally, students are not prohibited from accessing their phones in the event of an emergency once they are safe.

For more information: [National School Safety and Security Services](#)

## **Why can't teachers be in charge of the class and collect the phones?**

**Q7**

Children need consistency and one policy for the entire school benefits all students. Teachers benefit by regaining classroom instructional time instead of having to police phones, as monitoring phones takes time and energy away from teaching and supporting students. If there is a consistently enforced building-wide policy in place then students are less likely to push back on the policy.

## **Why is it important to allow our children to be independent during the school day?**

**Q8**

Students need to be given independence from their parents or guardians during the school day to develop foundational skills. Constant contact can fuel a cycle of anxiety for both students and parents. Research shows encouraging independence fosters a child's self-confidence, resilience, problem-solving ability, and mental health.

## **What if my child has a medical condition that must be monitored by their cell phone?**

**Q9**

This exception must be written into a 504, IEP, or medical plan, and is specific to the need only and still prohibits cell phone use for any other purposes.

## **What if my child has an IEP/504 plan?**

**Q10**

It is extremely rare for a cell phone to be required for an IEP/504 plan. But if the situation does arise, documentation should be provided and the exception is specific to the need only and still prohibits cell phone use for any other purposes.

## **Will it be harder for students to make connections and friends if they are offline all day?**

**Q11**

Social media tends to foster asynchronous interactions leading to greater levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression. In-person socializing forms far stronger connections and supports the development of healthier social and emotional skills.

## **Don't some students benefit from having social media?**

**Q12**

Even for students who use social media for connection, it is still a distraction during school hours. Our goal is to limit use during the school day to minimize disruption and mitigate the potential harms of social media dependency.

## **What if my child is bullied or harassed by a teacher and is unable to capture a video of the incident?**

**Q13**

Any complaint of harassment or bullying occurring inside the school will be taken seriously by school administration. If a student is in a situation where they may feel threatened or unsafe, they are encouraged to quickly contact a trusted adult or authority to prevent further harm and to receive the support they need.

To download the FAQ, please visit <https://ed.sc.gov/freetofocus/>