

Understanding the New "Bell to Bell" Device Ban, "Off and Away All Day"




August 5, 2025

Dear Williamson Central School District Families,

I'm writing to you (again) today to share important information about the new state-mandated "Bell to Bell" Internet-Enabled Device Ban, which goes into effect this fall (2025). This regulation—now part of Education Law Section 2803—requires all public schools across New York State to implement a policy restricting student use of internet-enabled personal devices during the entire school day.

We recognize that this change may bring a range of emotions, questions, and conversations, and we hope the resources below help you better understand the law and how it will be implemented here in Williamson. More importantly, we hope you find this communication helpful as we **partner together** in supporting our students during this transition to an **"off and away all day"** approach to personal device use.

To meet a variety of preferences for engagement, we're offering three options below for reviewing this information:

-  Deep Dive Conversation (Audio Format)
-  Summary Version (TL;DR Overview)
-  Extended Version (Full Letter & Policy Details)

Please choose the version that works best for you and your family's needs. Our goal is to be transparent, accessible, and supportive as best we are able every step of the way.

Deep Dive Conversation Audio: [New NYS "Bell to Bell: Device Ban - Effective Fall 2025](#)

Summary Version: New NYS "Bell to Bell" Device Ban – Effective Fall 2025

- Starting Fall 2025, all NY schools—including WCS—must follow a state-mandated ban on student use of internet-enabled personal devices (smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, etc.) from the first bell to the last bell, across all school grounds. This law (Education Law Section 2803) does not allow opt-outs and applies statewide.
- What's Allowed:

- School-issued devices for learning
 - Devices for health needs, emergencies, legal reasons, or IEP/504 plans
 - Translation and student caregiver cases (approved individually)
- How to Contact Your Child:
 - Call the main office or use other school communication methods
 - Students may use devices before/after school or on the bus
- Storage During School Day:
 - At home
 - Lockers (grades 3–12, except 5)
 - Classroom storage (PreK–2, grade 5)
 - Main Office secured area
 - Note: Schools not responsible for lost/damaged devices.
- Progressive Discipline for Violations:
 - Warning + phone stored + call home
 - Detention + phone stored in Main Office
 - More detentions + parent pickup required
 - Student Management Plan + possible loss of locker use
- Next Steps:
 - Policy is posted on the WCS website
 - Annual public reports will track enforcement equity
 - Reach out to state lawmakers if you wish to advocate for changes
 - Questions? Contact your school's main office or visit the WCS website.

Extended Version: New NYS “Bell to Bell” Device Ban – Effective Fall 2025

We understand that you may have mixed feelings about this new policy, and we want to assure you that we hear your concerns and perspectives. Please know that **this is a state-mandated law**, not a district recommendation, which means **there is no "opt out" option for our schools or for your families**. Our district, like all others in New York State, is required to comply, and the WCS Board of Education officially approved our [district policy](#) on July 2, 2025.

What Exactly is the "Bell to Bell" Ban?

The core of this new state law requires every school district, charter school, and BOCES to adopt a written policy prohibiting students from using internet-enabled devices on school grounds during the entire school day. To help clarify, here are the official definitions from the state law:

- "Internet-enabled devices" include personal smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, or any other device that can connect to the internet and access content, including social media applications. It's important to note that this ban does NOT include basic cell phones that don't connect to the internet, nor does it apply to school-supplied internet-enabled devices that are used for educational purposes.
- "School Day" means the entirety of the instructional day, including not just class time, but also homeroom, lunch, recess, study halls, and all passing time between classes – essentially, from the first bell to the final bell.
- "School Grounds" refers to any building, athletic field, playground, or land within the school facility's property lines.

Our Preparations and Your Input

We want to reassure you that our district has diligently completed all the required steps to prepare for this new law:

- **Your Voice Mattered:** Before adopting our policy, we consulted with a wide range of local stakeholders, including our staff unions, parents, and students. We held various meetings and an online survey from May through June 2025 to gather your valuable feedback. We truly appreciate the thoughtful questions, concerns, and suggestions you shared throughout this process, especially regarding safety, communication, and storage. We heard from many of you that while limiting classroom distractions is important, concerns exist about emergency contact, flexibility during non-instructional time, and consistent enforcement.
- **Policy Transparency:** Our complete policy is (was) clearly visible and accessible on the district website prior to August 1, 2025. It is available for translation into the 12 most common non-English languages upon request.
- **Support, Not Suspension:** Please note that school districts are prohibited from suspending a student solely for violating this policy. However, it is important to understand that other Code of Conduct infractions which pose an ongoing threat of disruption to the academic process are still subject to disciplinary actions, including suspension.
- **Annual Reporting:** By September 1, 2026, and every year after, we will post a public report on our website detailing how the policy is being enforced. This report will include anonymous data and an analysis of any demographic differences in enforcement. If any significant disparities are found, we will also include a plan to address them.

When Devices CAN Be Used

While the ban is comprehensive, the policy does allow for important exceptions to ensure student well-being and educational needs are met:

- **Educational Purposes:** If a teacher, principal, or the school district authorizes it for a specific learning activity.
- **Healthcare Needs:** When a device is necessary for managing a student's health care.
- **Emergencies:** In the event of an emergency.
- **Translation Services:** For students who need translation assistance.

- **Student Caregivers:** On a case-by-case basis, for students who are caregivers responsible for a family member's well-being. This will be determined after a review by a school social worker, school counselor, or school psychologist.
- **Legal Requirements:** When use is required by law.
- **IEP/504 Plans: Crucially, the policy cannot interfere with a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan.**

Staying Connected: How Parents Can Reach Their Children

We know that one of the biggest concerns for parents is being able to contact your children during the school day, especially in emergencies or for important updates. We want to assure you that several communication options will be available:

- **Main Office Phones:** You can always call the main office at your child's school. Our school staff can relay messages or call your child to the office to speak with you.
- **Classroom Phones:** In emergency situations, direct contact through classroom phones may also be utilized.
- **Written Notes:** You can drop off written notes at the Main Office, and our staff will deliver them to your child.
- **ParentSquare & Website:** We are actively exploring expanded functionality within ParentSquare and an online request mechanism via our website to make communication even easier and more efficient.
- Students will continue to have access to their devices while on the bus during transportation times.
- **Building level administration will provide you with written notice on how to contact your children at the beginning of each school year and upon enrollment.**

Device Storage at School

The state policy requires us to provide one or more methods for students to store their internet-enabled devices on school grounds during the school day. Our proposed on-site storage options include:

- **At Home:** Students and families may opt to keep all personal electronic devices at home!
- **Lockers:** Available for students in grades 3 through 12, excluding grade 5. Many of you suggested this as a practical and secure solution.
- **Classroom Storage Containers:** Designated for our younger students in PreK through grade 2, and for grade 5 students.
- **Main Office Repository:** A secured central storage location, such as a vault, will also be available.

We want to be transparent: **the school is not responsible if a cell phone is lost, stolen, or damaged** while stored on school premises due to this new law.

Implementation and Expectations (Progressive Discipline)

To ensure consistent application across all school buildings and grade levels, our Code of Conduct will include the following progressive disciplinary actions for policy violations:

- **1st Offense:** A warning, the phone will be moved to a designated storage location, and a phone call will be made home.
- **2nd Offense:** A phone call home, the phone will be moved to the Main Office for student pickup at the end of the day, and the student will receive a Lunch/Afterschool/Recess Detention.
- **3rd Offense:** A phone call home, the phone will be moved to the Main Office for parent/guardian pickup at the end of the day, and the student will receive two+ Lunch/Afterschool/Recess Detentions.
- **4th Offense:** A parent/guardian conference will be held, a Student Management Plan will be developed, and the student will receive additional Lunch/Afterschool/Recess Detentions. Student Management Plans may include provisions for indefinite "loss of privilege" around using lockers for device storage.

Building-level administration will work closely with students, faculty, and staff to ensure consistent enforcement. We also recognize the importance of adults modeling appropriate behavior, and the district will provide expectations for teachers and staff regarding their use of cell phones and internet-enabled devices.

Financial Considerations

The state budget has allocated \$13.5 million for implementing these "distraction-free learning policies" statewide. Williamson Central School District will use its modest allocation (less than \$5,000) to purchase signage, storage solutions for grades without lockers, and other related materials. We *anticipate* zero expenditures from our general budget for the implementation of the "Off and Away All Day" ban.

Your Voice Matters: Advocating for Change

We truly appreciate your continued partnership and patience as we navigate and implement this new state law. We understand the diverse perspectives within our community regarding this mandate. While our district is required to comply, we strongly encourage all members of our school community to engage in the democratic process and make your voices heard if you wish to advocate for changes, greater flexibility, or exceptions to the current state regulation.

We urge you to reach out directly to your elected state officials and share your perspective:

• Senator Pamela Helming

◦ District Office: 25 North Street, Canandaigua, NY 14424 | Phone: 315-568-9816 | Fax: 585-393-0825

◦ Albany Office: Legislative Office Building, Room 711B, Albany, NY 12247 | Phone: 518-455-2366

• Assemblyman Brian Manktelow

- District Office: 10 Leach Road, Lyons, NY 14489 | Phone: 315-946-5166 | Fax: 315-946-5229
- Albany Office: LOB 320, Albany, NY 12248 | Phone: 518-455-5655 | Fax: 518-455-5407

Supporting the Transition to "Off and Away All Day"

The District understands that this policy and its rollout requires the partnership and support of all families. We encourage all Marauder families to discuss this policy with their students before the beginning of the school year and to set expectations about how this policy will affect their time at school. We know that the implementation of this policy may be subject to change as new guidance is issued by New York State and as the District navigates the transition to our "Off and Away All Day" policy.

As we enter our last month of summer break it will be helpful for your child(ren) to reduce their screen time in anticipation of spending an entire school day away from their smart devices. Students who continue to maintain long hours on their devices will have a harder time adjusting to a school day without them. Lengthy exposure that is suddenly and drastically reduced can increase stress, agitation, difficulty concentrating and irritability if it isn't tapered off over several weeks.

The following strategies at home support this transition:

- setting screen time limits
- turning off notifications
- establishing tech-free zones
- replacing phone use with hobbies
- tracking your usage (family friendly competition)
- set a schedule - for example, 30 minutes of homework and 10 minute break on their device, or complete a subject to earn a device break
- storing and charging devices in a central location outside the bedroom/sleep space

The following resources support these recommendations and offer more detailed information to support you and your family.

- [Be a Role Model: 4 Ways to Balance Screen Time Around Children](#)
- [Distraction Free Learning - WFL BOCES Video](#)
- [Healthy Children](#)
- [How to Prepare Your Kids for School After a Summer of Screen Time](#)
- [Screen Time for Teenagers](#)
- [Talking with Teens about Tech & Digital Media Limits](#)
- [The 5 Cs of Media Use](#)

Thank you for your understanding and continued support as we work together to ensure a successful 2025-26 school year. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any further questions or feedback.

Warmest regards,
E. Bridget Ashton

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