

Board of Education

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Belfast Central School District

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Administration

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Richard Bull, *5-12 Principal*
Jessica Hess, *PK-4 Principal/ Director of Pupil Services*
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Kaylani Dziedzic, *District Treasurer*
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Distraction Free School Policy

On May 6, 2025, NYS Governor Kathy Hochul issued the New York State Distraction-Free Schools Law, which applies to school districts, charter schools, and boards of cooperative services (BOCES). Each educational organization should review its existing policies and work to update them to meet the minimum standards established by law by August 1, 2025.

Governor Hochul's cellphone policy creates a model standard, including:

- 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.
- Allowing schools to develop their plans for storing internet-enabled devices during the day, giving administrators and teachers the flexibility to do what works best for their buildings and students.
- Securing \$13.5 million in funding to be made available for schools to aid in purchasing storage solutions to help them go distraction-free.
- Requiring schools to give parents a way to contact their children during the day when necessary.
- Requiring teachers, parents, and students to be consulted in developing the local policy.
- Requiring schools to annually publish a report detailing the enforcement of the policy they adopted, helping to prevent inequitable discipline.

Historical Cell Phone Change in Belfast. BCS prioritizes the safety and well-being of all students and staff while promoting the best learning environment possible. Unfortunately, cell phones have become an increasing disruption to the learning environment. Students have taken and shared inappropriate pictures and videos, have used devices to bully other students, focused attention on sending and receiving texts during classes, and accessed inappropriate content that has created disruptions in learning.

In response to the growing disruptions to learning, Belfast Central School prohibited Internet-enabled devices, effective April 17, 2023. Students are not allowed to have cell phones, personal devices, or any Internet-enabled smart devices during the school day.

Storage of Internet-Enabled Devices. If any Internet-enabled devices are brought into school, the device(s) must be turned off and in the student's locker when the first bell rings at 8:05 and remain there until dismissal. Belfast Central is also working to secure cell phone locking pouches for students to store devices during the school day.

What about emergencies? Building safety and security is the foundation this plan was built. If your child experiences an immediate emergency, BCS has network phones in each classroom, along with landlines in all offices. In the event of a building crisis, the school has a Safety Plan

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to connect with our community. Also, security and emergency officials have underlined the importance of following existing safety protocols that include keeping phone lines open and accessible in the event of an emergency.

Students can access a telephone in the Main Office. Parents can also call the Main Office phone at 585-365-2646 if they need to speak with their child.

Additionally, parents of students in grades 7-12 can contact their child through the student's BCS-issued and monitored e-mail address.

What about my child's mental health? BCS fully understands the severe impact that the pandemic has had on all of our students. Our overwhelmingly dedicated staff of teachers, aides, nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists are professionally trained to assist with our students' needs. As a district, we try and offer our students numerous interventions and opportunities to help cope with any problems they encounter during their day.

Why can't phones be used during lunch or study halls? Less structured times of the day, like lunch or study halls, have seen higher levels of students taking and sending unwanted pictures and photos, cyberbullying, and discipline referrals from inappropriate device usage.

What about other daily updates? Updates, such as sports practices, games, and cancellations, can be accessed through our school website and Facebook page. BCS will also utilize our robocall system to update families of changes in practices, games, events, etc., as soon as the information is available. Students can also call from the Main Office if it's an emergency.

What will happen if a student does not follow the no cell phone policy? If a student does not follow the cell phone policy, incremental discipline actions will be taken.

1st Violation: The first violation will result in the cell phone being confiscated and taken to the office; the device will be confiscated and placed in a locked box in the school office. Parents/guardians will be notified and required to retrieve the device in person.

For the following 30 school days, the student must surrender their device to the office upon arrival each morning, where it will be stored securely until dismissal. Additionally, the student will be assigned an After School Detention (ASD).

2nd Violation: The second violation will result in the cell phone being confiscated and taken to the office, and the student receiving after-school detention. The student's parent or guardian will be notified and will need to come to the school and pick up the cell phone.

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If a second violation occurs, the same retrieval process and ASD will be enforced, and the student will be required to submit their phone to the office each morning for the remainder of the school year.

3rd Violation: The third violation will result in the same consequences as violation #2, along with two nights of after-school detention for the student

BCS also reserves the right to increase disciplinary actions for repeated violations and/or egregious offenses.

School districts, charter schools, and BOCES, as subject to this legislation, shall not suspend a student solely for violating the district's policy regarding internet-enabled devices during the school day. In addition, beginning September 1st, 2026, each district 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 the enforcement of the policy.

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

Are there any exemptions to the policy? The NYS Distraction-Free Schools legislation has identified the following Exemptions for times in which a student may use an Internet-enabled device:

- Authorization by a teacher, principal, or the school district, charter school, or BOCES for a specific educational purpose.
- Instances where necessary for the management of a student's healthcare.
- Usage in the event of an emergency.
- Usage for 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 well-being 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.

Research on the impact of cell phones on children is available on the BCS webpage to help our students and families understand how the devices are impacting learning and development.

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Please visit the 'For Families' tab and the Resources for Parents section to find cell phone research.

Technology is a part of our daily lives. BCS has provided a device for every student in the building, which will allow students to continue to use technology for learning without the distractions that have grown with cell phones.