



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

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PRESENTS POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

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Three Principles to Develop School Cellphone (Student Personal Electronic Device) Policies

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Education released guidance recommending that every district in the country have a policy addressing whether and how students can use cellphones in school. The guidance provides district-level examples illustrating policies that ban personal technology, allow it to be used at certain times of the day or under certain conditions, or place no restrictions on use.

Beyond cellphones, the Playbook for Student Personal Device Policies (the “Playbook”) includes smartphones and other personal electronic devices (such as smartwatches, headphones or audio earpieces, and handheld games) that are the personal property of a student and not issued by a school for educational purposes. The definition does *not* include laptop computers or tablets.

In his letter introducing the Playbook, Secretary Miguel Cardona adds his voice to the challenges facing boards in their policy development:

“These phones are remarkable achievements of engineering, and they have many positive uses. Parents tell me they play a special role in helping them keep in touch with their children, especially in emergencies. And phones can enable students to get new information, practice skills, or come together virtually to solve hard problems.”

At the same time, a growing body of evidence is cause for concern about the impact of cellphones in schools on our young people. Adolescence is a critical time for the development of concentration skills, which support academic success and the ability to maintain emotional balance during stressful situations. However, because social media is designed to keep users engaged, its use may impact the ability of young people to focus and stay on task. Non-academic cell phone use during learning, such as multitasking, visiting social networking sites, and internet searching, tends to be associated with decreases in student learning, requiring students to take up to minutes to refocus after engaging in non-academic activity.”

In addition, his letter cites concerns related to the mental health and well-being of students and enhanced exposure to cyberbullying and sleep deprivation and that “exposure to social media has detrimental effects on students’ mental health, which in turn has adverse consequences for their academic performance.”

Consistent with the guidelines provided by Connecticut's State Board of Education, the Playbook suggests "every elementary, middle, and high school should have a clear, consistent, and research-informed policy to guide the use of cellphones in schools."

Encouraging full community engagement, Secretary Cardona suggests posing the Playbook's questions when meeting with students, teachers, and parents:

- When can students have access to phones?
- When phone use is prohibited, where and how are phones stored?
- How are emergencies or dangerous circumstances handled? How do parents and children communicate? How and when do schools and districts communicate with parents during emergencies?
- How do policies protect the rights of students, including students with disabilities, adhering to their individualized education plan? Are there other considerations for underserved students, such as English Language learners?
- What are the appropriate consequences when a student doesn't follow school policies?
- How do policies vary with the ages of students?
- Who is responsible for monitoring and enforcing policies?
- What training is provided for staff and students?
- What is the best approach to rolling out new policies?
- How can school districts and schools assess whether policies are working and how to refine them?

You can access Playbook for Student Personal Device Policies using the following link:
https://tech.ed.gov/files/2024/12/Planning-Together-A-Playbook-for-Student-Personal-Device-Policies_v25r4-FINAL.pdf

You can access the State Board of Education's "Guidelines using the following link:
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/board/position_statement_cell_phone_use.pdf

You can access CAFE's Model Cellphone Policies using the following link: [5131.81](#)

CAFE's Policy Department - Pam Brooks, Shannon Hamilton and I - wish everyone a joyful and restful holiday season and a healthy and productive New Year! We look forward to continuing to support your policy needs.