



Amherst Central School District Distraction Free Schools Plan for 2026-2027

1. Overview: (Required) Policy #7316 - Use of Internet-Enabled Devices During the School Day

Students are prohibited from using personal internet-enabled devices during the entire school day (first bell before homeroom to last period dismissal bell) on school grounds. This includes all instructional and non-instructional times (ie. homeroom periods, lunch, recess, study halls, passing time).

- a. Examples of a restricted device include, but are not limited to: smartphone, tablet, smartwatch, laptop, fitbit, smart glasses or other wearable device, iPod, and iPad. *It includes all devices capable of being connected to the internet.*
- b. Within school buildings, wired earbuds and/or headphones (which connect to a standard 3.5mm jack) may be used with teacher or administrative approval when connected to a district device. In classrooms, use is permitted solely for educational purposes with permission from the classroom teacher; in designated common areas or study periods, use must remain appropriate and aligned with each school's guidelines. Wireless earbuds are not permitted during the school day from bell to bell.
- c. School-issued Chromebook instructional devices are allowed.

2. Device Storage

All students are encouraged to leave their devices at home. Students may not have continuous possession of their devices throughout the school day.

- a. **Middle and High School** devices must be turned off and stored in a locked locker during the entire school day (from homeroom/homebase bell through dismissal bell). The law's intent is to restrict student access to covered devices for non-permitted reasons. Student backpacks are not an acceptable storage option.
- b. **Elementary** devices must be turned off and stored in student's backpacks placed in cubbies and/or lockers during the school day. At the elementary level, it is strongly recommended that internet-enabled devices be left home.

3. Checking Messages from Parents

Students may use their cell phones to check messages before the first bell and at the end of the day following the dismissal bell.

4. Policy Exceptions

Students may be authorized to use an Internet-enabled device during the school day on school grounds for the following purposes. Certain exceptions* will require parents to complete the Distraction-Free Schools Exception Form with documentation from a medical provider, PPS staff or a building principal. Even if a student demonstrates a need for an exception to the law, they may still be required to store their devices during the day. These exceptions do not automatically provide students unrestricted access to devices throughout the entire day.

- a. If authorized by a teacher, principal, or the District for a specific educational purpose.
- b. *Where necessary for the management of a student's health care - As required for tracking health conditions or medical purposes as per Individual Health Care Plan (example: Diabetes monitoring, telehealth appointment).
- c. In the case of an emergency - Students may be in a designated area with permission from a teacher or administrator, such as during a family emergency. However, during a school-wide emergency, no outside communication between students and parents is allowed, as this could compromise the safety of students and staff.
- d. *For translation services.
- e. *On a case-by-case basis, for a student caregiver who is routinely responsible for the care and well-being of a family member. Such an allowance will only be permitted upon review and determination by a school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor and in consultation with a school administrator.
- f. Where required by law.
- g. When the use is included in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan.

*(*Parents must apply using the Distraction-Free Schools Exception Form. Contact the building main office.)*

5. Enforcement and Consequences

The District is prohibited from suspending a student solely for accessing internet-enabled devices in violation of this policy. However, consistent violations may be considered insubordination. The formal progressive discipline procedures are as follows:

High and Middle School Level:

- a. First offense: The device will be confiscated and returned to the student at the end of the day.
- b. Second offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned to the student at the end of the day and parent/guardian will be notified in writing. One detention will be assigned.
- c. Third offense: The device will be confiscated until the end of the day. Parent/guardian may be required to pick up the device. Two detentions will be assigned. Student will be required to turn device in to the office upon entry for the next three school days. Parent/guardian will be notified in writing of the offense and this expectation.
- d. Fourth offense: The device will be confiscated and will be locked in a central location daily for a period of up to 5 weeks. Student will be issued one day of ISS. Parent will be notified in writing of this expectation and may be required to pick up the device. Further infractions may result in daily phone lock-up for up to an additional 5 weeks. The student may also be required to participate in restorative practice activities. In the event a student exhibits a pattern of repeated and persistent violations of this policy, administrators will facilitate a meeting with the student and the student's parent(s) or person(s) in parental relation to discuss: the objectives and expectations of this policy, the contributing causes of the student's challenges in complying with the policy, and measures the District and the student's family can take (e.g., counseling, education, administrative device controls) to support the student's compliance.
- e. Refusal to comply with a staff member's directive regarding cell phone use and/or repeated infractions beyond the 4th offense constitute insubordination and/or gross insubordination and will be addressed in accordance with the [ACSD Code of Conduct](#). A cell phone policy violation becomes insubordination when a student willfully fails to follow a direct instruction from staff.

Elementary Level:

- f. First offense: Verbal warning to return device to backpack.

- g. Second offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned to the student at the end of the day upon parent/guardian request.
- h. Third offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned only to the parent/guardian. Student will engage in reflective activity (ie: write/present about the importance of following directions)
- i. Refusal to comply with a staff member's directive regarding cell phone use constitutes insubordination and or gross insubordination and will be addressed in accordance with the [ACSD Code of Conduct](#). A cell phone policy violation becomes insubordination when a student willfully fails to follow a direct instruction from staff.

6. Methods for Parents to Contact Students During the School Day

- a. Parents/Guardians may call the school's main office, and the office staff can relay messages to the student or call the student to the office to speak with their parent/guardian.
 - Amherst Central High School Main Office: 716-362-8100
 - Amherst Middle School Main Office: 716-362-7100
 - Smallwood Drive Elementary School Main Office: 716-362-2100
 - Windermere Boulevard Elementary School Main Office: 716-362-4100
- b. Parents/Guardians may drop off written notes at the school's main office.
- c. The school district will annually provide written notification of these methods for parents or those in parental relation to a student prior to the beginning of the school year and upon the enrollment of new students.
- d. The school district will explore options for secure school messaging applications.

7. Methods for Students to Contact Parents/Guardians During the School Day

- a. Students may use the phone in the Main Office, Attendance Office, Nurse's Office, Student Services/Counseling Center or in the classroom (with teacher permission) to call a parent/guardian.

8. Student & Staff Training

a. Student

All students will receive training through assemblies and/or classroom lessons about device storage, expectations, and consequences. Students will be reminded of the policy regularly and consistently, especially at the start of the school year and after returning from breaks. Students will be instructed on location of their locker and the use of a combination lock. Student peer-to-peer engagement regarding the policy will occur throughout the year at school activities and club meetings.

b. Educators

Teachers and staff are expected to apply and enforce this policy fairly for all students and consistently within each building. Teachers and staff should seek assistance, where needed, from administrators to implement this policy successfully. All staff will receive training during professional development days about the policy, enforcement of consequences, how to communicate with parents/guardians and how to model positive behavior with personal electronic devices away during instructional time.

9. Family Communication

- a. Policy #7316 is available online in the [Board Docs policy manual](#) and the Distraction-Free Schools [webpage](#).

- b. Translations of the policy into the 12 most common non-English languages spoken by limited-English proficient individuals in the state will be provided, upon request, by a student or other persons in parental relation to a student.
- c. A [Distraction-Free Schools webpage](#) is located on the District's Parents/Students tab. Quick links on each building homepage will also lead to the webpage.
- d. All families, staff and students will receive information about the policy on an annual basis prior to the start of school. Communication channels will include email, student handbooks, school newsletters, district website, back to school packets, grade level orientations and school open houses.
- e. Upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year, parents/guardians will be notified in writing of the communication methods that are available for contacting their student during school hours.
- f. A Distraction Free Schools information sheet is included with Central Registration packets for new families.
- g. Informational programming for families and students will be conducted at various times in the school year regarding digital responsibility, anxiety/mental health, and behavioral change. An example might be Screen Sanity workshops that have been offered through the Family Support Center.

Updates:

7/29/25

7/15/26