

USE OF WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICES (WCDs)

Policy Code:

4318

The board recognizes that cellular phones and other wireless communication devices (WCDs), have become a staple in today's society and are important tools through which parents communicate with their children and through which students gather information. The board also recognizes that excessive use of WCDs may pose significant health and social risks for students and negatively affect the educational environment. Gaston County Schools (GCS) provides a computer for every student to use on an individual basis. In order to strengthen the school system's focus on learning, minimize distractions, promote the well-being of our students, and foster a sense of community within our schools, students are prohibited from having WCDs turned on or possessing such devices during the school day unless otherwise permitted under this policy.

A. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

1. The "school day" runs from the beginning of the first class period of the day to the end of the last class period of the day.
2. A "wireless communication device" (WCD) is any portable wireless device that has the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two or more parties, including but not limited to cellular telephones, tablet and laptop computers, paging devices, two-way radios, gaming devices, Smart watches, wireless earbuds, headphones, Smart glasses, etc.
3. A device is "turned off" only if it is fully powered off, such as would occur by removing a battery or selecting a "power off" or "shut down" button. A device that is merely silenced or in "airplane mode" is not turned off.

B. AUTHORIZED USE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

Students are permitted to possess WCDs on school property so long as the devices are not turned on, used, or displayed during the school day. High school students are permitted to engage with WCDs during their assigned lunch block. WCDs must be fully powered off before exiting the designated lunch location.

Students may not use wireless communication devices inside school buildings, at school-sponsored events, or on school buses to capture audio, video, or still pictures of other students and/or employees in which such individuals can be personally identified, nor share such recordings or pictures in any way, without the consent of the other students and/or employees. An exception will be made for recordings at events that are open to the public, such as athletic competitions, band and choral concerts, assemblies, presentations, and award ceremonies. If recording at a public event is restricted for any

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reason, including due to copyright issues (e.g., a school play), the students and all other members of the audience will be notified of the recording restrictions before the event begins.

Additionally, individual students may use WCDs as required by the student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan or to manage the student's health care in accordance with a documented medical condition.

Communication during emergency conditions:

All staff members have access to communication devices during instructional time and can contact the school office should emergency conditions arise.

C. AUTHORIZED USE – SCHOOL PROVIDED TRANSPORTATION

WCDs can be used on school buses provided they do not interfere with the safe operation of the bus.

D. CONSEQUENCES

School employees may immediately confiscate any WCDs that are on, used, displayed, or possessed in violation of this policy. In general, the confiscated device will be returned to the student at the end of the school day. However, an administrator may require a student's parent to recover a confiscated device if the student has repeatedly violated this policy.

The following factors should be considered when determining appropriate consequences: whether the WCD was used (1) to reproduce images of tests, obtain unauthorized access to school information or assist students in any aspect of their instructional program in a manner that violates any school board policy, administrative regulation, or school rule; (2) to bully or harass other students; (3) to send illicit text messages; (4) to take and/or send illicit photographs; or (5) in any other manner that would make more severe disciplinary consequences appropriate.

Students who violate GCS Policy 4318 which prohibits the use of WCDs during the school day will be subject to the disciplinary consequences below in order to promote a focused, distraction-free, and respectful learning environment for all.

CONSEQUENCES

First Offense

Verbal warning is issued, WCD is confiscated until the end of the school day, and parent/guardian is contacted.

Second Offense

The WCD is confiscated, the parent/guardian is contacted, and the parent/guardian must retrieve the device.

Third Offense

The WCD is confiscated, the parent/guardian is contacted, and the parent/guardian must retrieve the device. Additionally, the student will lose the privilege of possessing a WCD for 30 school calendar days.

Repeated Offenses

WCD is confiscated, the parent/guardian is contacted, and a face-to-face parent/guardian conference is required. In accordance with the GCS Student Code of Conduct, students may also face additional disciplinary actions including detention or In-School Suspension (ISS), at the discretion of the administrator or designee.

E. MISUSE OF WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICES

1. Students who violate Policy 4318 will be subject to discipline and may also be prohibited from having WCDs on school property.
2. Use of a WCD for any action that is disruptive of the educational process, including but not limited to cyberbullying, any form of harassment, and/or display of nudity, lewd or other sexually inappropriate images, will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension in accordance with the code of conduct and applicable policies and regulations, and/or legal/court action.
3. Use of a WCD for any action that includes the initiation and/or passing on of threats or acts of violence against persons or property will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension in accordance with the code of conduct and applicable policies and regulations, and /or legal/court action.

F. TEACHERS AND STAFF MEMBERS

1. Implementation and enforcement of Policy 4318 is the responsibility of school administration.
2. Teachers are not required to personally confiscate a WCD from a student who is in violation of Policy 4318. They must, however, refer students to school administration, who will confiscate consistently with the consequences set forth in this policy.
3. Teachers and staff members may not authorize students to use WCDs to fill in

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instructional time or to occupy students in lieu of providing instructional activities, or as a reward.

4. Teachers and staff members should model appropriate WCD control by not using such devices during instructional time.

G. SEARCH OF WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICES

In accordance with policy 4342, Student Searches, a student's WCD and its contents, including but not limited to text messages, digital photos and videos may be searched whenever a school official has reason to believe the search will provide evidence that the student has violated or is violating a law, board policy, the Student Code of Conduct, or a school rule. The scope of such searches must be reasonably related to the objectives of the search and not excessively intrusive in light of the nature of the suspected infraction.

H. LIABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Students are personally and solely responsible for the security of their WCDs. The school system is not responsible for the theft, loss or damage of a WCD.

GCS, including school personnel, assumes no responsibility in any circumstances for loss, destruction, damage, theft, or charges made on monthly statements for any WCD. Students will be responsible for locating any lost/stolen items and for other expenses accrued to their WCD accounts. GCS assumes no responsibility for any data contained on any WCD.

Legal References: G.S. 115C-36, -76.100, -390.2

Other Resources: *Best Practices Guide for North Carolina Public Schools Units Establishing Personal Communication Devices Policies*, Advisory Council for Student Safety and Well-Being, Office of Governor Josh Stein (June 3, 2025), available at <https://www.ncdps.gov/best-practices-guide-north-carolina-public-schools-units-establishing-personal-communication-devices>; *Phone-Free Schools Administrator Toolkit*, Phone-Free Schools Movement, available at <https://www.ncsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/V2-PFSM-Toolkit-Final.pdf>

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