MOUNT OLIVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Subject: New Student Cell Phone and Internet-Enabled Device Requirements for 2026–2027

Dear Mount Olive Township School District Community,

As we prepare for the 2026–2027 school year, I am writing to share an important update regarding student use of personal internet-enabled devices during the school day.

In accordance with new State requirements and guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education, the Board of Education will be formally adopting *Policy and Regulation 5516, Student Use of Internet-Enabled Devices* at their August 24th board meeting. The policy establishes a "bell-to-bell" restriction on the use of personal internet-enabled devices during the school day. This includes cell phones, smartwatches, headphones, earbuds, tablets, smart glasses, and other devices capable of accessing the internet or communicating electronically.

The purpose of this requirement is to reduce distractions, strengthen student engagement, support face-to-face interaction, and provide a school environment that is focused on learning. All district student handbooks and codes of conduct have been updated to reflect these expectations and the consequences for violations.

Students in Preschool Through Grade 5

For our elementary students, this policy does not represent a significant change from prior school years. Personal cell phones, smartwatches, and other internet-enabled devices have not been permitted for student use during the school day.

Devices may not be used on school grounds or during the bus ride to and from school. The updated Elementary Code of Conduct includes progressive consequences for violations, beginning with a warning and parent notification and increasing for repeated offenses.

Students in Grades 6–12

Students in grades 6–12 must keep personal internet-enabled devices turned off and stored away in their assigned lockers from the first bell through the last bell. Devices may not be used or visible during class, passing periods, lunch, or other portions of the school day. This expectation also applies to headphones, earbuds, AirPods, smartwatches, smart glasses, and similar devices.

For Mount Olive Middle School students, this is also largely consistent with the practices that have been in place during prior school years. Students have already been expected to keep their devices stored and out of sight throughout the school day. The updated Code of Conduct continues to provide progressive consequences when a device is used or visible.

The most significant change will be at Mount Olive High School. In previous years, high school students were permitted to use their devices during certain

non-instructional periods, including passing time and lunch. Under the new State requirement and district policy, that will no longer be permitted. High school students must keep their devices turned off and stored throughout the entire school day, including during lunch and between classes. The high school Code of Conduct clearly states that cell phones and other electronic devices may not be used or visible and establishes progressive consequences for violations.

Communicating During the School Day

We understand that families may be accustomed to communicating directly with their children during school hours. During the school day:

- Parents and guardians who need to reach their child should contact the school's main office. Staff will ensure that important messages are delivered promptly.
- Students who need to contact a parent or guardian may request assistance through the main office.
- During an emergency, the district will communicate directly with families through its established emergency notification systems. Students should follow the directions of staff and the procedures contained within each school's safety plan.

The policy permits accommodations when a personal internet-enabled device is required because of a documented medical, developmental, educational, or other qualifying need. Families seeking an accommodation should contact their child's school administration. Requests will be reviewed individually and must include appropriate supporting documentation.

We recognize that the high school change, in particular, will require an adjustment for some students and families. Building administrators and staff will review the expectations with students at the beginning of the year and reinforce them consistently through school communications, signage, classroom routines, and the student codes of conduct.

We appreciate your partnership in helping our students begin the year prepared to follow these expectations. By working together, we can provide a more focused learning environment while continuing to maintain safe and reliable communication between our schools and families.

Thank you for your continued support.

Warm regards,

Dr. Sumit Bangia