



WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION DEVICE / CELL PHONE POLICY

2026–2027

Purpose

Washington High School is committed to providing a safe, focused, and engaging learning environment where students can fully participate in instruction and build meaningful connections with teachers and peers. To minimize distractions and protect instructional time, student use of personal communication devices will be restricted during instructional periods.

Devices Covered by This Policy

Personal communication devices include, but are not limited to:

- Cell phones and smartphones
- Smart watches and other wearable communication devices
- Wireless earbuds, AirPods, and headphones
- Personal tablets or similar internet-connected devices
- Any other personal electronic device capable of sending or receiving messages, accessing social media, recording, or otherwise interfering with instruction

School-issued instructional technology is not included when being used as directed by school personnel.

Instructional Time: Phones Away

During instructional time, student cell phones must be placed in the designated classroom lockbox.

Upon entering the classroom, students will place their cell phone in their assigned location in the classroom lockbox. Phones must remain in the lockbox for the duration of the instructional period unless an approved exception applies. Students may retrieve their phones at the conclusion of the instructional period.

Simply placing a phone on silent, turning it face down, or keeping it in a pocket, backpack, purse, or other personal location does not meet the WHS expectation. If a student brings a cell phone to class, it must be placed in the classroom lockbox.

Students are expected to comply with this procedure immediately upon entering each classroom so that instruction can begin without unnecessary interruptions.

Earbuds, Headphones, and Smart Watches During Instruction

Earbuds, AirPods, headphones, and similar devices must be put away during instructional time unless specifically authorized by the teacher for an instructional purpose. Smart watches and other wearable devices may not be used for calling, texting, messaging, social media, or other communication during instructional time.

Hallway and Class Change Safety

For safety reasons, cell phones, earbuds/AirPods, and headphones may not be used while students are walking from class to class or traveling through the hallways.

- Cell phones must be put away and may not be used while walking through the hallways.
- Earbuds, AirPods, and similar devices must be removed from students' ears.

- Headphones may be worn around a student's neck, but may not be worn over the ears while walking.
- Students must remain aware of their surroundings and be able to hear directions, announcements, or emergency instructions from staff.

Once students arrive in the classroom, cell phones must immediately be placed in the designated classroom lockbox for the duration of the instructional period.

Permitted Non-Instructional Use

Students may use personal communication devices during designated non-instructional times, including:

- Before the beginning of the school day
- During lunch
- After the conclusion of the school day

Students must continue to follow all school expectations regarding appropriate technology use. Students may not use devices to photograph, video, or audio record another individual without permission; engage in harassment, bullying, or other inappropriate conduct; access inappropriate content; or interfere with the safe and orderly operation of the school.

Exceptions

Washington High School recognizes that there may be circumstances in which a student requires access to a personal communication device during instructional time. Exceptions may be granted for:

- Documented medical needs
- Requirements contained in a student's IEP or Section 504 Plan
- Emergency situations
- Other circumstances approved by school administration

Teachers should not routinely permit students to use personal cell phones as instructional devices when school-issued technology or other instructional resources are available.

Parent/Guardian Communication

Parents and guardians are asked to support instructional time by not calling or texting students during class periods. If a parent or guardian needs to communicate urgent information to a student during instructional time, the parent should contact the WHS Main Office. School personnel will ensure that the student receives the message.

Students who need to contact a parent or guardian because of an urgent or unexpected situation should request assistance from their teacher or the Main Office.

Emergency Situations

During a school emergency, students should follow the directions of teachers, administrators, school resource officers, and emergency personnel. Students should not retrieve or use their phones unless directed to do so by school personnel. Unnecessary phone use during an emergency can distract students from safety instructions, contribute to misinformation, and interfere with emergency response procedures.

Washington High School and Beaufort County Schools will use established communication systems to provide families with accurate information during school emergencies.

Failure to Follow the Policy

The goal of the WHS cell phone policy is to protect instructional time rather than create unnecessary disciplinary referrals. Students will be given clear expectations and opportunities to correct their behavior. However, students who repeatedly fail to comply will be subject to progressive consequences.

First Violation: The student will be reminded of the expectation and directed to place the device in the classroom lockbox.

Second Violation: The teacher will document the repeated violation and contact the parent/guardian.

Third Violation: The student will be referred to administration. The device may be secured in the office for the remainder of the school day, and the parent/guardian will be notified.

Repeated or Continued Violations: Additional disciplinary action may be assigned in accordance with the Beaufort County Schools Student Code of Conduct. A parent/guardian conference and/or an individualized cell phone plan may be required.

Refusal to comply with a reasonable staff directive regarding a personal communication device may result in additional disciplinary consequences.

Responsibility for Personal Devices

Students who choose to bring personal communication devices to school do so at their own risk. Students are responsible for retrieving their devices from classroom lockboxes at the appropriate time. Students should never remove, handle, or interfere with another student's device.

Any concern involving a missing, damaged, or improperly removed device should be reported immediately to the teacher and school administration.

Staff Expectations

Consistency is essential to the success of this policy.

All WHS teachers and staff members are expected to consistently implement the established procedures. Classroom teachers should:

- Ensure students place phones in the classroom lockbox at the beginning of each instructional period.
- Avoid establishing individual classroom rules that conflict with the schoolwide policy.
- Address violations consistently and document repeated concerns.
- Contact parents/guardians when required by the progressive consequence process.
- Model appropriate personal device use during instructional time.
- Contact an administrator when a student refuses to comply rather than allowing a prolonged confrontation to disrupt instruction.

Students should encounter the same core expectations in every WHS classroom.

Our Goal: Protecting Instructional Time

This policy is not intended to prevent students from having cell phones at school. Rather, it establishes clear boundaries for when and how those devices may be used. By keeping personal communication devices out of students' hands during instructional time, Washington High School seeks to:

- Reduce classroom distractions
- Increase student engagement
- Protect valuable instructional time
- Encourage meaningful interaction between students and teachers
- Reduce inappropriate social media use during class
- Support a safe and productive learning environment

AT WHS, INSTRUCTIONAL TIME IS LEARNING TIME.

Phones Away. Minds Engaged.

Reference: North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Best Practices Guide for North Carolina Public School Units Establishing Personal Communication Devices Policies.