To the Black River Community From the BRPS Board

We are writing to share an update on the Black River Public School Board's recent action regarding student personal devices. This note outlines our new policy, explains the Board's motivations, and acknowledges the diverse perspectives shared by our community. Our goal is to provide transparency and foster a shared commitment to supporting our students' growth and safety. Our collective aim is not merely to impose a rule, but to build mutual trust, support student development, and prepare our students for the responsibilities of the world beyond Black River.

For reference, here is a summary of the updated policy:

> *All wireless communication devices K-12, shall be powered off and stored away from the first bell to final dismissal from class. This includes early arrival to the Lyceum prior to the first bell.*
>
> *Exceptions:*
> *High School lunch in the Lyceum or outside.*
> *Per State law, medical necessity, IEP or Section 504 Accommodations, District Owned or Designated Devices, and Emergency Situations are exempt.*
>
> *Full Policy Here*

Policy Objectives & Community Perspectives

The Board's decision to implement a more strict wireless device policy than state requirements is rooted in a fundamental commitment to our students' academic growth and social-emotional well-being. Our primary objective is to create a focused, low-distraction learning environment that minimizes the risks associated with constant digital connectivity, while also ensuring students have the opportunities to develop the responsibility required to navigate a technology-integrated world.

We recognize that this policy change has prompted significant community discussion. We are appreciative of the engagement and inputs from families and faculty. Thank you to all who have contributed.

We have carefully considered the diverse perspectives shared by parents and faculty as well as guidance from the larger education community. There is broad consensus on the need to minimize distractions and protect instructional time. In deciding on this policy, we examined parent feedback and research addressing how phone use during the school day relates to mental health, social conflict, and cyberbullying. We have carefully weighed valid concerns about student safety, logistics, and the school's role in cultivating independence. Additionally, we analyzed the enforceability and

practicality of these guidelines for our campus alongside the potential secondary impacts on both educators and students.

This policy aims to strike a thoughtful balance: protecting the integrity of the classroom as a dedicated learning space, while acknowledging the developmental needs and practical realities of our older students.

The following data from our parent and faculty surveys provides insight into these shared priorities and the nuances of our community's feedback.

Executive Overview

The survey results show a near-consensus among parents and faculty for a strict 'Device-Free' policy in Elementary grades (K-5). However, opinions remain divided for Middle School (6-8) and High School (9-12), as families and staff balance the need for academic focus against logistical and communication concerns.

Parent Survey Highlights

- **Respondents**: 260 parents and guardians responded to the survey. 98 respondents have students in Lower El, 54 have students in Upper El, 109 have students in Middle School, and 123 have high school students.
- **Elementary (K-5)**: There is a strong consensus supporting a Device-Free policy, including 88% of Lower El and 84% of Upper El parents.
- **Middle School (6-8)**: Roughly 63% of middle school parents prefer a Device-Free environment.
- **High School (9-12)**: Perspectives are highly divided; only 41% of high school parents support a full ban, while 58% prefer an 'Instructional Time' policy that allows devices during passing time and lunch.
- **Key Themes**: Parents consistently prioritize maximizing classroom engagement and minimizing tech distractions, but also highlight concerns regarding safety, transit/sports coordination, and teaching personal Responsibility.

Faculty Survey Highlights

- **Respondents**: 32 faculty members responded to the survey.
- **Elementary**: Faculty overwhelmingly support a strict Device-Free policy for younger students.
- **Middle & High School**: Teacher preferences are mixed, split between Device-Free and Instructional Time models.
- **Key Themes**: Teachers emphasize the need for consistent enforcement, support student social-emotional well-being, and recognize practical communication needs for older students. Additionally, elementary staff noted

distractions caused by smartwatches, and several teachers noted that a Device-Free policy would reduce the emotional burden of policing device use.

A Note on Timing

State law (Public Act 2 of 2026 / House Bill 4141) mandated that all school boards review and adopt a policy prohibiting the use of personal wireless communication devices during instructional time this year. Although the previous protocol was generally in line with the state law, we took the opportunity to create a policy that would be best for our community. The Board dedicated the summer to thorough research, which included listening to the community, as well as surveys for both parents and faculty. Due to scheduling conflicts, we held a special board meeting in mid-August to finalize the policy, resulting in a very short timeline—leaving only one day of teacher in-service before the start of the school year.

We recognize that implementing this policy on such short notice was far from ideal. We sincerely apologize for any stress or confusion this late notification caused. We are deeply appreciative of the school administration, our teachers, and our students for their adaptability and hard work in navigating this transition so smoothly.

Other Policy Notes

Lunch

The exception for High School lunch is an acknowledgement that some device uses such as a quick text to a family member about after school logistics, or a response to an employer about a work shift can be handled over the lunch period with minimal disruption compared to other times or communication methods.

While high schoolers are permitted to use their devices during lunch, this allowance is not meant to promote screen time. Rather, we strongly advocate for students to use this time to build meaningful face-to-face connections and engage in direct social interactions with their peers.

Communication

We understand that this policy will require family communication patterns and methods to shift. For circumstances where a parent would need to communicate with their student, the best way to do so is by contacting the offices of our elementary, middle and high school buildings by phone at 355-0055.

In the elementary, Ms. Allison can be reached at extension 328 for attendance notifications, or extension 302 for other messages.

For middle school and high school, Mrs. Phillips can be reached at extension 228 for attendance and 102 for other messages. Also, a message to their school email account is a way to communicate directly with your student. This option is now available to all middle and high school students. Prior to the new cell phone policy, it was only at the request of parents that middle school student emails would be able to communicate outside of our Black River network.

Enforcement & Consequences

The policy has progressive enforcement consequences for unauthorized use of devices. While the Board recognizes that individual situations may arise, we prioritize consistent enforcement across all classrooms. Our intention is to avoid “warnings” and minimize exceptions to keep the policy clear, straightforward, and effective for all students and staff. Within the policy there are exceptions for medical, IEP and 504 accommodations, and explicit lesson-contained situations as directed by an educator. We are working closely with school leadership on the appropriate balance of accountability.

We intend to continue to solicit feedback throughout the school year on other topics. We appreciate your continued engagement in the Black River community.