

MEMORANDUM

TO: Boston School Committee

FROM: Cory McCarthy, Chief of Student Support
Dennisse Rorie, Director of The Office of Youth Leadership

CC: Mary Skipper, Superintendent
Sam Depina, Senior Deputy Superintendent of Operations

DATE: October 14, 2026

RE: Update and Preview: Draft BPS Personal Electronic Device Usage Policy

Executive Summary & Purpose

This memorandum provides the Boston School Committee with an overview and advance preview of the proposed Boston Public Schools (BPS) Personal Electronic Device Usage Policy. Grounded in research showing the negative impact of social media and constant screen exposure on adolescent mental health and focus, BPS is proposing a bell-to-bell prohibition on student personal electronic devices during the school day. This policy will work hand-in-hand with the district's recently approved Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy by ensuring students have access to technology that supports rather than distracts from their learning.

The primary purpose of this memo is to introduce the core tenets, scope, and implementation strategies of the proposed policy ahead of its formal submission to the School Committee for action in January 2027. This preview allows Committee members to review the policy details, understand its alignment with state guidance, and provide feedback prior to the official policy rollout.

Policy Overview and Background

- **Background:** Research¹ indicates that electronics and social media significantly affect students' overall well-being and academic performance. BPS aims to foster a distraction-free, safe, and welcoming environment that encourages authentic face-to-face connections. Additionally, BPS reviewed this draft alongside pending state legislative efforts to ensure our framework aligns directly with emerging state standards and best practices.
- **Overview:** The Policy that will be submitted for consideration will prohibit students from possessing personal electronic devices (cell phones, smartwatches,

¹ [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), 2025

tablets, personal laptops, Bluetooth devices, including AI glasses, etc.) during the school day. Devices must be turned completely off—not merely set to silent/vibrate—and remain secure and inaccessible "bell-to-bell" (including during classes, passing periods, lunch, and recess). Personal laptops or tablets are not permitted at school; school-administered devices will be provided as necessary. This policy would replace the current policy, which was introduced in 2005.

- **Scope:** The policy will apply to all students in Pre-K through Grade 12 across all BPS schools. Exemptions will be granted for students whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams determine a device is a necessary and reasonable accommodation to support free appropriate public education (FAPE), incorporating medical documentation where appropriate.
- **Engagement:** Since our last update to the Committee in December 2025, the district has engaged in robust conversations with students, educators, and parents to understand their perspectives and experiences regarding personal devices in schools. We engaged in three youth-based focus groups, which included meetings with Sociedad Latina, students from Boston Student Advisory Council, and English High school. One parent based focus group was led in collaboration with St. Stephens. In addition, one focus group was held with educators at English High School. A survey went to the school leader cabinet and other BPS administrators about school based policies and procedures and we received 92 responses. A small working group of community advocates, educators, parents and students met over four sessions to discuss important considerations of the Personal Electronic Device Usage Policy.

Over the next few months, the district plans to continue stakeholder engagement around its updated policy draft. This will include reconvening with the School Leader Cabinet, continuing to bring together focus groups of students, families, and educators, and continuing listening tours with the community. In particular, we will focus on hearing perspectives from students, educators, and families at Elementary Schools to ensure the policy encompasses their experiences and needs.

Following that engagement, the district will also refine its metrics for progress monitoring, and will finalize implementation guidance for school leaders. This will be completed prior to the formal policy submission to the School Committee and ahead of budget season, so schools and district staff can plan resources accordingly. The intention is for this policy to be in place for the first day of the 2027-2028 school year.

- **Resource and/or Budget Allocation:** Individual school leaders and administrators

will be granted discretion to select the specific mechanisms and securing methods (e.g., pouches, lockers, dedicated storage) that best fit their campus needs. The Central Office will provide technical assistance, progress monitoring tools, and restorative curriculum resources to support school staff without placing undue financial burdens on families. As we convene a working group to create specific implementation guidance for schools, we will do so with consideration of budget timelines to ensure schools are able to appropriately resource their implementation plans. We are also researching grant opportunities that may provide financial assistance with implementation of this policy.

Next Steps

By establishing a bell-to-bell distraction-free environment, BPS aims to improve student mental health, academic engagement, and school culture across the district. While initial implementation will require operational adjustments by school administration and routine shifts for families, the long-term benefit directly supports the district's vision of safe, supportive, and high-performing learning environments.

The policy will align with state-level initiatives, including the Massachusetts Attorney General's Toolkit on cell phones in schools and passing state legislative efforts promoting distraction-free learning environments. Furthermore, by restricting personal devices and relying exclusively on district issued technology, BPS will ensure that all student digital learning occurs on BPS approved devices, maintaining alignment and compliance with our district AI Policy.

Over the coming months, the district will continue to engage with various stakeholder groups, as described above. We will also continue to refine the policy based on feedback, and will create guidance to support schools with implementation. We look forward to hearing feedback from the School Committee and the public ahead of our final policy submission and request for a vote to approve the policy, scheduled for this winter.