

Hellgate Elementary School



Student Screen Time and Digital Device Use Guidelines

Hellgate Elementary School Board Approved on October 12, 2026

Purpose

Hellgate Elementary School recognizes that technology is an important instructional tool that can enhance learning, provide access to information, support creativity, and help students develop digital literacy skills. Technology use within Hellgate Elementary School is intended to support the Montana Technology Integration Standards by helping students develop technology skills, digital citizenship, communication, collaboration, creativity, and responsible technology use.

These guidelines are intended to promote healthy, purposeful, and age-appropriate technology use while ensuring that screens are used primarily to support learning goals rather than as entertainment or passive engagement.

This procedure applies solely to student use of screens and technology devices, including computers, tablets, Chromebooks, and similar digital tools. It is not intended to limit or regulate the instructional use of technology by teachers or staff. Educators may continue to utilize interactive whiteboards, document cameras, projectors, visual display screens, presentation systems, and other instructional technologies as appropriate to support teaching, learning, classroom management, and student engagement. The screen time guidelines outlined in this procedure pertain only to direct student screen use and do not include teacher-led instruction delivered through classroom display technologies.

Guiding Principles

Technology use should:

- Support specific instructional objectives.
- Enhance, rather than replace, high-quality teaching.
- Be developmentally appropriate for students' ages and needs.

- Include regular opportunities for movement, collaboration, discussion, and hands-on learning.
- Promote healthy digital habits and responsible citizenship.
- Avoid excessive passive screen consumption.

Kindergarten–Grade 1

Recommended Use

Technology should be used primarily for:

- Individualized interventions and support
- Early literacy and numeracy practice programs.
- Supporting district-approved Social Studies curriculum through interactive maps, digital stories and timelines, exploration of community helpers and traditions, virtual field trips, and age-appropriate activities that help students learn about citizenship, rules, and working together.
- Supporting district-approved Science curriculum through hands-on and virtual investigations, observation and data collection, simple models, and interactive exploration of life, earth, and physical science concepts appropriate for young learners.
- District Assessments.

Suggested Daily Screen Time

- No more than 10-15 minutes of instructional screen use per day.
- Screen use should generally occur in shorter segments rather than extended periods.
- Frequent movement breaks should be incorporated.

Rationale

Young children learn best through direct interaction with teachers, peers, and physical materials. Early elementary students benefit significantly from hands-on experiences, play-based learning, social interaction, and opportunities to develop fine and gross motor skills. Technology can support learning, but should not replace these foundational experiences.

Grades 2-3

Recommended Use

Technology should be used primarily for:

- Individualized interventions and support

- Literacy and numeracy practice programs.
- Writing and publishing projects.
- District assessments.
- Research and information gathering.
- Multimedia creation and presentations.
- Supporting district-approved Science curriculum through simulations, virtual investigations, data collection and analysis, scientific modeling, and interactive exploration of life, earth, and physical science concepts.
- Supporting district-approved Social Studies curriculum through interactive maps, digital timelines, primary source analysis, virtual field trips, and age-appropriate civic engagement activities.

Suggested Daily Screen Time

- Approximately 15-20 minutes of instructional screen use per school day in core content area classes.
- Screen-based activities should be balanced with discussion, group work, reading, writing, and hands-on learning experiences.

Rationale

Students in upper elementary grades are developing greater independence and digital literacy skills. Technology can help students access information, create content, and demonstrate learning. However, students continue to benefit from active learning experiences, social interaction, and opportunities to practice critical thinking without relying exclusively on digital tools.

Grades 4–6

Recommended Use

Technology should be used primarily for:

- Individualized interventions and support
- Literacy and numeracy practice programs.
- Writing and publishing projects.
- District assessments.
- Research and information gathering.
- Multimedia creation and presentations.
- Supporting district-approved Science curriculum through simulations, virtual investigations, data collection and analysis, scientific modeling, and interactive exploration of life, earth, and physical science concepts.

- Supporting district-approved Social Studies curriculum through interactive maps, digital timelines, primary source analysis, virtual field trips, and age-appropriate civic engagement activities.

Suggested Daily Screen Time

- Approximately 20-30 minutes of instructional screen use per school day in core content area classes.
- Screen-based activities should be balanced with discussion, group work, reading, writing, and hands-on learning experiences.

Rationale

Students in upper elementary grades are developing greater independence and digital literacy skills. Technology can help students access information, create content, and demonstrate learning. However, students continue to benefit from active learning experiences, social interaction, and opportunities to practice critical thinking without relying exclusively on digital tools.

Grades 7–8

Recommended Use

Technology should be used primarily for:

- Individualized interventions and support
- Writing and publishing projects.
- District assessments.
- Research and information gathering.
- Multimedia creation and presentations.
- Writing and content creation.
- Digital citizenship instruction.
- Supporting district-approved Science curriculum through simulations, virtual investigations, data collection and analysis, scientific modeling, and interactive exploration of life, earth, and physical science concepts.
- Supporting district-approved Social Studies curriculum through interactive maps, digital timelines, primary source analysis, virtual field trips, and age-appropriate civic engagement activities. Research and inquiry projects.

Suggested Daily Screen Time

- Approximately 30-45 minutes of instructional screen use per school day in core content area classes, depending on content area and project requirements.

- Teachers should continue to balance digital work with discussion, laboratory activities, reading, physical activity, and collaborative learning.

Rationale

Middle school students require increasing proficiency with digital tools to prepare for future academic and career demands. Technology can enhance engagement, organization, collaboration, and access to information. However, healthy technology use remains important, and students benefit from maintaining balance between screen-based and non-screen-based learning experiences.

Students with Disabilities and Assistive Technology

The District recognizes that some students with disabilities rely on technology as an essential tool for communication, learning, and access to the general education curriculum. For these students, screen use may be necessary through assistive technology, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, specialized software, or other accommodations and services identified in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan. As a result, the screen time expectations outlined in this procedure may be modified or adjusted to meet the individual needs of the student, consistent with their educational program and applicable federal and state laws.

Choice Time and Free Time Expectations

Screen-Free Choice Time

Whenever possible, student choice time, indoor recess activities, reward periods, and free-choice opportunities should **not** involve screens.

Preferred activities include:

- Reading
- Drawing and art
- Building and creating
- Board games and puzzles
- Social interaction
- Outdoor play and physical activity
- Creative and imaginative play

Rationale

Students spend an increasing amount of time on screens outside of school. Free-choice periods provide valuable opportunities to develop creativity, problem-solving skills, self-regulation, communication, and peer relationships. Screen-free choice time encourages students to engage with one another, participate in physical movement, and explore interests through hands-on experiences. These opportunities support social-emotional development and help establish healthy habits regarding technology use.

Technology should not be used as the default reward or entertainment activity. Instead, schools should strive to provide engaging alternatives that promote student well-being, creativity, and connection.

Staff Responsibilities

Teachers will:

- Use technology intentionally and purposefully.
- Monitor student engagement and screen time.
- Incorporate movement and brain breaks when appropriate.
- Balance digital activities with non-digital learning experiences.
- Model healthy and responsible technology use.
- Implement technology use in alignment with the Montana Technology Integration Standards.

Administrators will:

- Support staff in implementing balanced technology practices.
- Review guidelines periodically based on emerging research and district priorities.
- Encourage ongoing conversations about healthy digital habits.

Flexibility and Professional Judgment

The screen time recommendations outlined in this document are intended to serve as guidelines rather than strict limits. Teachers and staff should exercise professional judgment when determining the appropriate use of technology based on instructional goals, student needs, curriculum requirements, and individual classroom circumstances.

There may be occasions when screen use exceeds the recommended ranges due to:

- State or district assessments
- Research projects and presentations
- Writing and publishing activities

- Intervention and support programs
- Virtual learning opportunities
- Unique instructional needs or curricular requirements

When technology use exceeds the suggested guidelines, staff should continue to prioritize purposeful, educationally meaningful activities and seek opportunities to balance screen-based learning with discussion, movement, hands-on experiences, collaboration, and other non-digital learning activities.

Hellgate Elementary School is committed to fostering healthy, balanced technology habits that support student learning while recognizing that flexibility is necessary to meet the diverse needs of students and classrooms.

Resources Considered

- Montana Technology Integration Standards
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Guidance on Children and Media Use
- ISTE Standards for Students