To: Superintendents and Principals

From: Shellie Hartford, Director, Curriculum & Instruction

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Subject: Wireless Communication Device Policy

Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 78 (2026) provides definitions, requirements, restrictions, and exceptions for wireless communication device use in Indiana public school corporations and charter schools.

Per statute, a "wireless communication device" includes any *personal device* capable of connecting to a cellular network or the Internet. This includes personal cellular phones, tablet computers, laptop computers, gaming devices, and smartwatches.

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-30-2-2, "school day" means the entirety of the time a student is present on school property for a student instructional day. Accordingly, the requirements of SEA 78 apply throughout the entire school day, from bell to bell, including instructional time, passing periods, lunch periods, and all other periods during which students are under school supervision. This guidance does not apply to afterschool hours.

Per statute, school corporations and charter schools must adopt one of the following policy models and publish this policy on their website:

1. **No Device Policy -** Students are not permitted to bring wireless communication devices to school.

2. **Storage Policy -** Students may bring devices to school; however, all devices must remain stored, powered off, and inaccessible to the student throughout the entire school day. (*Further guidance on implementation of this option is provided below.*).

Per statute, students must be permitted to use a wireless communication device during instructional time if the wireless communication device is:

1. Included in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP);
2. Included in the student's 504 Plan;
3. Necessary for the management of a documented medical condition pursuant to an order provided by a licensed health care provider;
4. Authorized by the superintendent or the superintendent's designee at the appropriate time during an emergency; or
5. Necessary for language translation to ensure access for multi-lingual learners, prioritizing

school-managed wireless communication devices or applications where available.

Per statute, prior to July 1, 2028, teacher-directed use of a wireless communication device for educational purposes can occur on either a school-supplied wireless communication device or a school-sanctioned device. After June 30, 2028, all wireless communication devices must be supplied by the school corporation or charter school.

House Enrolled Act 1004-2026, a school's wireless communication device policy must explicitly prohibit a student from using a school-supplied wireless communication device for noneducational purposes during the school day.

As part of this new law, with exceptions, school corporations, the schools they operate, and charter schools, including school personnel, are immune from civil liability for any actions taken in good faith to comply with state law and the school's wireless communication device policy.

SEA 78 also permits schools to adopt policies allowing unobtrusive audio recording devices used solely for individual educational note taking or personal learning assistance consistent with IC 20-26-5-40.7(i)-(k). Such audio recording devices shall not capture, store, or transmit images or videos. Schools choosing to permit such devices should ensure local policies address notification procedures, appropriate use limitations, assessment restrictions, and student privacy protections.

Implementation Guidance

Storage Policy

Local schools retain flexibility in determining how wireless communication devices are stored, if students are permitted to bring them onto school property. Per statute, devices should remain powered off and not readily accessible to students during the school day. Schools should consider procedures that create meaningful physical separation between students and devices when practical. **Studies have shown the greater the physical distance between a student and a wireless communication device during the school day, the more effectively schools may limit student distraction in order to maximize learning**.

Because school environments vary significantly in physical layout and available locker space, school corporations may choose the implementation strategy that works most effectively within their local context. SEA 78 does not require schools to purchase specialized storage systems to comply with the law.

The following are examples of statutorily compliant implementation strategies that we recommend be prioritized in the order they appear and as school resources allow:

- student lockers;
- classroom storage systems or secured classroom locations;
- front office storage procedures;
- secure pouch systems;
- student backpacks as a last resort; or
- other locally developed procedures that ensure devices remain powered off and

inaccessible during the school day.

Per statute, students who travel to an off-site location for work-based learning should be permitted to have their wireless communication device on their person and can be utilized as permitted by the work-based learning supervisor.

Application

Prior to implementation, schools are encouraged to review student handbooks, discipline procedures, technology handbooks, and parent communication protocols. Schools should ensure that student handbooks and local school board policies clearly outline expectations, exemptions, disciplinary procedures, and parent communication protocols related to wireless communication devices. Clear communication and consistent implementation practices will support successful adoption and reduce confusion among students, staff, and families. Schools may also wish to consider:

- Student and parent informational meetings prior to implementation;
    - Schools may wish to provide students and families with research and informational resources regarding the negative impact of wireless communication devices on student attention, classroom engagement, and instructional environments. Clear communication regarding the purpose and expectations of local policies may support successful implementation.
        - Why Edify: 10 Negative Effects of Cell Phone Use on Students in the Classroom
        - U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Daily Screen Time Among Teenagers
        - Away for the Day: Research on Phones Impact on Academics
- Staff training regarding exemptions and enforcement expectations;
- Communication procedures during emergencies; and
- Signage or reminders reinforcing local expectations.

Schools may encounter operational situations during implementation that have historically relied upon student access to personal wireless communication devices, including dual authentication or verification processes associated with online program access, dual credit, postsecondary coursework, or filing of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid as required by Indiana Code 20-26-5-42.2. Schools and instructors are encouraged to identify alternative procedures whenever possible by working with vendors to inform them of the new provisions in Indiana Code. If temporary access to a wireless communication device is necessary, the activity should be carefully monitored and limited to the minimum extent necessary to complete the required task before returning to normal policy expectations.

Please contact IDOE's Digital Learning Team with any questions.

IDOE has drafted a model policy for schools to implement, but please note that changes may need to be made to best meet the circumstances of your school. The model policy is below -

Wireless Communication Device Policy

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-26-5-40.7, except for the situations described below, students are not permitted to access any wireless communication device, unless it is a school sanctioned wireless communication device, at any time during the school day. This policy does not apply to afterschool hours.

“School day” means the entirety of the time a student is present on school property for a student instructional day from bell to bell, including instructional time, passing periods, lunch periods, and all other periods during which students are under school supervision.

“School sanctioned wireless communication device” means a wireless communication device that:

- Is owned by a student or a third party vendor;
- Is approved by the school for instructional use;
- Is required or permitted by the school for participation in classroom instruction; ● Is subject to school managed network controls, filtering, or monitoring that restrict access to noninstructional content during the school day; and
- Is not a cellular telephone, gaming device, or smartwatch.

“Wireless communication device” means any portable wireless device that has the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two (2) or more parties, including a:

- Cellular phone;
- Tablet computer;
- Laptop computer;
- Gaming device; or
- Smartwatch that is connected to a cellular telephone, a cell tower, or the internet.

Students are permitted to bring their own wireless communication devices to school, but they must be powered off and stored in one of the following locations for the entirety of the time the student is present on school property during the school day:

- The students locker;
- A classroom storage system or secured classroom location;
- The front office;
- A secure pouch system; or
- The students backpack.

This policy does not prohibit a student from accessing their wireless communication device if it is included in the student's IEP, Section 504 plan, is used for language translation, necessary for the management of a documented medical condition with an order from a licensed health care provider, or in the case of an emergency as determined by the superintendent.

Students traveling off-site for a work-based learning experience are permitted to have their

wireless communication device on their person and can be utilized as permitted by the work based learning supervisor.

Students are personally and solely responsible for the care and security of wireless communication devices brought onto school property. The school assumes no responsibility for theft, loss, damage to, misuse, or unauthorized use of a wireless communication device brought onto its property.