DRAFT

POLICY GUIDANCE
Personal Technology Use in Schools

The Connecticut State Board of Education (Board), in support of its Position Statement on Personal Technology Use in Schools, offers the following guidance for districts to consider when drafting and adopting policies to restrict access to cell phones during the school day. This guidance emphasizes creating engaging spaces for learning to mitigate the negative impact that cell phones have on student learning. Included in this guidance are considerations for specific policies and practices in elementary, middle, and high school based on developmental readiness and maturity. Specific recommendations are provided for appropriate roles and responsibilities for local and regional boards of education and administrators in policy development; for school leaders and educators in ensuring consistent policy implementation; for families and students in supporting and complying with the district policy; and for higher education institutions and the Connecticut State Department of Education in preparing and supporting educators, school leaders, administrators, and local and regional boards of education.

A comprehensive policy should include language that incorporates age-appropriate restrictions that align with developmental considerations of students and the structure of the school day in each grade-band and school.

- **Elementary School**
  - The policy for elementary school students should focus on removing cell phones from the classroom to maximize academic, social, and emotional development. Elementary school students' school day environments and experiences and classroom activities should create spaces that encourage personal interaction among peers.
  - Specific procedures for collecting and isolating cell phones upon arrival at school or in the classroom may be necessary to ensure compliance with the policy.

- **Middle School**
  - The policy for middle school students should also focus on removing cell phones from the school day or classroom. Developmentally, this age group is particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of excessive personal technology use and has a difficult time controlling their impulses. Concurrently, middle school students experience increased autonomy and independence during the school day, which can lead to increased opportunity for cell phone misuse.
  - Possession of cell phones in this age group is likely to be viewed as a rite of passage into adulthood, so communication and application of policies that restrict use must be developed in consideration of the specific challenges of middle school students.

- **High School**
  - The policy for high school students regarding school day access and use should still be restrictive; however, as appropriate, high school students may be developmentally ready to take more ownership of controlling excessive use and understanding responsibilities regarding technology use to better prepare them for life after high school.
  - Inappropriate and potential illegal use of technology is likely to increase in high school on and off school grounds, including accessing and sharing inappropriate content and cyberbullying, requiring inclusion of expectations regarding technology use in the student Code of Conduct.
  - Cell phones that are turned off and kept out of sight create classroom environments where students are less likely to be distracted by interruptions, can focus more on learning, and allow educators to concentrate on instruction instead of constantly monitoring student cell phone use. The policy should therefore address high school students having cell phones on their person during class.

Responsibilities of local boards of education and superintendents of schools in developing a Personal Technology Use in Schools Policy

- Engage and elicit feedback from school leaders, educators, families, students, and relevant stakeholders in the development and adoption of a policy that aims to mitigate the negative impact of unrestricted access to personal technology in schools.
- Consider the development of associated regulations that align with the policy and provide for professional learning of all school staff in the implementation of the policy.
- Ensure that the foundation for the Personal Technology Use in Schools policy is districtwide in its vision, scope, and implementation.
- Consider the unique vulnerabilities and opportunities of different student developmental stages to create age-appropriate segments of the districtwide policy.
- At all age levels, behavioral expectations related to technology should be included in the student Code of Conduct to address issues such as cyberbullying, accessing/sharing inappropriate content, recording or taking photographs without consent, plagiarism, and the unapproved use of artificial intelligence (AI) software and applications.
- Embed a Personal Technology Use in Schools policy within a broader, intentional digital educational strategy. Consider a systemic approach toward developing digital literacy and citizenship to ensure that it is comprehensive and equips students from Kindergarten through Grade 12 with the skills and tools necessary to safely navigate online spaces.
- Assist families in understanding healthy uses of technology, setting ground rules, utilizing parental controls on devices, and ways to monitor technology use.
- Review and update the district policy regularly to address future technological devices, online platforms, and emerging threats.
- Consult board legal counsel during policy drafting and as needed to ensure compliance with applicable federal and state laws and alignment with best practices. Areas to consider include: school personnel access to content on student personal technology devices; consequences for violations of board policy or student Code of Conduct; accessing or disseminating inappropriate, harmful, or illegal content; material created on personal devices that may fall under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) or constitute part of an educational record; and access for students with disabilities or medical needs as outlined in individualized education programs (IEP) and Section 504 accommodations.

Responsibilities of school leaders and educators in supporting consistent implementation of the policy

- **School Leaders:**
  - Engage educators, families, and students in a mindful introduction to the Personal Technology Use in Schools Policy that is sensitive to the concerns of all involved.
  - Support educators in learning about the policy and the consistent, uniform application and enforcement of the district policy and associated regulations.
  - Provide educators with professional development on best practices for incorporating technology into classroom lessons and activities using allowable school-issued devices.
  - Develop a graduated response to inappropriate personal technology use that encourages students to see the value in a cell-phone-free space and creates opportunities to develop positive skills related to technology use.
  - Create a process for exceptions to the Personal Technology Use in Schools policy based on a student's specific needs and as appropriate according to each student's individualized education program (IEP), Section 504 accommodations, individualized health care plan, or learning plan.
  - Create a positive environment regarding media and technology by incorporating digital citizenship education as part of the curricula.

- **Educators:**
  - Recognize that impulse control is a skill that needs to be developed and that students require support and instruction to establish healthy and responsible relationships with technology and social media.
  - Create engaging lessons that foster in-person group work and collaboration among peers to strengthen students' interpersonal skills, peer interaction, and social communication.
  - Model the digital habits and the utilization of personal technology and social media in alignment with the district policy.
  - Participate in professional learning opportunities related to supporting positive digital habits, digital citizenship, and integrating the effective use of technology in the classroom.

Responsibilities of families, caregivers, and students to support the implementation of and adherence to the policy

- **Families and Caregivers:**
  - Promote student engagement in learning by being mindful of communicating with students via cell phone during the school day and encourage children to use planning and problem-solving skills, coping strategies, and in-school supports to help foster independence.
  - Support school initiatives to create technology-free spaces that allow students to fully participate in their education while encouraging in-person connections with peers and adults.
  - Model a healthy relationship with social media and screen time at home and reduce the use of technology as a tool for occupying young children.
  - Consider using age-appropriate parental controls on smartphones to encourage the development of healthy relationships with technology.
  - Establish open lines of communication with children and have regular conversations regarding the safe and responsible use of technology.

- **Students:**
  - Request to participate in opportunities to provide feedback in the development of the district policy and grade-band specific policies, as appropriate.
  - Follow the district Personal Technology Use in Schools policy and the student Code of Conduct.
  - Engage in lessons and classroom discussions related to social and emotional learning, digital citizenship, media literacy, and the responsible use of technology.
  - Encourage peers to use technology and social media appropriately, including being aware of and limiting the frequency in which they check their cell phones.
  - Report concerning and inappropriate cell phone use and online behavior by peers to a principal, teacher, school counselor, psychologist, social worker, or any trusted adult in the school building.

Responsibilities of state-level partners in preparing educators and supporting districts in developing and implementing district policies

- **Higher Education Institutions (Educator Preparation Programs):**
  - Participate in initiatives related to technology use in schools, including the development of model curricula for digital citizenship, media literacy, and responsible use of technology and social media.
  - Prepare pre-service candidates to effectively create a positive learning environment in accordance with the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching, focusing on evidence-based approaches to incorporating 21st century technology in the classroom.
  - Prepare pre-service candidates to develop student skills and dispositions to respond to real-world digital challenges in safe, effective, and thoughtful ways.
  - Contribute to the field of emerging research and best practices related to personal technology use by children and adolescents.

- **Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE):**
  - Develop a Kindergarten through Grade 12 Model Curricula for Digital Citizenship, Media Literacy, and Responsible Use of Technology and Social Media.
  - Provide professional learning and technical assistance on the effective integration and implementation of the Kindergarten through Grade 12 Model Curricula.
  - Continue to invest in resources that assist school districts in policies that address emerging technologies.
  - Monitor future national guidance and federal resources for dissemination to aid districts in maintaining prevailing content in district policies.
  - Coordinate and partner with state agencies, policymakers, and stakeholders to support district efforts in policy development and implementation.
  - Continue support of and collaboration with the research community to gather data to support district policies and elevate best practices.