Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

To Be Proposed:
August 5, 2026

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, adopts the Position Statement and Policy Guidance: Personal and Purposeful Technology Use in Connecticut Schools, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of _____, this fifth day of August, Two Thousand Twenty-Six.

Signed: _____
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary
State Board of Education

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

To: State Board of Education

From: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education

Date: August 5, 2026

Subject: Adoption of the Position Statement and Policy Guidance: Personal and Purposeful Technology Use in Connecticut Schools: Impact of Cell Phones, Social Media, and Screen Time on Student Learning and Mental Health

Executive Summary

Introduction
Students who feel intellectually, physically, and emotionally safe and healthy are more likely to be successful learners, and achieve growth in maturity, confidence and well-being that will support their success in school and in life. Students benefit from school environments that build skills in social interaction and communication, provide for stimulating intellectual engagement in the classroom, and support peer-to-peer and peer-to-adult relationship building. The notable rise in social media and cell phone use in and out of school has reduced opportunities for interpersonal interaction and personal growth, negatively impacting student mental health.

Background Information
In August 2024, the State Board of Education adopted the Position Statement and Policy Guidance: Personal Technology Use in Connecticut Schools - *Impact of Social Media and the Use of Cell Phones on Student Learning and Mental Health*. Since that time the body of research on the impact of limiting personal technology in schools continues to grow as more districts, states, and countries enact restrictions. Additionally, states around the country are moving forward with state-level policies and legislation setting age-specific in school screen-time limits including prohibiting digital devices in kindergarten through Grade Five; requiring instruction on the health and safety risks of excessive use of digital devices; and coupling the use of digital technology with required minimum time for physical activity.

Studies show that when cell phone restrictions are implemented, behavioral incidents decline, students report positive improvements in mental health and social connectedness, and schools experience a decrease in chronic absenteeism. Additional research shows that stricter, schoolwide personal technology use policies are associated with better teacher-reported outcomes and increased focus on academics. Two new pieces of legislation were proposed but failed to pass in the last Connecticut General Assembly legislative session (2026) that required restriction in the possession and use of cell phones from the beginning to the end of the school day for all grades. This updated Position Statement and Policy Guidance considers new research and encourages school districts to implement policies that align with what the legislation intended to do: create cell phone-free learning environments with allowable exceptions for rare, specific situations and for students with special needs while thoughtfully and purposefully utilizing technology to support digital learning and citizenship. Additionally, added to this Position Statement and Policy Guidance are considerations for districts to examine their relationship with educational technology and set limits to screen time in the classroom.

These findings on cell phone use reflect a larger body of evidence pointing to the harms of excessive screen exposure more generally, evidence which continues to develop and illuminate additional concerns for students' health, safety and learning. The 2025 Surgeon General's *Warning on the Harms of Screen Use* outlines the concerning relationship between early exposure to screens and adverse social-emotional and communication outcomes; the link between excessive screen time and poor education and health outcomes; and the real-life danger that youth can be exposed to online. Emerging research suggests that social media has a significant negative impact on brain development at a time in adolescence when identities and a sense of self-worth are forming, and social rewards, pressures and acceptance are paramount.

A survey conducted by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) between October 2024 and February 2025 showed that personal technology use policies that restricted access are working. Of the 140 districts that responded, 66 percent reported that their policy was either "very effective" or "somewhat effective" in increasing student engagement and learning. Additionally, a September 2025 survey conducted by the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) found that 57 percent of educators reported cell phone use during the school day as a major classroom disruption, contributing to distractions from instruction (81 percent) and lost instructional time (56 percent).

Recommendation and Justification
In an effort to ensure optimal learning environments for student academic success and overall well-being, I recommend that the State Board of Education adopt the Position Statement and Policy Guidance: Personal and Productive Technology Use in Schools - *Impact of Cell Phones, Social Media, and Screen Time on Student Learning and Mental Health.*

Follow-up Activities
The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) will provide school districts with the Position Statement and Policy Guidance to support the development or updating of districtwide policies that restrict the use of cell phones from the beginning to the end of the school day and encourage thoughtful and productive instruction and utilization of digital technology in schools. Finally, the CSDE will continue to monitor emerging research and guidance to inform future updates to ensure that district policies represent the most current and prevailing best practices.

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POSITION STATEMENT AND POLICY GUIDANCE

Personal and Purposeful Technology Use in Connecticut Schools

Impact of Cell Phones, Social Media, and Screen Time on Student Learning and Mental Health

STATE OF CONNECTICUT | CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | AUGUST 5, 2026

DRAFT

The Connecticut State Board of Education (Board) believes that all students deserve an excellent education that supports growth in knowledge, maturity, wellness, and readiness for a life of success and global citizenship. The Board's Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-2028: Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School prioritizes creating learning spaces that are safe, compassionate, and culturally responsive, and that are designed to support the academic, physical, and social-emotional well-being of all learners. The Board recognizes that thoughtful and purposeful approaches to technology are a critical component for ensuring school environments are conducive to achieving these goals. Students who feel intellectually, physically, and emotionally safe and healthy are more likely to be successful learners. Through this position statement and policy guidance, the Board acknowledges the importance of purposeful technology policies in ensuring that all students have access to a well-rounded and developmentally appropriate education experience that prepares them for lifelong success.

Personal Technology

For the purposes of this document, "personal technology" refers to all student-owned devices, primarily cell phones, but may also include smartwatches, tablets, and other current and emerging technologies. To create a school environment that promotes health and safety with a strong focus on learning, it is important to note the impact that unrestricted access to cell phones can have on learning spaces. Youth have access to personal technology at increasingly younger ages, with nearly one in four 8-year-olds owning a personal cellphone while almost 70 percent own a tablet.[1] By the time students enter secondary schools, personal technology ownership is almost universal with 97 percent of 11-to-17-year-olds owning a cell phone. Technology can give youth access to a diverse community, expanding their awareness of others who share abilities and interests, leading to an increased sense of belonging and acceptance. However, notifications during the school day and the lure of social media platforms negatively affect students' ability to be fully present in the classroom[2] resulting in lost instructional time, fewer opportunities for in-person interactions, and significant competition for dedicated and sustained student attention as reported by teachers.[3]

The body of research on the impact of limiting personal technology in schools[4] continues to grow as more districts, states, and countries enact restrictions.[5] Studies show that, after an initial adjustment period, behavioral incidents decline, students report positive improvements in mental health and social connectedness, and schools experience a decrease in chronic absenteeism. Preliminary findings released by Phones in Focus, a nonpartisan research initiative supported by the National Governors Association to provide evidence-based recommendations for school phone policies, show that stricter, schoolwide personal technology use policies are associated with better teacher-reported outcomes and increased focus on academics.[6]

Restricting personal technology use in schools will also limit students' ability to access social media, view harmful content, and use their devices for unkind or harmful behavior. The 2025 Surgeon General's *Warning on the Harms of Screen Use* outlines the concerning relationship between early exposure to

screens and adverse social-emotional and communication outcomes, the link between excessive screen time and poor education and health outcomes, and the real-life danger that youth can be exposed to online.[7] This builds on the 2023 Surgeon General's *Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health*, which highlighted the concerning relationship between excessive, unrestricted social media use and increased mental health challenges in youth.[8] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also reports that students with higher non-schoolwork screen use were more likely to experience a range of negative health outcomes, including lower levels of physical activity; poor sleep quality; symptoms of depression and anxiety; and reduced social, emotional, and peer support.[9]

A survey conducted by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) between October 2024 and February 2025 showed that personal technology use policies that restricted access are working. Of the 140 districts that responded, 66 percent reported that their policy was either "very effective" or "somewhat effective" in increasing student engagement and learning. Additionally, a September 2025 survey conducted by the Connecticut Education Association found that 57 percent of educators reported cell phone use during the school day as a major classroom disruption, contributing to distractions from instruction (81 percent) and lost instructional time (56 percent).

School Day Screen Time

For the purposes of this document, "screen time" refers to time students spend viewing or interacting with digital screens during the school day, including tablets, laptops, and computers, during instructional time. Technology can be employed in schools to personalize and accelerate learning when integrated thoughtfully and appropriately to support specific learning goals. Students benefit from instruction that integrates hands-on learning, digital tools, and assistive technology while modeling digital citizenship and media literacy through high-quality curricula that prepare them for responsible technology use in school and beyond. At the same time, it is important to note that longitudinal studies show educational technology has not produced the widespread gains in academic achievement that were once anticipated, and more time spent using digital devices in school has been tied to lower test scores.[10] This can be attributed to multiple factors, including the opportunity for distraction that devices provide, how the brain processes and retains information, reduced opportunities for sustained attention, and the adoption of digital learning tools without strong evidence of effectiveness.[11]

In 2024, the US Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology released *A Call to Action for Closing the Digital Access, Design, and Use Divides, 2024 National Educational Technology Plan*.[12] This document emphasizes that technology alone does not improve academic outcomes, rather its value depends on how purposefully and intentionally technology is integrated into the classroom to enrich and support effective teaching and learning.

To achieve the maximum positive impact that educational technology can provide while mitigating its potential risks, schools need a structured, schoolwide technology integration and usage protocol that provides thoughtful access to high-quality digital tools and integrates emerging technologies in ways that outline purposeful screen time, enhance instruction, foster responsible digital citizenship, and prepare students to succeed in an increasingly connected world.

Restrictions to both personal technology and screen time are also a legislatively aligned with Public Act 23-159, Section 4, which is now codified as Section 10-24f of the Connecticut General Statutes. This law requires local and regional boards of education to provide play-based learning opportunities during the instructional day for kindergarten and preschool programs offered by the board, specifically requiring that these play-based learning opportunities "be predominantly free of the use of mobile electronic devices."[13]

Connecticut State Board of Education Recommendation

The Board recommends that local and regional boards of education, in collaboration with school leaders, educators, families, and students, enact districtwide Personal Technology Use and Purposeful Screen Time Policies. The Board strongly recommends that such policies restrict the student use of personal technology, including cell phones and other current and emerging technology, from the beginning to the end of the school day (i.e., "bell to bell").

The Board also strongly recommends that such policies examine the district's relationship with educational technology and limit screen time in the classroom.

Districts are encouraged to audit their current educational technology program (devices, digital tools and services) through an examination of internal data, including assessing the impact on student achievement; conducting a cost-benefit analysis; and incorporating educator, student, and family feedback, to determine the impact that individual platforms and technologies have had on their school community and, where appropriate, prioritize alternative contextualized instruction over screen-based learning.[14] When analyzing existing educational technology and exploring new digital resources, districts should consider *why* and *how* the technology will be used to enhance teaching and learning and cultivate a school community that integrates screens intentionally in harmony with hands-on experiences that build interpersonal skills and deepen comprehension.

Personal technology policies should be implemented in a manner that promotes safe, focused learning environments while ensuring that students with disabilities and other students with documented needs continue to receive the individualized supports necessary to fully access instruction, participate in school activities, and experience equitable educational opportunities.

POLICY GUIDANCE
Personal Technology Use in Schools

The Connecticut State Board of Education (Board), in support of its Position Statement on Personal and Purposeful Technology Use in Connecticut Schools, offers the following guidance for districts to consider when drafting and adopting policies to restrict access to cell phones from the beginning to the end of the school day (i.e., "bell to bell"). This guidance emphasizes creating engaging spaces for learning that thoughtfully integrates educational technology and mitigates the negative impact that personal technology has on student learning.

Included in this guidance are implementation considerations for elementary, middle, and high schools based on the opportunities and potential challenges presented in each age range as well as important considerations for students with diverse learning needs. 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 CSDE in preparing and supporting students, educators, school leaders, administrators, and local and regional boards of education.

To achieve consistent and comprehensive implementation, the Board offers the following considerations based on the developmental and educational readiness of students at each grade band. Individual student needs should be considered through appropriate school teams (e.g., Section 504 team, Planning and Placement Team) and in collaboration with families and providers.

Personal Technology Use

Grade Band	Bell-to-Bell Restrictions*	Rationale	Developmental Considerations
Elementary School (PreK–5)	Currently in 70 percent of schools	• Promotes academic, social, and emotional development. • Creates spaces that encourage and facilitate personal and social interaction among peers.	Elementary students are developing foundational socialization, communication, and self-regulation skills and benefit from hands-on, play-based learning.
Middle School (6–8)	Currently in 71 percent of schools	• Supports attention, learning, and healthy peer relationships while reducing distractions. • Limits potential exposure to developmentally inappropriate or harmful online content.	Middle school students are vulnerable to peer influence and social pressures, which can be amplified by social media, negatively affecting mental and emotional well-being. As independence increases, self-regulation and impulse control are still developing, increasing the risk of inappropriate technology use and online behavior.

continued ▶

Grade Band	Bell-to-Bell Restrictions*	Rationale	Developmental Considerations
High School (9–12)	Currently in 31 percent of schools	• Creates a focused learning environment where students actively engage in the classroom • Discourages smartphone dependency and overreliance on technology	High school students are preparing for college, careers, and independent adulthood. Schools should foster responsible technology use by helping students view personal devices as tools for learning, organization, and time management rather than primarily for entertainment and digital socialization.

**Per CSDE Personal Technology Use Policy Landscape Scan (January 2026)*

Purposeful Use of Educational Technology ("Screen Time")

Grade Band	Responsibility	Student Skill Focus	Educational Considerations
Elementary School (PreK–5)	Adult-guided	Foundational skill development in attention, language, and self-regulation	Younger learners benefit from highly structured, adult-mediated, and co-engaged technology use. Schools should prioritize hands-on, interactive learning opportunities.
Middle School (6–8)	Shared responsibility	Self-regulation, emotional awareness, and healthy habit formation	Middle school students should develop the skills to self-regulate technology use, recognize digital distractions, and refocus attention. Classroom technology should support active learning, critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, and guided inquiry.
High School (9–12)	Student-managed	Increased autonomy, self-management, accountability, and real-world readiness	High school students should be allowed increased autonomy to develop digital habits aligned with college and career readiness and independent adulthood. Technology should support active learning, organization, and management of responsibilities.

Adapted from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction: Guidance for Purposeful Screen Use in Schools.

Guidance for Policy Development

Districts are encouraged to consult the US Department of Education Office of Educational Technology's Planning Together: A Playbook for Student Personal Device Policies for best-practices for co-developing policy in partnership with all members of the school community. The playbook is centered on three key principles:

1. When co-designed with diverse and representative stakeholders — including students, parents and caregivers, educators, and school leaders — device policies can result in improved stakeholder support and increased potential for successful implementation.
2. Potential for success is enhanced when there is broad awareness and a shared ownership in implementing and adhering to device policies. School leaders should effectively and consistently ensure compliance and accountability for policy implementation. Educators should advance effective classroom culture and norms for teaching and learning to accompany their school's device policy.
3. Device policies should be paired with an emphasis on digital citizenship at school and at home, including systemic, evidence-based approaches for teaching adults and children about how to keep students safe, healthy, and productive in online spaces.[15]

Additionally, local policies should recognize that individual students may require access to a personal technology device to support learning, communication, health, safety, or other disability-related needs. Consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and other applicable laws, districts must ensure that students with disabilities continue to receive the accommodations, supports, assistive technology, and services necessary to access and participate in their educational program. Any restrictions on personal technology use should include clearly defined exceptions for students whose individualized education programs (IEP), Section 504 plans, individualized health care plans, or other documented needs require the use of a personal device or assistive technology to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) or equitable access to school programs and activities.

Stakeholder Engagement

- **Students:**
  - Student voice is essential for the development and implementation of a policy that respects their growing independence and autonomy but still prohibits use of personal technology and limits screen time during the academic day.
  - As one student noted in written testimony in support of House Bill 5035, "*While most students strongly oppose the phone ban when it was first implemented, its overall effects on the social and educational atmosphere of our school have been positive, largely because of the compromises reached between students and administration regarding the technicalities of the policy.*"
- **Educators:**
  - Educators regularly tout the benefits of bell-to-bell restrictions on personal technology devices.
  - "*About eight, nine years ago, I had to police people's cellphones. And I'd have to talk to the same kid over and over again,"* Now, [during] a class exercise, "*they turn their desks, they talk to each other… and it's generally just so much more of a positive environment.*"[16]
  - As one educator noted in written testimony in support of House Bill 5035, "*In my district, we implemented a comprehensive cellphone restriction policy two years ago. The transition was not without resistance. Students were accustomed to constant access, some families initially worried about communication, and staff had to adjust routines while consistently reinforcing expectations. However, when policies are enacted clearly, consistently, and with fidelity, they work. Over the past two years, I have observed meaningful improvements in ways that are visible every single day. Students are more attentive during instruction, participate more*

readily in discussions, and demonstrate greater persistence with complex tasks. Without screens as intermediaries, they talk to one another before class, collaborate more naturally, and rebuild essential social skills that had begun to erode. Classroom disruptions related to devices such as messaging, social media conflicts, and unauthorized recording have dramatically declined, allowing teachers to teach without competing against an endless stream of notifications engineered to distract. The overall school culture feels healthier, and many students report feeling less pressure to manage social dynamics throughout the day."

- **Families:**
  - As one parent noted in written testimony in support of House Bill 5149, "*As a parent, I see the 'cell phone battle' every single day. My husband and I have already made the decision not to give our youngest son a smartphone, but as any parent knows, that doesn't stop the pressure. We fight the battle at the dinner table, we fight it when we go out, and we see the pull these devices have on our children's attention and spirits. It is our primary job as parents to ensure our children head to school ready to learn. But the reality is that the fight doesn't end when they step onto the school bus. When they walk into a building filled with buzzing pockets and hidden screens, they aren't entering a sanctuary of learning, they are entering an arena of distraction.*"
  - As another parent noted in written testimony in support of House Bill 5149, "*Banning cellphones & smartwatches "bell to bell" would be very beneficial for students. Numerous studies have shown the harm posed by phones to children. Even having the phone on silent and in a backpack near you reduces your concentration. The evidence is clear and obvious that phones and smartwatches do not belong in classrooms. Currently in CT different school districts have different policies with uneven applications. For example, in my elementary school cellphones/smartwatches are not supposed to be used during school hours. However, my kindergartener tells me her classmates are sending voice memos to their parents about what they are having for dinner, and playing games on their watch while waiting in line. This corrupts children's attention spans and distracts from educational time and social skills. In older grades bullying and social media can have a huge negative impact on students.*"

Another important consideration is the perceived impact that restricting access to personal technology may have on student safety and security. Families may be concerned about their ability to reach their child during an emergency and whether they will receive timely and accurate communication from the school. Districts should develop and review the communications section of their All Hazards School Security and Safety Plans to ensure these concerns are addressed. School leaders should develop and communicate protocols for communicating with families during the school day and publicize how parents and caregivers can get information to students during the school day, how to communicate with students during family emergencies, and also exactly how the school will communicate with families in cases of emergencies and safety and security incidents at school. Using personal devices during an emergency can hinder the response effort and create further safety issues. Personal devices can distract students from important instructions, ringing phones and notifications can alert an intruder to the location of students, and a high volume of calls and messages can overwhelm the cellular network and affect the ability of school administrators and first responders to communicate effectively in real time. Additionally, given that students may not be aware of the emerging situation, information communicated by students may be inaccurate and hinder emergency response efforts.[17]

Responsibilities of Local Boards of Education and Superintendents of Schools in Developing a Personal and Purposeful Technology Use 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 and screentime 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 policy is districtwide in its vision, scope and implementation and aligns with existing policies.
- Consider the unique vulnerabilities and opportunities of different student developmental stages in policy implementation.
- Include 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 the 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. The CSDE offers a comprehensive K-12 Model Digital Literacy and Well-Being curriculum.[18]
- Assist families in understanding healthy uses of technology, setting ground rules, using parental controls on devices and ways to monitor technology use.
- Review and update the district policy regularly to address future technological devices, platforms and emerging threats.
- Consider caregiver and student concerns for communication during family emergencies or safety and security incidents at school and ensure appropriate pathways are developed and shared with families for communicating and receiving information — for routine and emergency situations.
- 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; 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 IEP and Section 504 accommodations.
- In developing local policies, it is important that boards of education and superintendents ensure that procedures clearly identify individualized exceptions for students whose documented educational, medical, accessibility, or communication needs require access to personal technology. Policies should support collaboration among school administrators, educators, families, and appropriate school personnel to ensure these accommodations are implemented consistently.

Responsibilities of School Leaders and Educators in Supporting Consistent Implementation of the Policy

- **School Leaders:**
  - Engage educators, families, and students in a mindful introduction of the Personal and Purposeful Technology Use Policy that is sensitive to the concerns of all involved.
  - Support educators in learning about the policy and the consistent, uniform application of and compliance with the district policy and associated protocols.
  - Provide educators with professional development on best practices for meaningful use of technology and digital tools and services in classroom lessons and activities using allowable school issued devices.

- Develop shared expectations for appropriate technology use that align with the school's broader behavioral expectations and positive school climate efforts and school climate plans, emphasizing responsible digital behavior, restorative practices, skill-building, and personal accountability.
- Create a process for exceptions to the personal technology use and purposeful screen time policy based on a student's specific needs and as appropriate according to each student's IEP, Section 504 accommodations, and individualized health care plan, learning plan, or Title IX or other student safety plan.
- Create research-based strategies and approaches to create a positive environment regarding media, technology, and screen time by incorporating digital citizenship, literacy and wellness education as part of the curricula.
- Create and ensure uniform implementation of protocols for communicating with families and for families to communicate with school leaders and educators for routine communications with their child and in cases of emergency.
- Provide multiple communication options for afterschool activities, clubs, sports, and all school events that do not rely solely on social media, such as the district website, weekly newsletters, school communication apps, or email.

- **Educators:**
  - Develop age-appropriate expectations for responsible use of technology devices, digital tools and services, and screen time usage.
  - Recognize that impulse control is a skill that needs to be developed and that students require support and instruction to establish a healthy and responsible relationship 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 healthy digital habits and the use of personal technology and social media in alignment with 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.
  - Incorporate age and developmentally appropriate opportunities to teach students that personal technology can be used as a tool and resource for learning, task and assignment organization and time management.
  - Understand that individual students may use personal devices or other assistive technology with permission as part of an IEP, Section 504 plan, individualized health care plan, or other documented needs.
  - Partner with families and caregivers to reinforce healthy digital habits at home and during non-school days and hours.

Responsibilities of Families, Caregivers and Students to Support the Implementation of and Adherence to the Policy

- **Families and Caregivers:**
  - Partner with school staff and classroom teachers to reinforce healthy digital habits at school and at home.
  - Promote student engagement in learning by being mindful of trying to communicate with students via cell phone during the school day and encourage children to use pre-planning, problem-solving skills, coping strategies, and in-school supports to help foster independence.

- Support school initiatives to create a personal technology-free learning environment that allow students to fully participate in their education while encouraging in-person connections with peers and adults.
- Review and follow district policies regarding routine and emergency communication with school leaders and educators during the school day.
- Model a healthy relationship with technology, social media and devices at home and reduce the use of technology as a tool for occupying young children.
- Use age-appropriate parental controls on smartphones and other devices to help build a healthy relationship with technology.
- Establish open lines of communication with children and have regular conversations about the safe and responsible use of technology, including discussions on the purpose of applications for accessing news, gaming, and learning.
- Review recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) on how parents and caregivers can help support school cell phone policies.[19]
- Review the Digital Literacy and Well-Being Resources for Families[20] from CommonSense Media, a CSDE partner for promoting healthy digital habits.
- Create a family media plan to manage use of devices and digital tools and services at home.[21]

- **Students:**
  - Participate in opportunities to provide feedback in the development of the district policy and grade-band specific policies, as appropriate.
  - Follow the district Personal and Purposeful 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.
  - Use pre-planning, problem-solving skills, coping strategies, and in-school supports to reduce the need for school day communication with family members or other entities outside school.
  - Encourage peers to engage in the appropriate use of technology and social media.
  - 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 Supporting Districts in Developing and Implementing District Cell Phone Policies and Preparing Educators

- **Higher Education Institutions Educator Preparation Programs:**
  - Participate in initiatives related to technology and screen time use in schools, including the development of model curricula for digital citizenship, media literacy, 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.
  - Integrate the Connecticut comprehensive K-12 Model Digital Literacy and Well-Being curriculum in the course sequence of teacher preparation programs.
  - 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):**
  - Promote and provide professional learning and technical assistance on the effective integration and implementation of the K-12 Model Digital Literacy & Well-Being curriculum.
  - Continue to invest in resources that assist school districts in policies that address emerging technologies and screen time usage.
  - Monitor future national guidance and federal resources for dissemination to districts to aid 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.

Connecticut Sample Policies

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) has developed Sample Policy Guidance for local and regional boards of education:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education: Sample Policy and Guidance[22]

Notably, CABE has model policies on both play-based learning and screen time. Aligning with Section 10-24f of the Connecticut General Statutes, CABE's model policy on play-based learning states:

> *"Play-based learning during the instructional time of each regular school day for all students in kindergarten and any preschool program offered by the board shall be provided. Such play-based learning must be incorporated and integrated into daily practice, allow for the needs of such students to be met through free play, guided play and games, and be predominantly free of the use of mobile electronics."*[23]

CABE's model policy on screen time recommends daily maximum limits on screen time based on grade band to "ensure that technology serves as a purposeful complement to, rather than a replacement for, high-quality, face-to-face instruction, collaborative peer learning, and hands-on, offline experiences."[24]

In addition, the following excerpts from sample policies and resources are meant to provide an array of content for districts to consider in developing their own policy to restrict cell phone use during the school day. Policies should consider the needs, ages, and use of social media and technology of students; the norms of the school-family relationships and expectations; and the teaching and learning needs of the school community. They are not intended to imply one strategy or policy is best or more successful than another, as the local or regional board of education must determine what best meets the needs of the district, its staff, families, and students.

Like many school policies, personal technology policies should include limited, individualized exceptions to meet students' individualized, documented educational, medical, or safety needs while maintaining the overall intent of reducing distractions and promoting student learning and social-emotional health.

Torrington Public Schools

- **Elementary school:** Students may bring cell phones and wearable technology to school but must turn their cell phones off or place them on silent mode. Cell phones and wearable technology must remain completely out of view (e.g., in the student's backpack) for the entire school day.
- **Middle School:** Students may bring cell phones and wearable technology to school but must ensure that they are turned off or on silent mode and locked in a district issued cell phone pouch throughout the entire school day. Students lock their cell phone pouches upon entry to the building and unlock them at dismissal.
- **High School:** Students may bring cell phones and wearable technology to school but must ensure that they are turned off or on silent mode and locked in a district issued cell phone pouch throughout the entire school day. Students lock their cell phone pouches upon entry into the school building and unlock them at dismissal. Cell phones will only be allowed if requested by a teacher as necessary for a specific lesson, upon approval by an administrator 24 hours in advance. If approved, the mobile kiosk will be signed out to the teacher for that period or the day. At no time will students be obligated to possess or own a personal electronic device to meet their educational needs.

Lisbon Public Schools

- **Grades PreK–Grade 4:** Cell phones/smartwatches are not permitted on school premises.
- **Grades 5–Grade 8:** Cell phones/smartwatches should be off and out of sight when students walk into the building. Cell phones/smartwatches are to be stored in lockers throughout the school day. Students are permitted to use their cell phones/smartwatches during after-school homeroom (3:00–dismissal) per the teacher's permission (for example, practice is canceled; a parent needs to be notified).
- Parents should not expect to communicate directly with their children using their cell phone/smartwatch during the designated school time. Parents who need to communicate with their child in the case of an emergency should call the school office and communicate with school personnel the nature of their emergency who will then communicate as appropriate with the student impacted by the emergency.

Resources for Districts and Educators

Connecticut State Department of Education (accessed 7/15/2026)
CSDE K-12 Model Digital Literacy & Well-Being Curriculum
Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy Guidelines and Recommended Actions (2020)
Connecticut School Climate Guidance (2025)
Connecticut Assistive Technology Guidelines (2021)

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (accessed 7/15/2026)
Framing the Smartphone Policy Deliberations (2024)
Student Social Media Use (2024)

US Department of Education Office of Education Technology (accessed 7/21/2026)
Planning Together: A Playbook for Student Personal Device Policies (2024)

Common Sense Media (accessed 7/15/2026)
Common Sense Education

American Academy of Pediatrics (accessed 7/15/2026)
Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

Digital Promise (accessed 7/15/2026)
EdTech Procurement Framework

Resources for Families and Caregivers

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (accessed 7/15/2026)
Online Health and Safety for Children and Youth

Common Sense Media (accessed 7/15/2026)
Digital Literacy & Well-Being Resources for Family Engagement
Family Tech Planners
Tips for the Online World

American Academy of Pediatrics (accessed 7/15/2026)
Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health
School Smartphone Policies: How Parents Can Help
Family Media Plan

Child Mind Institute (accessed 7/15/2026)
Screen Time & Technology Resources for Parents

Center for Disease Control (CDC) (accessed 7/21/2026)
Keeping Children Safe Away from Home

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Footnotes

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