



Office of the State
Superintendent of Education



Model School Personal Device Policy

MARCH 2026



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INTRODUCTION

Legal Background

Across the District of Columbia, schools and local education agencies (LEAs) are increasingly restricting the use of personal wireless communication devices—such as cell phones, tablets, laptops, and gaming systems—during instructional time. This shift reflects growing research¹ indicating that personal device possession during learning disrupts the ability of schools to foster engaging, safe, and vibrant learning communities. In response to this challenge, the DC Council passed, and Mayor Muriel Bowser signed into law, the “[Disconnect Act of 2025](#)” (Act).²

This legislation requires all District LEAs serving K–12 students to adopt a personal wireless communication device policy (device policy) before the start of the 2026–27 school year. All LEA policies must:

- Prohibit students from possessing a wireless communication device not owned or provided by the school (specifically cellphones, laptop computers, tablet computers, or gaming devices) on school premises at any time during the full school day;
- Identify consequences for device possession;
- Establish a process and timeline for the LEA to assess whether the policy is working and how to refine it;
- Require each school in the LEA to:
 - Identify how a parent or guardian of an enrolled student should communicate urgent information to their child during the full school day;
 - Identify how the school will communicate with families in cases of emergency;
 - Identify appropriate storage for students’ personal wireless communication devices during the full school day; and
 - Publish their device policy no later than 15 days prior to the start of the school year, and communicate the policy to their families and employees, contractors, and volunteers.

Additionally, the required policies may:

- Allow students to carry or hold an item in a backpack, purse, handbag, or other personal carryall;
- Include exemptions for a student possessing a personal wireless communication device for specific educational purposes or to manage a student’s health care needs; and
- Be stricter than those outlined in the law.

The law also required that the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) develop and share with LEAs a model policy that meets the requirements set forth in the Act. The required model policy can be found below.

Best Practices and OSSE’s Model Policy

To draft the policy, OSSE conducted a landscape analysis of all publicly available LEA personal device policies and engaged with hundreds of District students, educators, and family members. In these engagements, it became clear that some device policy choices did not have a single best practice that would meet the needs of all school communities. OSSE therefore does not provide this model policy as a universal document meant to be implemented without modifications in any given LEA. Rather, OSSE encourages LEAs and schools to use this document as a starting point, adopting policies that comply with the Act while also collaborating with their communities to establish the systems and processes that best fit their needs.

However, there are promising strategies gleaned from conversations and observations in District schools that OSSE encourages LEAs to consider when implementing their own personal device policies. Specifically, LEAs should strongly consider:

- **Inviting the school community into the development of personal device policies, emphasizing the “why” behind restrictions.** Letting community members contribute to a school’s policy strengthens buy-in and quality. School leaders report that centering discussions on time and place—emphasizing that school is meant for academic learning and social and emotional development—is particularly effective in gaining community buy-in and understanding. OSSE modeled this by engaging with District stakeholders while drafting this policy.
- **Taking community safety concerns seriously and communicating proactively.** Schools need clear, well-communicated policies and procedures for emergency response and communication. How parents and students can reach one another in the event of an emergency needs to be clearly established in every school building. Schools should highlight how personal devices can make school less safe by facilitating student conflicts and distracting students during emergencies. In accordance with the law, OSSE’s LEA-level model policy requires that schools have emergency communications plans, leaving the specifics to each school’s context. Additional recommendations are included in the “Emergency Communications Policy” section.
- **Restricting student access to personal devices by collecting and securely storing them prior to the start of each school day.** The most effective way to restrict student personal device usage during the school day is to collect and store them daily. School leaders with effective collection policies report rarely needing to implement interventions in response to unauthorized personal device use, thereby reducing conflict between students and staff. Though the law permits devices to be stored in personal carryall, OSSE’s below model policy discourages storage anywhere that affords easy device access.

- **Restricting additional devices other than those required by law.** Technology is constantly changing. LEAs should respond to these changes by updating restrictions as needed to maintain a distraction-free environment. For example, OSSE recommends that LEAs consider restricting the possession of smart watches, headphones, and wireless hotspots as done in the model policy below.
- **Emphasizing a restorative approach for interventions for student violations of personal device possession restrictions.** Restorative approaches reframe device possession as an opportunity to learn and build positive relationships in the school community. More information on restorative interventions can be found in the “Interventions for Consideration” section.

In one OSSE-led discussion, an educator stated that “The lack of a policy has made [their school] unsuccessful” in fostering a distraction-free learning environment, succinctly encapsulating the purpose of a model policy. Our classrooms cannot be distraction-free without first defining what that means and how it will be implemented. It is OSSE’s sincere hope that this document will be a useful tool for LEAs to implement effective, legally compliant device policies, and support joyful, distraction-free learning environments in Washington, DC.

Note of Thanks and Appreciation

In developing this model policy, OSSE held focus group sessions with educators, families, and students, visited schools, and distributed a public feedback survey to District residents. The responses of hundreds of District of Columbia students, educators, and caretakers were invaluable. Their input contributed significantly to the initial policy drafting and subsequent changes and edits. In addition to those who completed OSSE’s survey, OSSE wanted to particularly thank:

- The DC State Board of Education’s Student Advisory Committee
- OSSE’s Teacher, Parent, and School Leader Superintendent Advisory Councils
- District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
- The Youth Leadership Council at the DC Coalition of Mental Wellbeing and Behavioral Health in Schools
- The DC Charter School Alliance
- LEA leaders
- The DC Public Charter School Board
- Other District government agencies

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS MODEL POLICY

The following OSSE model policy is organized into two parts: an annotated policy and an appendix. The annotated model policy (pages 6 to 15), contains the full text of the model policy paired with in-text commentary titled “OSSE Observations.” These observations are contextually included alongside the relevant policy section(s). They highlight some of the many considerations OSSE weighed in the policy’s development, providing transparency to help inform LEAs as they draft their own device policies. The appendix includes a “clean” model policy without OSSE Observations, which LEAs may adopt, modify, and use at their discretion.

Because this is a model policy, OSSE has made certain policy choices—based on its assessment of best practices—that go beyond the requirements of the Disconnect Act. Where a policy goes beyond the requirements of the law, a “‡” in superscript is included in the annotated model policy. This does not include where the model policy endeavors to operationalize a legal requirement. For example, the law requires LEAs to evaluate the effectiveness of their personal device restriction policies. The model policy outlines how a school could evaluate the effectiveness of its policies, which is legally required, and is therefore not marked with a “‡” despite the details not being explicit in the law itself.

Each of the District’s schools have unique circumstances and learning environments that cannot be fully captured by any one model policy. Therefore, there is text CAPITALIZED, BOLD, AND IN BRACKETS throughout this document that are meant to be customized by each LEA depending on the unique environments, systems, and processes in their school buildings. Definitions for



OSSE OBSERVATIONS

All OSSE observations will be included in text sessions formatted identical to this box!

what to fill into these unique sections are as follows, in the order that they first appear:

- **[LEA NAME]:** Name of the local education agency (LEA).
- **[DATE]:** The date that the LEA wishes to input for a given context.
- **[SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT]:** This is the person(s) responsible at a school for the particular contextual need. It could be designated job titles, specific names, or a combination of both.
- **[TIME PERIOD]:** Designated period of time (for example, a semester).
- **[LEA DESIGNATED CONTACT]:** This is the person(s) responsible at the LEA for the particular contextual need.
- **[SPECIFIC INTERVENTION(S) BASED ON LEA/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT]:** Appropriate intervention(s) that an LEA or school leverages in their codes of conduct.

For more information and resources on personal wireless communication device policies, visit the [OSSE Model Cell Phone Policy](#) website or email OSSE.SchoolHealth@dc.gov.

[LEA NAME] PERSONAL WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE POLICY

[The Disconnect Act of 2025](#) requires each local education agency (LEA) serving students enrolled in grades K-12 to adopt and implement a personal wireless communication device policy no later than 15 days before the start of the 2026-27 school year.³

This [LEA NAME] personal device policy will be published on the [LEA NAME]'s website no later than 15 days before the start of each school year for which the policy is in effect, and any mid-year modifications to the policy will be published no later than 15 days before being effective.⁴ Additionally, the policy will be communicated to all enrolled families before the first day of school⁵, and it will be communicated to all [LEA NAME] employees, contractors, and volunteers who have contact with students during school hours.⁶ By proactively communicating the personal device policy ahead of the school year and allowing time for all members of the school community to understand it, we aim to support effective implementation and reduce the need for interventions related to personal device policy violations.

This policy was first published on the [LEA NAME]'s website on [DATE] and last updated on [DATE].

Restricted Personal Wireless Communication Devices

Under District law, beginning in the 2026-27 school year, K-12 students may not possess a personal wireless communication device ("personal device") at any time during the full school day⁷, starting at the time that instruction begins each day and ending at the time students are dismissed daily, including during lunch periods and transitions between classes. Personal devices are those not owned or provided by the school. The following personal devices may not be possessed by K-12 students during the full school day:

- Cellular phones
- Tablet computers
- Laptop computers
- Gaming devices
- Smart watches with communications capabilities‡
- Headphones (wireless or wired)‡
- Wireless hotspots‡

Individual schools may choose to prohibit additional personal devices not included in the above list.

Secure Storage

Students who choose to bring personal devices to school must place them at a designated secure storage location upon arrival to campus, where it will be kept for the full school day. ‡ Each school campus is responsible for establishing secure storage location(s) and processes for collecting personal devices upon student arrival and subsequently distributing personal devices when students dismiss.⁸ ‡ Allowing students to keep personal devices in locations that are personally accessible during the school day (for example, in a purse, backpack, or pocket) is not allowable secure storage in [LEA NAME].

Personal devices are the sole responsibility of students who choose to bring them onto school campus. Personal devices are brought on school premises at the student's own risk. [LEA NAME] assumes no responsibility for personal devices, and will not replace, any lost, damaged, or stolen personal devices. This is applicable to all devices, including devices that have been confiscated by the LEA.‡



OSSE OBSERVATIONS: PERSONAL DEVICE STORAGE

OSSE engagement found that most effective distraction-free schools securely store personal devices at the start of each school day. When well implemented, it reduces the enforcement burden for individual school staff and aligns to research showing that mere possession of a personal device can be a learning distraction.* OSSE observed many viable ways that personal devices could be stored:

- Students at a DCPS High School designed and built phone lockers. These lockers, mounted on wheels, are kept in the front atrium of the school prior to entering security checkpoints. Each student is assigned a locker number and encouraged to use personal locks to further secure their personal devices. The school wheels the lockers to a secure location after the beginning of the school day and brings them to the auditorium at the end of the school day for personal device distribution prior to going home. Students have built lockers for other District schools.
 - Students at a DCPS Middle School place their personal devices in a case prior to entering the school building. In exchange for their device, a school staff member gives the student a slip of paper that corresponds to the grade-level case and slot number that contains their personal device. Cases are secured in a locked closet during the day and brought to relevant grade level floors at the end of the day. Through the school's Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) system, students can earn the privilege of being first in line to retrieve their phone at the end of each day.
 - Students at another school turn in a personalized pencil pouch with their personal devices at the start of each day. The school sorts the personal devices by home room, securely stores them during the school day, and returns them to home rooms to be picked up at the end of each day.
 - Other schools use personal pouches that can only be unlocked by the school.
- OSSE encourages schools to consider the following when developing a personal device storage process:
- **Physical space:** Where does your school have adequate space in the building to collect personal devices at the start of each day? Schools with narrow entryways or weapon abatement systems may not be able to collect personal devices where students enter the school building due to space constrictions that create bottlenecks. Schools reliant on outdoor collection need to consider alternatives in the event of inclement weather. If adequate storage space for all student personal devices does not exist, alternative methods should be considered. OSSE discourages in-classroom storage, which can be less secure and places undue responsibility on educators.
 - **Staffing:** Who will collect and distribute personal devices daily? Identifying who is responsible is important, including in the event of staff absences. Staff trained and experienced in de-escalation and building school culture may be best positioned to collect personal devices.
 - **Student engagement:** Are there creative ideas that students have for storing their personal devices? Letting students design lockers, decorate pencil pouches, and otherwise engage with the physical storage of personal devices increases buy-in and incentivizes compliance.
 - **Cost:** Different storage approaches carry different costs, which should be considered accordingly.

* Ward, Duke, Gneezy, & Bos (2017). Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*.

Exemptions

While DC schools are not legally required to allow for exemptions from their personal device policies, there are limited circumstances in which a personal device may be necessary on an individual basis.⁹

Exemptions for Educational Purposes

[LEA NAME] does not allow personal devices to be used for educational purposes. † [LEA NAME] provides all necessary technology for an enriching learning environment for each of our students. It is inequitable for [LEA NAME] staff to require or expect student use of a personal device for a student to participate fully in their education.

Exemptions for Assistive Technology

At no time should a student’s personal device be used for educational purposes due to inclusion of a device in a student’s individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan. This is consistent with District regulations requiring that all identified assistive technology be provided by the school at no cost to the parent.¹⁰

Specifically, LEAs must provide assistive technology devices and services to a student with a disability in accordance with the student’s IEP.¹¹ LEAs cannot require a student with a disability or a parent to purchase or otherwise provide assistive technology devices or assistive technology services that are necessary for the student to access a free appropriate public education (FAPE).¹²

Medical Exemptions

A student may possess their personal device(s) during instructional time if possession is necessary for managing health care needs. Health care needs are defined by law as “specific medical requirements or disability or health-related supports that are documented by a licensed medical provider with the LEA and that require the use of a personal device for monitoring a medical condition, administering medication, receiving health-related alerts, receiving disability-related supports, or communicating with medical personnel or caregivers regarding the student’s health during the school day.”¹³

To obtain a medical exemption, students or their families must provide documentation from a licensed medical provider to [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT] demonstrating a health care need as defined by the law. Medical exemptions do not expire (unless they are temporary) and shall be signed or approved by a private physician, their representative, or the public health authority stating that personal device possession is medically necessary for the student. Physicians may use the Universal Health Certificate to indicate medical exemption or submit a signed or stamped letter indicating that personal device possession is medically necessary. Medical exemptions that are temporary shall be monitored by the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT] to determine when the student is no longer eligible to possess a personal device.

Students or their families are encouraged to provide the required documentation upon, or immediately following, enrollment in a school. Schools will not be able to grant an exemption without appropriate documentation in place.

Medically exempted students may not use their personal devices outside of medically necessary uses and are encouraged to only use their personal devices outside of instruction time in school-designated locations (for example a nurse’s office) if possible, to avoid potential confusion.



OSSE OBSERVATIONS: EXEMPTIONS

In OSSE’s conversations with students and educators, one of the most common concerns shared was that school-provided devices or internet access were inadequate for specific educational needs. Students cited blocked websites needed for class research or materials teachers needed (like videos) that were not accessible on school networks.

OSSE understands these concerns, but found that educational exceptions generally exacerbated enforcement challenges, disrupting distraction-free norms and disadvantaging students without access to personal devices. If an LEA is considering educational exemptions, they should consider the array of possible “educational purposes” in their building and narrowly tailor any exemptions to those specific needs. This could include what schools may do if school-issued devices are lost or broken, or if students need two-factor authentication to access particular materials like college applications or financial aid.

The best way for schools to preclude the educational need for personal devices is to have explicit student and educator-facing “white-listing” policies. White-listing policies should be accessible to educators, students, and parents so they understand which websites can, and cannot, be accessed on school networks and school-provided devices. Additionally, these policies should be reviewed regularly with students and educators to ensure that they can access necessary websites on school-provided devices, and request that certain websites be unblocked if not.

Additionally, navigating school-allowed resources can be an opportunity to teach students about identifying and using trusted online resources, a core component of DC’s Social Studies standards, which can be reviewed in full [here](#).

Early Dismissal and Off Campus Travel During School Hours

If a student dismisses early or must leave campus for a school-allowed reason (e.g., to attend an employer-based internship opportunity), they may retrieve their personal device from the school's designated secure storage location and maintain possession of the personal device for the duration of the time that they are off campus. Students are required to place their personal device(s) at the school's designated secure storage location if they return to campus.

Each [LEA NAME] school is allowed its own policy regarding personal device possession during field trips or off-campus extracurricular activities during school hours.

Exemption Enforcement

If an exemption is approved, the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT] will maintain a record of all exempted students and the reason for the exemption. These records will be kept in a secure location to prevent unauthorized disclosure of students' private information. A list of all exempted students without the identified reason will be maintained by the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT], shared with all school staff, and be in an easily available location so that staff may quickly check to see if a specific student is exempt.

Interventions

Students may not be suspended or disciplinarily unenrolled for violating the personal device policy.¹⁴ School staff should consider interventions that correct student behavior and acknowledge how possession impacts a distraction-free learning environment while ultimately keeping the student in the classroom.

If experiencing large numbers of interventions, school staff should review and strengthen their personal device collection and storage procedures, and reiterate [LEA NAME]'s clear, consistent expectations for device possession to students, families, and staff.

All school staff are expected to help ensure that our learning environments are distraction-free and will be trained accordingly. However, ultimate enforcement of interventions for unauthorized personal device possession is the responsibility of the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT]. To prevent potential confusion, school volunteers or guests are not allowed to enforce a school's personal device policy. To avoid conflict, schools are expected to adhere to their protocol for alerting the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT] in instances when misbehavior escalates.

Interventions will reset at the start of each [TIME PERIOD]. While the policy will be enforced starting on the first day of school, interventions will begin after the first week of school is complete to allow students to adapt to distraction-free learning. At [LEA NAME], we will adhere to the following interventions when students violate our personal device policy:

INFRACTION FREQUENCY	INTERVENTIONS
First Infraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Securely store student's personal device for the remainder of the day according to school's storage processes[SPECIFIC INTERVENTION(S) BASED ON LEA/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT]
Second Infraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Securely store student's personal device for the remainder of the day according to school's storage processes[SPECIFIC INTERVENTION(S) BASED ON LEA/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT]
Third and Subsequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Securely store student's personal device for the remainder of the day according to school's storage processes[SPECIFIC INTERVENTION(S) BASED ON LEA/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT]

Other Student Behavior

Other student code of conduct violations not directly related to the unauthorized possession of a personal device will be enforced in accordance with the school's code of conduct. For example, if a student is using a personal device to bully and/or harass another student, this is a violation of [LEA NAME]'s code of conduct regarding bullying.



OSSE OBSERVATIONS: INTERVENTIONS

By law, all LEA-level personal device policies are required to outline “consequences for violation,” as is OSSE’s model policy. School and LEA-level device policies exist within a broader code of conduct framework, often utilizing “tiers.” Lower tier (one or two) behaviors have less intensive consequences than higher tier (e.g., three) behaviors. Most District LEAs consider possession to be a tier one or two behavior.

As a state education agency, OSSE will not create a District-wide, tiered code of conduct for all student behaviors. Instead, our model policy is crafted to allow schools to input the appropriate interventions based on their own codes of conduct. The “Interventions for Consideration” section on page 13 is an example of tiered consequences that LEAs might choose to adopt.

Conversations with schools, school leaders, and experts in restorative practices and social and emotional learning informed OSSE’s example interventions. OSSE recommends that schools consider the following when developing their own personal device policy consequences:

- Any consequences should be related to the violation. Taking away student recess time for using a personal device, for example, does not address the underlying issue.

- Restorative practices emphasize understanding why a student feels the need to possess their personal device during instructional hours. After multiple confiscations, schools should engage the student to understand why they feel they need their personal device and engage with the underlying need. For more information on restorative practices, see OSSE’s resources.
- Overnight device confiscation should be avoided whenever possible. OSSE received strong feedback from parents, students, and educators discouraging overnight confiscation, and chose not to recommend such an approach because many students use their personal devices to access transportation.
- As with all policies and procedures, staff should be thoroughly trained on proper implementation of the LEA’s personal device policy.

Last, the best antidotes to unauthorized personal device use are implementing effective personal device collection and secure storage procedures and creating learning environments where students do not feel the need to access their personal devices. Successful schools report engaging lessons, welcoming staff, and joyful enrichment activities as effective, proactive ways to reduce student desire to use personal devices during the school day.



OSSE OBSERVATIONS: INTERVENTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Interventions for personal device possession could be adjusted based on grade bands and could include, but are not limited to, the below tiered responses.³⁷ Any interventions should be consistently enforced across the school community, and schools should monitor equitable enforcement.

DISCIPLINE TIER	INTERVENTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION
First Infraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom-based responses • Verbal warning and reminder about the personal device policy to the student and their family • Written reflection
Second Infraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional family outreach • Discussing distraction-free learning in restorative circles
Third and Subsequent Infractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and student conference to discuss proper and improper personal device use, including determining whether students need to take their personal devices to school at all, and whether additional steps need to be taken to ensure the student is properly turning their personal device in each day. An action plan will be drafted with input from the student and their family. • Subsequent violations will result in staff reviewing the personal device action plan with the student and their family and adjusting accordingly. • Referral to Student Support Team, IEP team (if the student has accommodations or modifications in place), mentoring program, or counselor.

Emergency Communications Policy

Nothing is more important to [LEA NAME] than the safety of our students. All [LEA NAME] schools must identify how a parent or guardian of an enrolled student should communicate urgent information to their child during the full school day¹⁵, and how the school will communicate with families in cases of emergency.¹⁶

Each [LEA NAME] school must publish this information in family and student handbooks.



OSSE OBSERVATIONS: COMMUNICATIONS

The law mandates that LEAs require each school in the LEA to have a communications policy, which OSSE has mirrored in this model policy.

When discussing personal device restrictions with families and students, OSSE found that they are most anxious about the potential to not reach one another in the event of an emergency. They often rely on personal devices to communicate essential information when needed.

To build trust with families and students when implementing personal device restrictions, schools must ensure emergency communication procedures are easy to understand and readily accessible. Although OSSE found that nearly all schools have such policies, many families were unaware of them and did not know how to contact their children—or how their children would be contacted—in an emergency.

Schools publishing such policies, and regularly reminding families about them, will increase trust and reduce anxiety. Regularly testing emergency communications protocols and ensuring that emergency contact information is kept up to date are also essential, with the added benefit of serving more touchpoints to familiarize families with emergency procedures. When it comes to student safety, OSSE recommends schools err on the side of over-communication.

Additional best practices for written emergency communications policies include:

- Clearly establishing how a family may reach their child during the day (for example, a front office phone number) and sharing that information frequently and prominently.
- Establishing policies clearly outlining what qualifies as an emergency necessitating student or school contact of a family during school hours.
- Developing and sharing a school emergency guide that describes what parents can expect in the event of emergencies, including evacuations, heightened alert status†, severe weather, earthquakes, lockdowns, or shelter in place orders. The guide should not include sensitive information that could endanger a school community during an emergency by being publicly available, such as the names of staff responsible for emergency response coordination, the locations of command posts, school floor plans, or evacuation routes.
- Sharing all emergency communications channels multiple times throughout the year.
- Communicating to families in their home language as required by the DC Language Access Act.

† Incident that dictates a heightened state of alert to visitors or others who desire access to the facility, or students, personnel or visitors who wish to leave.



Policy Assessment and Revision

DC law requires LEAs to establish a process and timeline to assess whether the policy is working and how to refine it.¹⁷

To ensure this policy is effective and minimizes the risk of disproportionate impact on specific student groups, **[LEA DESIGNATED CONTACT]** at **[LEA NAME]** will conduct a policy assessment prior to the start of each **[TIME PERIOD]**, and if necessary, make revisions. In assessing the policy, **[LEA NAME]** will examine:

- Policy code of conduct enforcement data, ensuring that the policy is being enforced fairly and appropriately across student populations;¹⁸
- Student and family input, including data collected from survey administration and qualitative conversations with student and parent advisory groups; and
- Collected feedback from **[LEA NAME]** educators regarding effective and ineffective practices.

Annually, the **[LEA DESIGNATED CONTACT]** or their designee(s) will:

- Convene stakeholders, particularly families, students, and educators, to gather feedback on the policy and associated interventions as written;
- Examine **[LEA NAME]** social studies instruction for alignment with the media literacy and civics standards within the [Washington, DC Social Studies Standards](#);
- Review each **[LEA NAME]** school's discipline data for patterns of potentially inequitable enforcement and compliance with District law; and,
- Update the **[LEA NAME]** policy based on this annual review, as needed.

[LEA DESIGNATED CONTACT] may choose their own tools to gather relevant feedback or may leverage the Stanford Social Media Lab and Tech and Society Lab at NYU Stern's Toolkit for Assessing Phones in Schools ([The TAPS](#)).

Changes to this policy will be communicated and published **at least 15 days** before taking effect.¹⁹

APPENDIX | COPYABLE MODEL POLICY WITHOUT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[LEA NAME] PERSONAL WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE POLICY

[The Disconnect Act of 2025](#) requires each local education agency (LEA) serving students enrolled in grades K-12 to adopt and implement a personal wireless communication device policy no later than 15 days before the start of the 2026-27 school year.²⁰

This [LEA NAME] personal device policy will be published on the [LEA NAME]'s website no later than 15 days before the start of each school year for which the policy is in effect, and any mid-year modifications to the policy will be published no later than 15 days before being effective.²¹ Additionally, the policy will be communicated to all enrolled families before the first day of school,²² and it will be communicated to all [LEA NAME] employees, contractors, and volunteers who have contact with students during school hours.²³ By proactively communicating the personal device policy ahead of the school year and allowing time for all members of the school community to understand it, we aim to support effective implementation and reduce the need for interventions related to personal device policy violations.

This policy was first published on the [LEA NAME]'s website on [DATE] and last updated on [DATE].

Restricted Personal Wireless Communication Devices

Under District law, beginning in the 2026-27 school year, K-12 students may not possess a personal wireless communication device ("personal device") at any time during the full school day,²⁴ starting at the time that instruction begins each day and ending at the time students are dismissed daily, including during lunch periods and transitions between classes. Personal devices are those not owned or provided by the school. The following personal devices may not be possessed by K-12 students during the full school day:

- Cellular phones
- Tablet computers
- Laptop computers
- Gaming devices
- Smart watches with communications capabilities[‡]
- Headphones (wireless or wired)[‡]
- Wireless hotspots[‡]

Individual schools may choose to prohibit additional personal devices not included in the above list.

Secure Storage

Students who choose to bring personal devices to school must place them at a designated secure storage location upon arrival to campus, where it will be kept for the full school day.[‡] Each school campus is responsible for establishing secure storage location(s) and processes for collecting personal devices upon student arrival and subsequently distributing personal devices when students dismiss.^{25 ‡} Allowing students to keep personal devices in locations that are personally accessible during the school day (for example, in a purse, backpack, or pocket) is not allowable secure storage in [LEA NAME].[‡]

Personal devices are the sole responsibility of students who choose to bring them onto school campus. Personal devices are brought on school premises at the student's own risk. [LEA NAME] assumes no responsibility for personal devices, and will not replace, any lost, damaged, or stolen personal devices. This is applicable to all devices, including devices that have been confiscated by the LEA.[‡]

Exemptions

While DC schools are not legally required to allow for exemptions from their personal device policies, there are limited circumstances in which a personal device may be necessary on an individual basis.²⁶

Exemptions for Educational Purposes

[LEA NAME] does not allow personal devices to be used for educational purposes. † [LEA NAME] provides all necessary technology for an enriching learning environment for each of our students. It is inequitable for [LEA NAME] staff to require or expect student use of a personal device for a student to participate fully in their education.

Exemptions for Assistive Technology

At no time should a student's personal device be used for educational purposes due to inclusion of a device in a student's individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan. This is consistent with District regulations requiring that all identified assistive technology be provided by the school at no cost to the parent.²⁷

Specifically, LEAs must provide assistive technology devices and services to a student with a disability in accordance with the student's IEP.²⁸ LEAs cannot require a student with a disability or a parent to purchase or otherwise provide assistive technology devices or assistive technology services that are necessary for the student to access a free appropriate public education (FAPE).²⁹

Medical Exemptions

A student may possess their personal device(s) during instructional time if possession is necessary for managing health care needs. Health care needs are defined by law as "specific medical requirements or disability or health-related supports that are documented by a licensed medical provider with the LEA and that require the use of a personal device for monitoring a medical condition, administering medication, receiving health-related alerts, receiving disability-related supports, or communicating with medical personnel or caregivers regarding the student's health during the school day."³⁰

To obtain a medical exemption, students or their families must provide documentation from a licensed medical provider to [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT] demonstrating a health care need as defined by the law. Medical exemptions do not expire (unless they are temporary) and shall be signed or approved by a private physician, their representative, or the public health authority stating that personal device possession is medically necessary for the student. Physicians may use the Universal Health Certificate to indicate medical exemption or submit a signed or stamped letter indicating that personal device possession is medically necessary. Medical exemptions that are temporary shall be monitored by the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT] to determine when the student is no longer eligible to possess a personal device.

Students or their families are encouraged to provide the required documentation upon, or immediately following, enrollment in a school. Schools will not be able to grant an exemption without appropriate documentation in place.

Medically exempted students may not use their personal devices outside of medically necessary uses and are encouraged to only use their personal devices outside of instruction time in school-designated locations (for example a nurse's office) if possible, to avoid potential confusion.

Early Dismissal and Off Campus Travel During School Hours

If a student dismisses early or must leave campus for a school-allowed reason (e.g., to attend an employer-based internship opportunity), they may retrieve their personal device from the school's designated secure storage location and maintain possession of the personal device for the duration of the time that they are off campus. Students are required to place their personal device(s) at the school's designated secure storage location if they return to campus.

Each [LEA NAME] school is allowed its own policy regarding personal device possession during field trips or off-campus extracurricular activities during school hours.

Exemption Enforcement

If an exemption is approved, the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT] will maintain a record of all exempted students and the reason for the exemption. These records will be kept in a secure location to prevent unauthorized disclosure of students' private information. A list of all exempted students **without** the identified reason will be maintained by the [SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT], shared with all school staff, and be in an easily available location so that staff may quickly check to see if a specific student is exempt.

Interventions

Students may not be suspended or disciplinarily unenrolled for violating the personal device policy.³¹ School staff should consider interventions that correct student behavior and acknowledge how possession impacts a distraction-free learning environment while ultimately keeping the student in the classroom.

If experiencing large numbers of interventions, school staff should review and strengthen their personal device collection and storage procedures, and reiterate **[LEA NAME]'s** clear, consistent expectations for device possession to students, families, and staff.

All school staff are expected to help ensure that our learning environments are distraction-free and will be trained accordingly. However, ultimate enforcement of interventions for unauthorized personal device possession is the responsibility of the **[SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT]**. To prevent potential confusion, school volunteers or guests are not allowed to enforce a school's personal device policy. To avoid conflict, schools are expected to adhere to their protocol for alerting the **[SCHOOL DESIGNATED CONTACT]** in instances when misbehavior escalates.

Interventions will reset at the start of each **[TIME PERIOD]**. While the policy will be enforced starting on the first day of school, interventions will begin after the first week of school is complete to allow students to adapt to distraction-free learning. At **[LEA NAME]**, we will adhere to the following interventions when students violate our personal device policy:

INFRACTION FREQUENCY	INTERVENTIONS
First Infraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Securely store student's personal device for the remainder of the day according to school's storage processes[SPECIFIC INTERVENTION(S) BASED ON LEA/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT]
Second Infraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Securely store student's personal device for the remainder of the day according to school's storage processes[SPECIFIC INTERVENTION(S) BASED ON LEA/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT]
Third and Subsequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Securely store student's personal device for the remainder of the day according to school's storage processes[SPECIFIC INTERVENTION(S) BASED ON LEA/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT]

Other Student Behavior

Other student code of conduct violations not directly related to the unauthorized possession of a personal device will be enforced in accordance with the school's code of conduct. For example, if a student is using a personal device to bully and/or harass another student, this is a violation of **[LEA NAME]'s** code of conduct regarding bullying.

Emergency Communications Policy

Nothing is more important to **[LEA NAME]** than the safety of our students. All **[LEA NAME]** schools must identify how a parent or guardian of an enrolled student should communicate urgent information to their child during the full school day,³² and how the school will communicate with families in cases of emergency.³³ Each **[LEA NAME]** school must publish this information in family and student handbooks.

Policy Assessment and Revision

DC law requires LEAs to establish a process and timeline to assess whether the policy is working and how to refine it.³⁴

To ensure this policy is effective and minimizes the risk of disproportionate impact on specific student groups, **[LEA DESIGNATED CONTACT]** at **[LEA NAME]** will conduct a policy assessment prior to the start of each TIME PERIOD and if necessary, make revisions. In assessing the policy, **[LEA NAME]** will examine:

- Policy code of conduct enforcement data, ensuring that the policy is being enforced fairly and appropriately across student populations;³⁵
- Student and family input, including data collected from survey administration and qualitative conversations with student and parent advisory groups; and
- Collected feedback from **[LEA NAME]** educators regarding effective and ineffective practices.

Annually, the **[LEA DESIGNATED CONTACT]** or their designee(s) will:

- Convene stakeholders, particularly families, students, and educators, to gather feedback on the policy and associated interventions as written;
- Examine LEA NAME social studies instruction for alignment with the media literacy and civics standards within the [Washington, DC Social Studies Standards](#);
- Review each LEA NAME school's discipline data for patterns of potentially inequitable enforcement and compliance with District law; and
- Update the **[LEA NAME]** policy based on this annual review, as needed.

[LEA DESIGNATED CONTACT] may choose their own tools to gather relevant feedback or may leverage the Stanford Social Media Lab and Tech and Society Lab at NYU Stern's Toolkit for Assessing Phones in Schools ([The TAPS](#)).

Changes to this policy will be communicated and published **at least 15 days** before taking effect.³⁶

ENDNOTES

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|----|--|----|---|----|---|
| 1 | A compilation of research on technology and the associated impacts on youth has been arranged by a team led by Jonathan Haidt, and can be found here . | 15 | DC Code § 38-851.02(d)(1) . | 27 | 5-A DCMR §§ 3013.3-3013.4. |
| 2 | DC Code §§ 38-851.01—851.03. | 16 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(2) . | 28 | 5-A DCMR § 3013.3. |
| 3 | DC Code § 38-851.02(a) . | 17 | DC Code § 38-851.02(d)(2) . | 29 | 5-A DCMR § 3013.4. |
| 4 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(3) . | 18 | A recent National Bureau of Economic Research working paper found that enforcement of cell phone restrictions policies inequitably impacted Black students in the short term, but that actions dissipated after the first year. School leaders should be considerate of such potential inequities and monitor them closely. | 30 | DC Code § 38-851.01(2) . |
| 5 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(4) . | 19 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(3) . | 31 | DC Code § 38-236.04. |
| 6 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(5) . | 20 | DC Code § 38-851.02(a) . | 32 | DC Code § 38-851.02(d)(1) . |
| 7 | DC Code § 38-851.02(a) . | 21 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(3) . | 33 | DC Code § 38-851.02(d)(2) . |
| 8 | DC Code § 38-851.02(d)(3) . | 22 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(4) . | 34 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(2) . |
| 9 | DC Code § 38-851.02(b) permits “exemptions for a student possessing a personal wireless communication device for specific educational purposes and to manage a student’s health care needs.” | 23 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(5) . | 35 | A recent National Bureau of Economic Research working paper found that enforcement of cell phone restrictions policies inequitably impacted Black students in the short term, but that actions dissipated after the first year. School leaders should be considerate of such potential inequities and monitor them closely. |
| 10 | 5-A DCMR §§ 3013.3-3013.4. | 24 | DC Code § 38-851.02(a) . | 36 | DC Code § 38-851.02(c)(3) . |
| 11 | 5-A DCMR § 3013.3. | 25 | DC Code § 38-851.02(d)(3) . | 37 | Adopted in part from the Maryland State Department of Education, Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools: Implementation Guidance and Resources for Support (April 2025), 21. |
| 12 | 5-A DCMR § 3013.4. | 26 | DC Code § 38-851.02(b) permits “exemptions for a student possessing a personal wireless communication device for specific educational purposes and to manage a student’s health care needs.” | | |
| 13 | DC Code § 38-851.01(2) . | | | | |
| 14 | DC Code § 38-236.04. | | | | |



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