

Distraction-Free Education Act

Model Policy | ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit - 2025

Section 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Distraction-Free Education Act is to create focused learning environments in K-12 schools to improve academic outcomes and boost student engagement. By restricting personal device use, this Act supports improved concentration, meaningful peer interactions and the development of essential skills needed for success in college, careers and life. Additionally, this Act aims to contribute to improved mental health by reducing the negative effects of excessive screen time and social media exposure.

Section 2. Definitions

1. As used in this section, these terms have the following meanings:

- a. “Personal Electronic Device” is any portable electronic device capable of transmitting, receiving, or accessing communications, data or media. This includes, but is not limited to, smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, e-readers, headphones, virtual reality headsets, and other devices with functionalities such as wireless communication, internet access, messaging, video recording, gaming, social media access or data transmission.
- b. “Access” means viewing, holding, wearing or otherwise using a device for the purpose of communication, internet access, gaming, recording, listening to music or any other function commonly associated with personal electronic devices.
- c. “Bell-to-Bell” means the period beginning with the first bell signaling the start of instructional time and ending with the final bell signaling the conclusion of the school day. This includes all scheduled instructional time, breaks, transitions, assemblies and other school-related activities occurring between the start and end of the school day.
- d. “Distraction-Free Education” refers to a learning environment where access to Personal Electronic Devices is restricted to minimize distractions, improve academic outcomes, and increase meaningful interactions and focused learning experiences.

Section 3. Policy Guidelines

1. Effective beginning with the ___ school year and thereafter, no K-12 student in public or public charter schools shall access Personal Electronic Devices during the school day.

Section 4. Department Responsibilities.

1. The Department shall provide local school districts with guidance and resources for the effective implementation and enforcement of the Distraction-Free Education Act.
 - a. This may include grant funding for the purpose of implementation, such as purchasing pouches, lockers or other storage solutions; model policies; best practices; training for educators and administrators; guidance on appropriate emergency communication methods; and recommendations for disciplinary procedures.
2. The Department shall oversee the implementation of this policy across all districts to ensure consistent enforcement and compliance with the requirements of the Act.
 - a. This may include assessing district compliance and collecting data on the policy's outcomes, including its effects on academic performance, student engagement, student mental health and teacher satisfaction.
3. The Department shall review the Distraction-Free Education Act every ____ years, or sooner if necessary, to incorporate feedback, address challenges and ensure the policy aligns with best practices.

Section 5. District Responsibilities

1. Each local school district shall adopt a Bell-to-Bell policy that prohibits student Access to Personal Electronic Devices.
 - a. The policy shall be implemented across all grade levels, kindergarten through twelve, beginning with the ___ school year.
 - b. The policy shall determine and establish appropriate methods for storing Personal Electronic Devices.
 - i. Storage options may include, but are not limited to, the student's locker, a locked pouch or a designated place in the classroom.
 - c. The policy shall establish clear procedures for off-site events or activities, including all school-sponsored events and/or field trips, daily bus transport, athletic events and other non-building specific instructional opportunities that do not occur on school grounds.
 - d. The policy shall determine clear communication protocols for school-based emergencies.
2. A student whose Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 Plan, or Medical Plan explicitly mandates the use of a Personal Electronic Device for medical or educational purposes shall be permitted to access the device as necessary to fulfill the requirements of the respective plan.
3. Any student found in violation of the restrictions outlined in this Act during the school day shall be subject to progressive consequences in accordance with the district's disciplinary code.
 - a. This may include, but is not limited to, verbal warnings, confiscation of devices, parental notification and other actions as deemed appropriate.

4. The district shall implement appropriate monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with this policy.
 - a. This may include, but is not limited to, assigning designated staff to oversee implementation and adherence, conducting periodic audits of device storage and regularly reviewing enforcement practices.
5. The district shall ensure that parents/guardians and students are informed of the policy through student handbooks, school websites and other communication channels.
6. The district shall host student and parent engagement activities designed to promote device-free, independent play and learning.
 - a. This may include, but is not limited to, family workshops, Q&A sessions, town halls, mindfulness or enrichment sessions, screen-free challenges and participation in initiatives that encourage students to engage in meaningful, screen-free play and activities.
7. The district shall regularly review the policy's effectiveness and adjust as necessary to ensure its continued alignment with educational goals and student well-being.

Section 6. Effective Date

This Act shall take effect upon becoming law.

Appendix

Example District Policy

I. Policy Statement

[School district's] cell phone policy is established to promote an environment where teaching and learning can thrive, ensuring that the use of cell phones and personal electronic devices does not disrupt the educational experience during the school day.

II. Applicability

Students are prohibited from using cell phones and personal electronic devices at any time during the school day.

III. Exception

This policy does not restrict a student's use of a cell phone or personal electronic device when such use is explicitly documented as a necessary accommodation in the student's Medical Plan, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a plan developed under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794).

IV. Cell Phone Storage

Cell phones and personal electronic devices must be powered off during the school day and stored in a secure location such as a locker or storage device provided by the district. The [insert school district] shall not assume any responsibility for the theft, loss or damage of a cell phone.

V. Non-emergency Communication

Parents or guardians who need to communicate with their student during the school day shall contact the school directly.

Coaches and sponsors of field trips, extracurricular events and athletic events shall establish and communicate rules regarding personal device use after school hours to participating students.

VI. Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency, all communication will be facilitated through school emergency communication management systems and coordinated by school personnel.

VII. Discipline

If a student violates this policy, a teacher or administrator shall take the following progressively serious disciplinary measures:

First violation: Student will receive a verbal warning and be required to store their cell phone/electronic device in accordance with this policy.

Second violation: Cell phone/electronic device will be confiscated by an administrator and stored in the school's central office for the remainder of the school day.

Third violation: Cell phone/electronic device will be confiscated by an administrator and stored in the school's central office to be picked up by the student's parent or guardian. A conference will be held to discuss the student's cell phone use.

Fourth violation: The student shall face additional disciplinary measures, which may include but is not limited to, additional meetings with a parent or guardian, loss of privileges, detention or the implementation of a behavior plan.

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