THE CELL PHONE TOOLKIT

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MESPA

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
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INTRODUCTION

Cell Phone Toolkit

As representatives of MESPA and MASSP, we urge you to emphasize the shared responsibility of staff, parents, and the school community in educating students about the effects of social media and cell phone use. Effective management of these tools is critical, as is instilling a sense of responsibility and digital citizenship in our students. As they progress through our educational system, it is essential to provide age-appropriate guidance on the use of social media, helping them understand its impact on their mental health, academic performance, and social interactions. By working together, we can ensure our students develop the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the digital world responsibly and successfully. **More importantly, we can provide a distraction-free classroom environment where students can thrive academically.** Your leadership and commitment to this cause are vital for fostering a safe and supportive learning environment.

This toolkit will provide model guidelines that school districts can adopt for student possession and use of cell phones in school(s). Individual districts have the discretion to adjust and modify these guidelines.

This document is divided into two distinct sections:

- **Elementary/Middle Level/High School**
  No Cell Phones Allowed During the Academic Day
- **High School Alternative Option**
  Limited Access - Cell Phone Use During Passing Time and Lunch

Guidelines have been written for each preference. Along with the guidelines, there are examples of consequences, handbook language and a parent/guardian letter.

Legislation passed
during the 2024 Minnesota State Legislative session

A school district or charter school must adopt a policy on students' possession and use of cell phones in school by March 15, 2025. The Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association and the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals must collaborate to make best practices available to schools on a range of different strategies in order to minimize the impact of cell phones on student behavior, mental health, and academic attainment.

Minn. Stat. § 121A.73

RATIONALE

The "Why"

Improving Academic Performance

Recent research has shown that cell phone use in the classroom is a significant source of distraction. A study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology (2020) found that students who frequently use their cell phones in class tend to have lower academic performance. Similarly, an article in Education and Information Technologies (2022) emphasized that multitasking with cell phones negatively affects information retention and understanding.

Enhancing Mental Health

Excessive cell phone use has been linked to increased anxiety and stress among students. Research from the Behavioral Sciences (2023) indicates that the pressures of constant connectivity and social media can lead to mental health issues. A study in Clinical Psychological Science (2022) also found that students who use cell phones during class are more likely to experience social isolation and depression.

Creating a Better Classroom Environment

Cell phones disrupt the classroom environment, making it challenging for teachers to maintain control and for students to focus on learning. A review in the Journal of Computers in Education (2020) concluded that cell phones lead to increased incidents of cheating and reduced participation in class discussions. Moreover, an article in Education Science (2024) found that cell phone policies can improve the learning environment by promoting more face-to-face interactions among students.

Supporting Effective Teaching

Surveys and studies have shown that both teachers and students recognize the disruptive nature of cell phones in the classroom. Education Science (2024) revealed widespread support for measures to limit cell phone use and highlighted that teachers feel more empowered and effective when cell phone use is restricted.

Additional resources can be found at the end of this toolkit

ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE LEVEL, AND HIGH SCHOOL

No Cell Phones Allowed During Academic Day

Students are encouraged not to bring cell phones or other electronic devices including smart watches, and earbuds/air pods to school.

If students choose to bring a cell phone/device to school the expectations are as follows: Cell phones, electronic devices (including smart watches) and earbuds/air pods will remain in student backpacks/ lockers during the academic school day, including lunch.

- Students who need to be in contact with their family during the academic day are to ask permission to use one of our school phones. Parents are welcome and encouraged to contact our main office if there is a message that needs to be relayed.
- Students assume the risk of damage, theft, or loss when choosing to bring a phone to school.
- Students may use their cell phone, smart watches, and earbuds/air pods before and after the academic school day. This includes:
    - Checking in or responding to family members.
    - Sending and receiving appropriate communication with friends.
    - Sharing school-appropriate material with friends.
- Cell phone use of any kind is not permitted in locker rooms or bathrooms.
- Earbuds/headphones may be allowed at designated times for instructional purposes on school approved devices.
- Phone usage during lockdown and fire drills is prohibited.
- Using a cell phone to record or take photos of staff members or other students is not allowed without permission.
- Recording or taking photos of classmates with the intent to bully or harass is not permitted.
- Using social media, apps, or any other function of a cell phone/device to spread rumors, bully, make fun of, exclude, or create a disruption in school or outside of school is not permitted.
- Sharing or asking classmates for inappropriate content is not permitted.
- Cell Phone Guidelines for off-campus school activities (i.e. extracurricular activities, outdoor and service trips, school field trips) will be individualized depending on the specific trip and activities. These expectations will be addressed at pre-trip meetings and/or on trip-specific permission slips.

Extenuating Circumstances

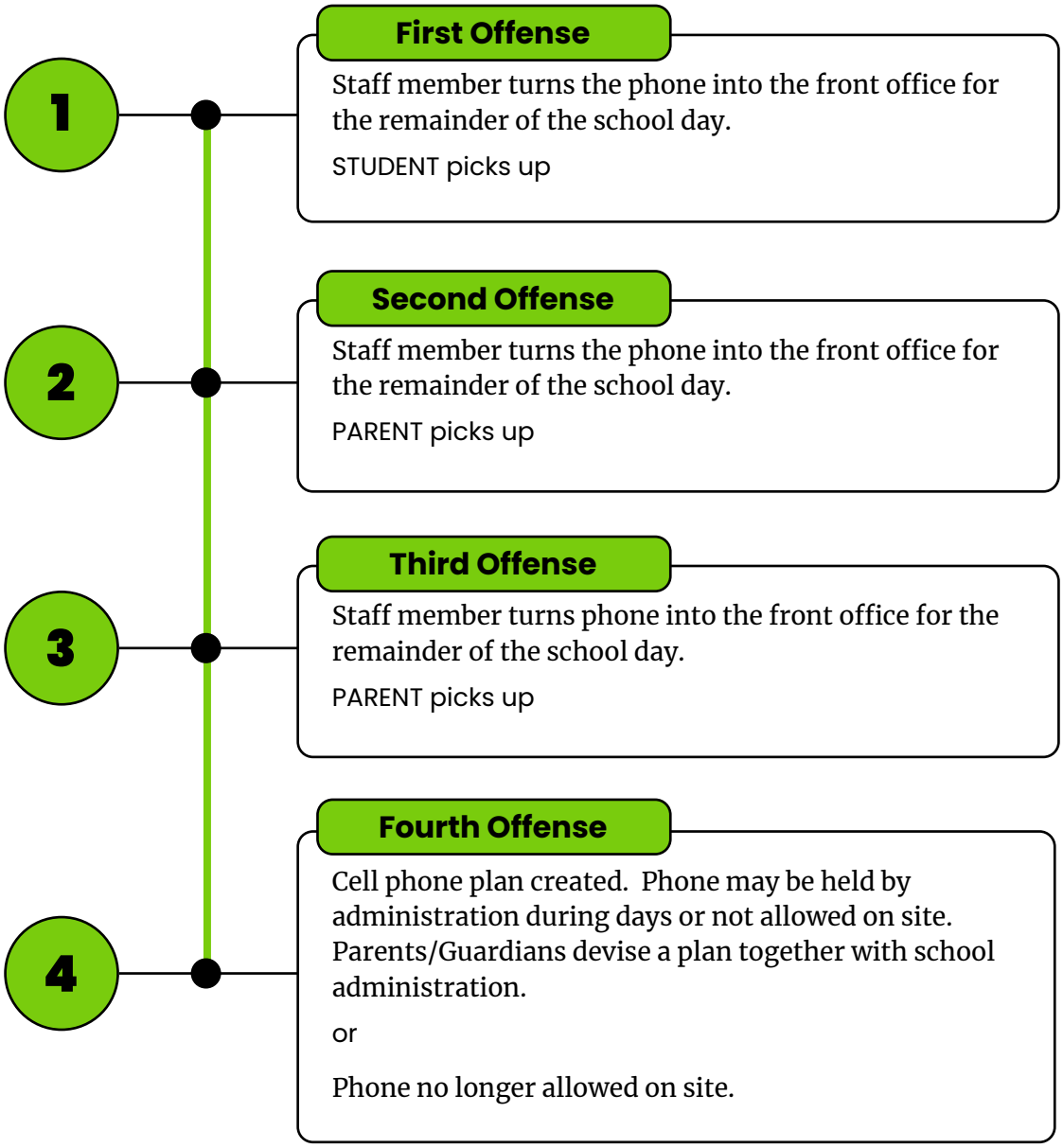
- Students who use their cell phone to monitor a medical condition (i.e. diabetes, epilepsy) may have their cell phone with them at all times, but must adhere to all other expectations of the cell phone policy.

  Please contact school administration if there is an essential need for a phone for approval.

- In the case of medical necessity or emergency, a student should have a health plan or prior approval.

Example Consequences, Progressive Plans

These offenses are for using or accessing cell phones/electronic devices. Violations with cell phones or other district policies will be addressed accordingly.



Handbook Language

Electronic devices, Music, Telephones, Cell Phones, Headshpones, iPods, e-Readers, etc.

General Guidelines

- **Cell Phone Use:** Students may NOT use cell phones during the academic day - first bell to last bell.
- **Device Storage:** It is strongly suggested that all electronic devices be kept off and in a locker during school hours.

Confiscation and Consequences

- **Unauthorized Use:** If any electronic device, including cell phones, is seen or heard during school hours it may be confiscated by any staff member.
- **First Infraction:** The device will be taken to the office and the student will pick it up at the end of the school day.
- **Second Infraction:** A parent/guardian must pick up the device, and additional consequences may be assigned.
- **Third Infraction:** A parent/guardian must pick up the device, and additional consequences may be assigned.
- **Fourth Infraction:** Cell phone plan created. Phone may be held by administration during days or not allowed on site. Parents/ Guardians devise a plan together with school administration.

Specific Restrictions

- **Locker Rooms and Bathrooms:** Devices with photo-taking capabilities are NOT allowed in locker rooms or bathrooms at any time. Confiscation and search of such devices is standard procedure if found in these areas.
- **Lockdowns and Fire Drills:** Phone usage during lockdown and fire drills is prohibited.
- **Unauthorized Recording:** Students who take pictures or videos of others without permission in any school setting, including the bus, will face disciplinary actions.
- **Smart Watches, Earbuds and Headphones:** Smart watches, earbuds and headphones may not be worn in the hallways or cafeteria.

Investigations and Inspections

- **Device Disabling:** Disabling a cell phone or computer to thwart an investigation of a disciplinary matter will result in disciplinary action.
- **Device Inspection:** The school reserves the right to inspect a student's electronic device, through proper legal channels, if there is reason to believe the student has violated school policies or engaged in misconduct while using the device.

School Responsibility

- **Lost, Stolen, or Damaged Devices:** The School is not responsible for, nor is it required to investigate, any lost, stolen, or damaged electronic devices brought onto school grounds or the bus.

Additional Rules

- **Recording and Posting:** Students may not use a device to record, transmit, or post photos or videos of a person or persons on school grounds or the bus without express permission of an administrator in addition to the individual or individuals that are the subjects of the recording.
- **Phone Calls:** Students are not to use their phones to call or text individuals during the school day. A telephone located in the office is available for student use. Students will NOT be called to the phone during the school day except for emergencies.

Compliance

By following these guidelines, students will help maintain a focused and respectful learning environment. Failure to comply with these guidelines will result in disciplinary actions as described above.

Example Parent/Guardian Letter

New Student Cell Phone and Personal Device Rules & Guidelines

Dear Parents/Guardians,

You are receiving this letter to inform you about our school's student cell phone/personal device rules and guidelines for the 2024-2025 school year. Cell phones and personal digital devices are NOT required resources for students at school. However, we recognize that the prevalence of cell phones among students has increased significantly in recent years. In the school environment, cell phones can be a distraction, an interruption, and occasionally, a tool for exchanging inappropriate information.

AWAY FOR THE DAY!

Starting the first day of school from the first class bell to the last class bell, cell phones or other electronic devices including smart watches,and earbuds/air pods should be turned off and put away.

We believe this new guideline will create a more positive learning environment and allow our students to be more engaged in classroom activities, and, conversely, less likely to be distracted by non-school activities. It will allow teachers to focus on lessons, instead of cell phone distractions in the classrooms. As more research on the impacts of cell phone use on adolescents is being published, we understand that it can lead to increased mental health issues in adolescents. As protecting and supporting the mental health of our students is a priority, we believe that eliminating cell phone use during school will assist us in these endeavors.

WHY do we require cell phones to be off and put away during school?

- **Relationships** In order to be connected to learning in the classrooms students must be connected to one another and to the instructional staff. Significant research and experience have determined that student access to cell phones distracts from the learning environment and creates a significant barrier to the interactions and connections crucial to rich, relationship-based learning.
- **Focus** Students learn best when they are "present" and engaged in the learning activities and interactions from moment to moment. Research has determined that not only cell phone use but also the proximity of cell phone availability and access for students during class is a distraction from learning.
- **Safety** It is acknowledged that families may choose to have students carry cell phones for a variety of reasons related to safety, however, cell phones as vehicles for social media access and use have proven detrimental to our school community.

HOW do students manage phones?

- **Cell phones are required to be off and put away in backpacks/lockers during the school day.** Phones are never allowed in bathrooms or locker rooms.
- Students who have a medical or other emergency reason for accessing their phone during the day should discuss an exception with an administrator.
- If parents need to reach their child during the school day, please call the main office. We will ensure students receive messages in a timely manner. For all other non-emergency messages, students may check their phones after school as they leave the building.

IF a student does not meet this expectation, what happens?

- On the first offense, a student will be referred to the office and will pick up their cell phone at the end of the day. Expectations around cell phone use at school will be reinforced in partnership with the parent/guardian.
- If there is a second or third offense, the student's parent/guardian will be required to pick up the cell phone from the office.
- If there is a fourth offense, a plan will be made in partnership between the school and the family to either store the cell phone in the office each day or to leave it at home.

Please review this letter with your student prior to the start of school. Thank you for your continued support in ensuring a safe and healthy learning environment for your child. If you have any questions regarding our cell phone guidelines, please do not hesitate to contact the school directly.

Sincerely,
(Enclose Cell Phone Policy)

HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE OPTION

Cell Phone Use During Passing Time and Lunch

Limited Access

Individual districts have the discretion to adjust and modity these guidelines. The bolded language is what differentiates this limited access version.

Students are encouraged not to bring cell phones or other electronic devices including smart watches, and earbuds/air pods to school.

If students choose to bring a cell phone/device to school the expectations are as follows: Cell phones, electronic devices (including smart watches) and earbuds/air pods will remain in student backpacks/ lockers during instructional time.

- Students who need to be in contact with their family during the academic day are to ask permission to use one of our school phones. Parents are welcome and encouraged to contact our main office if there is a message that needs to be relayed.
- Students assume the risk of damage, theft, or loss when choosing to bring a phone to school.
- Students may use their cell phone, smart watches and earbuds/air pods before and after the academic school day. This includes:
    - Checking in or responding to family members.
    - Sending and receiving appropriate communication with friends.
    - Sharing school-appropriate material with friends.
- **Cell Phone use is allowed between classes and during lunch only.**
- Earbuds/headphones may be allowed at designated times for instructional purposes on school approved devices.
- Cell phone use of any kind is not permitted in locker rooms or bathrooms.
- Phone usage during lockdown and fire drills is prohibited.
- Using a cell phone to record or take photos of staff members or other students is not allowed without permission.
- Recording or taking photos of classmates with the intent to bully or harass is not permitted. Students in violation are subject to the district's Bullying and Harassment Policies.
- Using social media, apps, or any other function of a cell phone/device to spread rumors, bully, make fun of, exclude, or create a disruption in school or outside of school is not permitted.
- Sharing or asking classmates for inappropriate content is not permitted.
- **Cell phones and earbuds (may/will) be required to be placed in a designated area in each classroom as determined by the instructor.**
- **If your phone is seen or heard in class it will be placed in the device box or pouch holder. (Individual schools can determine the cell phone holding process.)**

- **Students who need to go to the bathroom will need to place their cell phone in either the device box, pouch holder or teacher's desk.**
- During times of testing and other student evaluations, teachers may request that students remove their cell phone from their possession reducing the possibility of compromised test security.
- Cell phone guidelines for off-campus school activities (i.e. extracurricular activities, outdoor and service trips, school field trips) will be individualized depending on the specific trip and activities. These expectations will be addressed at pre-trip meetings and/or on trip-specific permission slips.

Extenuating Circumstances

- Students who use their cell phone to monitor a medical condition (i.e. diabetes, epilepsy) may have their cell phone with them at all times, but must adhere to all other expectations of the cell phone policy.

  Please contact school administration if there is an essential need for a phone for approval.

- In the case of medical necessity or emergency, a student should have a health plan or prior approval.

Example Consequences, Progressive Plans

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1 First Offense

In the classroom:

Staff member has student place phone in a designated area within the classroom until the end of the class period.

STUDENT picks up

Ouside of the classroom:

Staff member turns the phone into the front office for the remainder of the school day.

STUDENT picks up

2 Second Offense

Staff member turns the phone into the front office for the remainder of the school day.

PARENT picks up

3 Third Offense

Staff member turns phone into the front office for the remainder of the school day.

PARENT picks up

4 Fourth Offense

Cell phone plan created. Phone may be held by administration during days or not allowed on site. Parents/Guardians devise a plan together with school administration.

or

Phone no longer allowed on site.

Handbook Language

Electronic devices, Music, Telephones, Cell Phones, Headshpones, iPods, e-Readers, etc.

General Guidelines

- **Cell Phone Use:** Students may NOT use cell phones during class time.
- **Device Storage:** It is strongly suggested that all electronic devices be kept off and in a locker or out of sight during school hours.

Confiscation and Consequences

- **Unauthorized Use:** If any electronic device, including cell phones, is seen or heard during school hours **without teacher/staff approval, excluding lunch and passing time**, it can be confiscated by any staff member.
- **First Infraction:** If the device is used or accessed in the classroom, the staff member will have the student place the phone in a designated area within the classroom until the end of the class period. If the device is used or found outside of the classroom, excluding lunch or passing time, the device will be taken to the office and the student will pick it up at the end of the school day.
- **Second Infraction:** A parent/guardian must pick up the device, and additional consequences may be assigned.
- **Third Infraction:** A parent/guardian must pick up the device, and additional consequences may be assigned.
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- **Unauthorized Recording:** Students who take pictures or videos of others without permission in any school setting, including the bus, will face disciplinary actions.
- **Earbuds and Headphones:** Earbuds may not be worn in the hallways or cafeteria. Over-the-ear headphones are not allowed at school.

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We believe this new guideline will allow our students to be more engaged in classroom activities, and, conversely, less likely to be distracted by non-school activities. It will allow teachers to focus on lessons, instead of cell phone distractions in the classrooms. As more research around the impacts of cell phone use of adolescents is being published, we understand that it can lead to increased mental health issues in adolescents. As protecting and supporting the mental health of our students is a priority, we believe that limiting cell phone use during school will assist us in these endeavors.

We recognize that cell phones are a safety and security tool for parents and students to stay connected. Rather than call or text students on their cell phones, parents and guardians should utilize the school phone number (add school number) to relay any messages that may be urgent in nature for your student. The office will relay the message to students in a prompt manner. Again, students will have access to their phones during passing time and lunch. We appreciate the support of guardians in following this procedure.

If a student is found using a cell phone during instructional time/classroom hours, the phone will be collected by a staff member and delivered to the office. Parents or guardians will also receive an email or a phone call. The attached document explains our cell phone policy in more depth. Please review them with your student prior to the start of school.

Please review this letter with your student prior to the start of school. Thank you for your continued support in ensuring a safe and healthy learning environment for your child. If you have any questions regarding our cell phone guidelines, please do not hesitate to contact the school directly.

Sincerely,

(Enclose Cell Phone Policy)

Resources

Away for the Day Website

https://www.awayfortheday.org

AASA Article: A Mind Shift Over Cellphones in Schools

https://www.aasa.org/resources/resource/mindshift-over-cellphones-schools

Book Study: The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness by Jonathan Haidt

United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released a new Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health - PDF