



Oregon Department of Education

Promoting Student Learning, Well-Being, and Belonging: Guidance for School Cell Phone Policies

Key Recommendations

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The following are key recommendations to consider when developing cell phone policies, including strategies for effective planning, implementation, and continuous improvement to ensure broad community support and successful outcomes. These recommendations emphasize collaboration, clarity, and ongoing communication throughout the process.

POLICY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT:

- **Develop policy and implementation plans with input from staff, students, and the community.** To build staff, student and community buy-in, incorporate their input at every stage—design, implementation, and review—helping to shape both the policy and its implementation plans. Input could come from groups such as student leadership and school site councils which include parent/caregiver input, as well as labor associations. Ensure that school staff fully support and consistently implement the policy to maintain its credibility and effectiveness and that policies are not overly reliant on teachers alone implementing the policy, but are led and supported by school administration.
- **Center human dignity and integrate strengths-based language and approaches when developing policies and practices.** Interrupt language and behaviors that perpetuate bias, divisiveness, and oppression of any group. Apply an [equity lens](#) to ensure that policies do not stigmatize or disadvantage those without cell phones and other mobile devices. Attend to students with accessibility needs in an affirmative and inclusive way and foster an inclusive environment where every student is valued.
- **Ensure cell phone policies are simple and straightforward to make them realistic for school staff to implement.** Integrate these policies into structures such as the school's behavior management system or student codes of conduct, emphasizing positive reinforcement. Clear, simple rules help students understand and follow expectations, while overly complex rules lead to inconsistency and frustration. Adjust as necessary. Communicate guidelines clearly in students' primary languages, using visuals when helpful.
- **Ensure cell phone policies address liability risk for theft, loss, or damage.** It is common practice for school districts to have policies that address theft, loss, or damage of personal property brought onto school grounds. School leaders developing and/or revising school cell phone policies are encouraged to be very clear about how these two policies intersect and align rules with the existing limited liability of personal property policies.
- **Ensure Communication Preparedness.** Assess each school's preparedness to ensure regular communication, especially with families and parents, without reliance on cell phones and other mobile devices. For example, does each classroom have a landline telephone? Do school staff have access to walkie talkies, etc.? Additionally, consider the impact to front office staff.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION:

- **Educate school staff, students, families, and caregivers about new policies and expectations.** Build a plan for ongoing professional development time for staff on consistent reinforcement and follow through with the new/revised cell phone policies. Students and their caregivers will also benefit from ongoing communication regarding these policies throughout the school year. For example, reviewing the risks of technology usage, incorporating the policy guidelines into instructions for existing curricula, holding regular discussions around cell phone usage, and/or reaffirming expectations as needed through homeroom or advisory periods.

- **Integrate [Transformative Social Emotional Learning](#) into efforts that foster a positive school environment.** Recognize the complexity of students' beliefs, emotions, identities, cultures, backgrounds, and lived experiences. Involve students throughout the implementation process, honoring their identities, agency, sense of belonging, decision-making, and curiosity as they engage in feedback and discussions on cell phone policy. A strong Transformative Social Emotional Learning plan not only fosters proactive student engagement and voice but can also ensure the policy feels fair, promoting ownership, accountability, and increasing student buy-in.
- **Teach students about digital citizenship, media literacy, and healthy relationships.** Oregon [content standards](#) require regular instruction on [digital citizenship](#), [healthy relationships \(including through social media\)](#), [cyberbullying](#), [body image](#), and [other related topics](#). Oregon [ORS 339.356](#), last updated in 2021, also requires all Oregon school districts to adopt a policy which prohibits harassment, intimidation or bullying, which includes cyberbullying.
- **Consider how the policy will be enforced so students do not lose instructional time.** Excluding students from the classroom through suspension, expulsion, or other disciplinary removal as a consequence of cell phone misuse can result in inequitable outcomes and deprive students of critical learning opportunities. Research indicates that suspension and expulsion are often: (a) ineffective in improving student behavior,¹ (b) detrimental to academic achievement outcomes,² and (c) disproportionately harmful to students of color.³ Schools are encouraged to implement alternative strategies that uphold the educational rights of all students while addressing behavior effectively. For more information, refer to Oregon Department of Education's resources on preventing exclusionary discipline located on the [ODE School Discipline webpage](#).
- **Encourage Teachers and School Staff to Model Expected Behavior:** Teachers and other staff lead by example; by avoiding the use of personal cell phones and other mobile devices during instructional time, they model and demonstrate their own focused attention and prioritize teaching and interaction with students. Schools should provide staff alternatives to personal cell phone communication, including email, school apps, land lines, etc. for work-related communication.

CONTINUOUS POLICY IMPROVEMENT:

- **Build regular review and [continuous improvement](#) into the cell phone policy process, acknowledging that initial implementations are rarely perfect.** Include plans for initial implementation, regular reviews, and ongoing improvements. Involve staff, students, families, labor associations and the community in these processes. Use existing groups like student leadership and school site councils to gather feedback, ensuring continued buy-in from the initial policy design. Create explicit opportunities to gather student input about their experiences.
- **Gather ongoing feedback from parents, caregivers, and the broader school community and ensure input is considered.** This fosters shared responsibility and cooperation. After implementation, maintain ongoing communication to keep everyone informed about the policy's progress and any needed adjustments. Ensure communications are continuous, accessible, and available in native languages for all families in the community both before and after policy implementation.

¹ More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10665684.2014.958965>

² Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement. Retrieved from: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/breaking-schools-rules-statewide-study-how-school-discipline-0>

³ The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin? Retrieved from: http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/25.The_Achievement_Gap_and_the_Discipline_Gap.2010.pdf