Spotlight on Small and Rural Schools and Districts

Executive Order 25-09 is intended to support Oregon schools in creating focused, supportive learning environments by guiding the use of personal electronic devices (PEDs). This resource is specifically designed to assist small and rural districts, which often face limited staffing, constrained resources, and diverse community needs; factors that can make policy development and implementation especially challenging. Whether a district is just beginning the policy process or working to refine an existing policy, the toolkit offers practical, adaptable strategies to support successful implementation across school communities.

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Understanding Executive Order 25-09

Purpose of the Executive Order

Governor Tina Kotek issued Executive Order 25-09 to support student mental health, reduce classroom distractions, and promote safe, focused learning environments across Oregon. Research shows that high social media and device use is linked to:

- Increased anxiety, depression, and self-esteem challenges in youth
- Distraction from learning and reduced academic outcomes

This policy is intended to help students focus, build connection, and support mental wellness.

> **What Counts as a Personal Electronic Device (PED)?**
> Devices that:
>
> - Are **portable** and **electrically powered**
> - Can make/receive **calls**, **texts**, or access the **internet**
>
> **Examples of PEDs:** Cell phones, smartwatches, smart glasses, etc.
>
> **Not Examples of PEDs:** Laptops or school-issued learning devices

Key Deadlines

- Policy Adoption Deadline: October 31, 2025
- Policy Implementation Deadline: January 1, 2026

What the Policy Must Include

Each school district must adopt a personal electronic device policy that:

- Prohibits student use of personal electronic devices during instructional hours (start to end of school day) including passing periods and lunch
- Defines how devices will be stored during the school day
- Provides exemptions for:
  - Medical needs
  - IEPs or 504 plans
- Outlines staff actions for violations that:
  - Do not remove students from learning (e.g., no suspension or expulsion)

What the Policy May Include

Locally determined exemptions for specific student needs or educational goals, including but not limited to:

- Multilingual learners
- Students who need PEDs for course authentication
- Students navigating housing instability
- Pregnant or parenting students
- Students in early college or dual enrollment programs
- Students who are family caregivers
- Students with immigration-related safety needs
- Justice-involved students
- Students with off-campus work responsibilities, such as Career and Technical Education (CTE) students

Transparency Requirements

The policy must be posted on the district website and shared with:

- School personnel
- Students
- Parents/guardians
- On-site partners
- Oregon Department of Education

Start Strong: Policy Development and Engagement Resources

This section offers guidance for creating personal electronic device (PED) policies that are clear, practical, and responsive to rural contexts, while still meeting the requirements of Executive Order 25-09 and addressing the needs of all students. **Districts are encouraged to reference the OSBA Sample Policy as a starting point to guide and support their local policy development process.**

Key Strategies for Relational Implementation

Ground Policy in Local Relationships

Acknowledge that EO 25-09 defines the policy content, but invite feedback from students, families, and staff on *how* the policy is implemented (e.g., storage, enforcement).

Use trusted, informal settings that are already in place such as:

- Family nights
- Hallway conversations
- Community meetings

Frame the policy as a shared commitment to student learning and well-being, not as a disciplinary measure.

Prioritize Clarity and Consistency

Use simple, shared language across classrooms to reduce confusion.

Example: "During the school day, phones stay away."

Create consistent signage and classroom routines to avoid mixed messages.

Account for Limited Staffing

Create policies that are straightforward and manageable with limited staff.

Example: Use a "Reteach, redirect, reset" approach as a Tier I classroom strategy.

Designate a single point of contact such as a principal, counselor, or lead teacher, to oversee PED-related issues and communication.

Address Unique Communication Needs

Recognize that families may depend on phones due to:

- Emergency situations, such as coordinating medical care or responding to urgent family matters, especially for families without consistent access to other forms of communication.
- Afterschool care coordination, particularly for students responsible for younger siblings or navigating complex pickup arrangements.
- Work schedules or nontraditional hours that make it difficult for families to connect with school staff during the day, increasing reliance on direct communication with their child.
- Language access needs, where digital tools (like translation apps or text messaging) may support communication between multilingual families and their children.

Schools should keep these realities in mind when developing and implementing personal electronic device (PED) policies. It is important to support strong family-school communication without creating unnecessary burdens for students or families. This could include:

- Establishing clear protocols for handling urgent messages,
- Providing designated ways for students and families to communicate during the school day that do not require the use of a personal electronic device (e.g. making calls from the school office), and

- Including flexible communication procedures in individual student plans if a student has an exemption as determined by district policy.

Support Inclusive Implementation in Rural Contexts

Avoid "zero-tolerance" policies that fail to consider individual student needs. Ensure the policy includes both required exemptions, such as for students with IEPs, 504 plans, or documented medical needs, as well as locally determined exemptions (if applicable). Regularly monitor staff discretion in enforcement to minimize the risk of inconsistent application or bias.

Communicate with Cultural Awareness

Reach out through familiar and trusted community venues, such as:
- Faith-based organizations
- Tribal centers
- Clinics
- Local sports events

Translate key messages, including for multilingual populations in the community.

Partner with respected community members (e.g., pastors, coaches, elders) to help share and reinforce the message.

> 💬 Sample Community Message
>
> *"As a small school, we know every student and every family. This PED policy is about helping students stay focused and connected with their learning. We understand that phones are important for safety and family communication. If your child requires device access due to a documented medical condition, learning disability, or a need identified in a 504 plan, we will work with you to create a plan that supports their success."*

Planning Template

This template outlines key implementation elements, paired with sample strategies and space to assign responsibilities or include local notes. Each section can be customized to reflect a school's size, staffing structure, and unique culture, supporting a smooth and effective rollout.

Implementation Element	Sample Strategy	Notes / Who Is Responsible [Examples Included]
Staff Training	Conduct a 30-minute overview and discussion during back-to-school week. Use staff meetings for follow-up.	Led by Principal or Instructional Coach or another school/district leader
Student Education	Introduce the policy in advisory or homeroom using guided discussion circles that encourage student input on implementation and enforcement, while clearly communicating that the policy itself is established and non-negotiable.	Facilitated by Home Room or Advisory Teachers
Family Communication	Share flyers at local businesses, hold town hall Q&A sessions, and send robocalls from the principal.	Materials prepared by Office Manager; Principal leads meetings
Policy Enforcement	Apply a Tier I approach that prioritizes verbal redirection and reflection logs, avoids automatic consequences, and preserves instructional time when addressing non-compliance.	All staff follow shared protocol; Counselor provides support
Exemptions & Support	Review IEPs, 504s, health plans, and Individualized Language Plans (ILP) for PED-related needs; document additional exemptions as included in district policy.	Coordinated by SPED Teacher, EL Coordinator, or District Case Manager (in some cases this might be the Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Director of Student

Implementation Element	Sample Strategy	Notes / Who Is Responsible [Examples Included]
		Services, or other district staff member who supports such efforts)
Community Engagement	Host information sessions at churches, community centers, or local events; involve trusted community messengers.	Principal or Family Liaison coordinates outreach
Signage & Messaging	Display consistent, clear visuals in classrooms and common areas, e.g., "During school time, phones stay away."	Posted by Custodian or Front Office; templates provided by admin or coach
Emergency Contact Protocol	Provide families with clear guidance to contact the school office rather than students' personal devices.	Managed by Office Staff; materials sent home with students
Monitoring & Adjustment	Schedule monthly 15-minute team check-ins to review challenges and make necessary adjustments.	Facilitated by Principal or Lead Teacher; rotate staff participation
Translation & Accessibility	Translate key messages and permission forms; assess families' technology access and communication preferences.	Use district translation services; gather family input on preferred formats

Leading with What You Have: Realistic Strategies for Small Teams

This section names common challenges and offers relationship-driven, realistic strategies that reflect what small schools do best. Working together, knowing students well, and drawing on community support.

Staff Capacity and Role Flexibility
Challenge: Staff wear multiple hats, making formal enforcement systems hard to maintain.
What is currently working?
What is not working or needs support?
Possible strategies to try: Use clear, consistent language schoolwide. Develop a tiered response guide for all staff. Assign a "support person of the day" for PED-related issues.
Local Adaptations or Notes:
Who is responsible?

Consistency in Close-Knit Communities
Challenge: Personal relationships can lead to uneven enforcement or unintentional favoritism.
What is currently working?
What is not working or needs support?
Possible strategies to try: Use shared routines like "phones in cubbies" or "plug in and power down." Develop consistent scripts to reduce subjectivity (e.g., "Hey [Name], we all agreed phones away helps us focus. Can I help you with that?").

Consistency in Close-Knit Communities

Challenge: Personal relationships can lead to uneven enforcement or unintentional favoritism.

Prioritize reflection over discipline, even when staff empathize with a student's situation.

Local Adaptations or Notes:

Who is responsible?

Navigating Community Expectations and Pushback

Challenge: Families may expect quick access to students and question new restrictions.

What is currently working?

What is not working or needs support?

Possible strategies to try:

Hold informal Q&As at trusted community spaces (e.g., sports games, local events).
Communicate through familiar channels like text messages, Facebook, or bulletin boards.
Clearly explain emergency contact procedures: "To reach your student during school hours, please call the main office. We will get the message to them promptly."

Local Adaptations or Notes:

Who is responsible?

Infrastructure and Budget Constraints

Challenge: Limited resources can make storage and signage difficult.

What is currently working?

What is not working or needs support?

Infrastructure and Budget Constraints

Challenge: Limited resources can make storage and signage difficult.

Possible strategies to try:

Repurpose shelves, bins, or mail slots as "phone garages."
Have students create posters or visual reminders to save printing costs.
Share bins or lockers between classrooms when storage is tight.
Emphasize the benefits of offline learning when tech access is limited.

Local Adaptations or Notes:

Who is responsible?

Leveraging Community Partnerships

Strength: Rural schools often benefit from close ties with local agencies, churches, and organizations.

What is currently working?

What is not working or needs support?

Possible strategies to try:

Partner with community partners or libraries to co-host family education nights.
Involve youth-serving nonprofits in student-led digital wellness campaigns.
Invite community elders or alumni to speak on focus, presence, and relationships.

Local Adaptations or Notes:

Who is responsible?

Quick Wins for Small Teams

- Create a short staff training video explaining the tiered response approach.
- Empower student leaders to design posters or lead advisory circles.
- Assign one admin or counselor to call families needing exemptions and document those needs clearly and explicitly.
- Start small by piloting the policy with one grade or wing before expanding schoolwide (ensuring that policy adoption and implementation follow the required timelines named in EO 25-09).

Implementation Considerations

- Do not assume everyone knows the rules. Teach them clearly and explicitly. Remind as needed.
- Support multilingual and neurodivergent students with translated materials and clear visual aids.
- Monitor for disproportionate redirections and use these moments to teach rather than punish.

Reflect and Refine: Strategies for Continuous Improvement

This section offers right-sized tools and strategies to help small and rural districts sustain and strengthen PED policy implementation through regular reflection, equity checks, and community-based feedback.

Right-Sized Strategies for Reflection and Growth

Monthly Micro-Reflection Protocol

Who: Principal, one to two staff members (rotating), counselor, student representative, and community member if available
Where: Staff meeting, PLC, advisory, or prep period
Time Needed: 15 to 30 minutes

Prompt Set:

- What is going well with the PED policy so far?
- Who seems to be struggling, and what support might they need?
- Are we seeing repeated concerns with particular students or groups?
- Are our responses still grounded in care, not just correction?
- Have we reviewed exemptions and made adjustments as needed?

How to Use It:
Keep notes in a shared notebook, Google Doc, or printed form. This allows small teams to track patterns over time and follow up in real time.

Student Experience Check-Ins

Approach: Use a "Listen, Look, Learn" structure each month to spot equity trends.

Step	Action Example
Listen	Ask three students, "How is the phone policy working for you?"
Look	Review reflection or redirection forms. Are patterns emerging?
Learn	Chat with a family during pickup: How has the phone policy been helpful to your student? Are there areas of the policy that your student is still struggling with?

Why It Works:

This approach turns small moments into meaningful data. It gives voice to underrepresented students and surfaces trends before they become problems.

End-of-Term Community Conversation

Format: Host a simple, informal circle with students, families, and staff at a familiar space like a cafeteria or library.

Sample Prompts:

- What feels clear, supportive, or successful about PED expectations?
- What is not working, or feels confusing or frustrating?
- What have you noticed at home about focus, sleep, or screen use?
- What is one small shift we could try together next term?

Next Steps:

Document themes, then share a brief summary in a family newsletter, staff bulletin, or posted flyer to close the loop.

Simple Progress Tracking Tool (Quarterly)

Use this tool to reflect on implementation progress each quarter. It can be completed by a leadership team, a site-based council, or even one reflective administrator.

Area of Implementation	Reflection Question	Status (🟢 On Track / 🟡 Needs Attention / 🔴 Needs Action)	Notes / Next Steps
Expectations	Are students and staff consistently clear on what is expected?	🟢 🟡 🔴	
Response Practices	Are we responding with restoration and reflection before discipline?	🟢 🟡 🔴	
Exemptions	Are exemptions documented and used when needed?	🟢 🟡 🔴	
Equity	Are any groups being redirected more often? Why?	🟢 🟡 🔴	
Student Voice	Have we asked students how the policy is going?	🟢 🟡 🔴	
Family Partnership	Are families informed and engaged?	🟢 🟡 🔴	

Use this as a conversation starter during professional development, site team meetings, or quarterly implementation reviews.

In small communities, relationships are the strongest form of data.
Meaningful reflection does not require complex dashboards or large-scale surveys. It comes from knowing your students well, staying curious about their experiences, and inviting families into the conversation. Small shifts, when guided by student voice and equity, can lead to lasting change.