



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: August 28, 2024  
To: Local Educational Agency Leads  
From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Educational Services  
Dr. Jorden Schiff, Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Teaching and Learning

## Considerations for the Development of Policies to Address Cell Phone Usage in Schools

School districts currently have the authority to determine their own cell phone policies. The use of cell phones in schools is a complex issue that requires careful consideration of the educational environment, student well-being, and the diverse needs of the school community. This broadcast memo is designed to assist school leaders in developing or refining policies on cell phone usage that support healthy relationships with technology and maximize student engagement.

### Student Impact

There is [growing concern](#) that excessive cell phone use is linked to increased levels of anxiety and depression among students. Additionally, cell phones may impact academic performance. A [study](#) from Rutgers University found that college students allowed to use cell phones during lectures performed worse on end-of-term exams by at least 5%, equivalent to a half-letter grade reduction. Schools that have implemented restrictions report improved social interactions, with students more likely to engage with each other and their teachers. However, it is important to engage parents and the broader school community in the policy development process and explain communication processes for emergency situations. Holding meetings, conducting surveys, and ensuring clear communication can help align the school's policies with the expectations and needs of the community.

### Policy Implementation and Flexibility

Developing a local cell phone policy involves careful consideration of benefits and drawbacks. The inappropriate use of cell phones may disrupt classes and detract from academic concentration. School districts should also consider that there may be specific instances where incorporating student cell phone use into an instructional activity, such as accessing digital learning resources, may enhance learning and increase engagement. By grounding decisions in research and engaging the school community through the establishment and implementation of cell phone use policies, school and district leaders can foster safe environments that are conducive to learning and student well-being.

To support schools and districts in their efforts to establish balanced, thoughtful policies, the NJDOE developed a [webpage](#) containing considerations for establishing or enhancing policies regarding cell phone use in schools, including a series of guiding policy questions, recommendations for district leaders, and additional resources.

### Implementation in New Jersey: Next Steps and Requests for Input

The NJDOE is undertaking steps to convene the Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents shortly. The Commission will be charged with providing research-based recommendations on proposed social media usage standards and effective strategies to mitigate its adverse effects on student health and academic performance. Excessive cell phone use and unhealthy relationships with technology will likely largely inform those discussions.

In the meantime, the NJDOE recognizes the tremendous innovation, thoughtfulness, and compassion that so many districts have already invested in establishing cell phone use policies. These policies are especially meaningful as part of an articulated vision that supports innovation as well as healthy and responsible relationships with technology overall. As research and local sentiments continue to evolve, the NJDOE recognizes that district policies may evolve as well.

The NJDOE strongly encourages school leaders, as well as teachers, students, and parents, to share their experiences with cell phone-free policies in schools. This information will be used to help refine guidance, inform state policy and may be shared with the Commission. Please share your experiences with the NJDOE at [SocialMediaCommission@doe.nj.gov](mailto:SocialMediaCommission@doe.nj.gov).

c: Members, State Board of Education  
NJDOE Staff  
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network  
Garden State Coalition of Schools  
NJ LEE Group