



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: January 28, 2026
To: Local Educational Agency Leads
From: Luiz Pereira, Director
Office of Student Support Services

Release of Updated Guidelines on Student Use of Internet-Enabled Devices

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has released updated [*Guidelines for Schools on Student Use of Internet-Enabled Devices*](#) (Guidelines) pursuant to P.L.2025, c.195. Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, the legislation requires each board of education to adopt a bell-to-bell policy prohibiting student non-academic use of personal internet-enabled devices, including smartphones, on school grounds during the school day with limited exceptions. The local bell-to-bell policy is required to be aligned to the guidelines provided by the NJDOE.

The Guidelines are designed to assist public school districts, charter schools, and renaissance school projects in developing and implementing local policies that promote student well-being, academic engagement, and a positive school climate, while maintaining flexibility for local decision-making based on community needs and operational capacity per P.L.2025, c.195. The Guidelines outline statutory requirements, policy considerations, and implementation strategies, and include developmentally appropriate recommendations across grade levels.

While all boards of education are required to adopt a bell-to-bell policy consistent with P.L.2025, c.195, districts retain flexibility in determining how their policies are implemented. Districts may select approaches that best fit their local context, including decisions related to device storage, supervision, and enforcement. The Guidelines provide examples of storage options such as locked pouch systems, school-managed lockers or bins, classroom-based storage, or student-managed storage (i.e., backpacks, lockers, etc.), provided that personal internet-enabled devices remain powered off and prohibited to students during the school day.

P.L.2025, c.195 and these implementing guidelines also recognize that limited and appropriate exceptions may be necessary. District policies must permit student use of internet-enabled devices when required to implement an individualized education program, Section 504 plan, or student health plan, or when needed for translation services, caregiving responsibilities, emergencies, or documented circumstances required by law. In addition, when no reasonable alternative to the use of an internet-enabled device exists for a specific purpose, districts may authorize use through a locally established approval process. Districts are encouraged to develop clear procedures that allow educators or staff to seek approval from the principal, chief school administrator, or designee in such circumstances, and to communicate these procedures to staff, students, and families.

To support consistent implementation, districts may wish to establish local systems or tools that assist with managing approved exceptions and ensuring shared understanding among staff. These may include written procedures, internal tracking or logging mechanisms, and staff guidance that promotes consistent application across classrooms while maintaining student confidentiality. Any such systems should align with district policies and applicable student privacy requirements.

Questions regarding the updated Guidelines may be directed to PhoneFreeSchools@doe.nj.gov.

The NJDOE appreciates the continued efforts of local educational agencies to create learning environments that support student focus, well-being, and engagement.

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