
Guidance for Schools on Student Use of Internet-Enabled Devices:
Frequently Asked Questions

General

Q1: Which entities are required to adopt a bell-to-bell policy beginning with the 2026-2027 school year?

Pursuant to *P.L. 2025, c. 195*, all New Jersey public school districts, including charter schools and renaissance school projects, must adopt and implement a bell-to-bell policy that prohibits the use of personal internet-enabled devices during the entirety of the school day for students in kindergarten through grade 12.

Q2: What does a bell-to-bell policy mean?

Bell-to-bell describes the timeframe when the bell rings at the start of the school day until the dismissal bell rings at the end of the school day. Students may not use personal internet-enabled devices during this timeframe unless permitted by exceptions afforded in *P.L. 2025, c. 195* or the NJDOE's *Guidance for Schools on Student Use of Internet-Enabled Devices* (e.g., for health-related reasons).

However, this also means that students are permitted to use their personal internet-enabled devices for after-school or before-school activities, before a sports practice, or at any other time outside of the regular school hours when they may be on school grounds unless the school district's policy further restricts student access to internet-enabled devices.

Q3: What should be included in school district policies?

A school district's policy must be aligned to the NJDOE Guidelines and include the following:

- Bell-to-bell ban on student use of personal internet-enabled devices during the entirety of the regular school day.
- Description of personal internet-enabled devices.
- Description of device storage options.
- Description of circumstances where a student may require use of their cell phone or other internet-enabled devices during the school day.
- Process for requesting exceptions to the policy.

- Description of expectations for use of internet-enabled devices during an emergency.
- Description of how consequences will be imposed for violations of the district's policy in accordance with the district's code of student conduct.

It is important to note that a school district may adopt a policy more stringent than the NJDOE Guidelines.

Q4: What types of devices are included in the policy?

School district policies are required to prohibit student use of any personal internet-enabled devices. This includes, but is not limited to, smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, smart glasses, etc.

There may be specific circumstances where a student may require the use of their personal internet-enabled device(s) during the school day (e.g., to fulfill accommodations in the IEP, to monitor healthcare, for translation services, etc.). Should a student require an exception to the policy, the district should implement their procedures for a device-related exception.

Q5: How will parents be able to reach their child during the school day?

While families are encouraged to refrain from contacting their child on their personal cell phone or other internet-enabled device during the regular school day to support student engagement and social interactions with peers, there may be instances when communication is necessary.

Schools should determine the most effective methods for families to communicate with students during the regular school day (e.g., specific phone number, student email account, school messaging app/other portal, school email account, etc.).

To promote family and school partnership, schools should have a plan to inform families about available options at the beginning of the school year.

In the event of a school-related or personal emergency, where immediate contact is necessary, parents are encouraged to contact the school's main office for assistance.

Access to Devices

Q6: Are all schools in the district required to use the same storage option?

No. School districts have flexibility to determine the storage needs for all students. This permits different storage options by school, grade, and/or another configuration.

Q7: Are districts that use software or other technology to block students' use of their personal internet-enabled devices in compliance with the requirements of the law?

School districts must restrict students from using their personal internet-enabled devices for the entirety of the school day. Should software or other technology ensure students are unable to use these devices during the entire school day, school districts may avail themselves of these resources.

It is important to note that school districts are responsible for ensuring the district's bell-to-bell policy is effectively implemented regardless of the type of device storage option selected by the school/district. Additionally, if school districts choose to use software or other technology to block students' use of their personal internet-enabled devices, they should collaborate with their local municipality to determine that there are no safety or security concerns.

Q8: Can students use personal internet-enabled devices during lunch, study hall, and/or time in between classes?

No. The bell-to-bell policy requires personal internet-enabled devices to be off and stored for the entirety of the school day. Students may not access these devices during lunch on campus, study hall, time between classes, and/or other periods during the school day.

Q9: Can students use internet-enabled devices to listen to music during the regular school day (e.g., while completing independent work)?

If a school allows students to listen to music during the school day, it is recommended that the school allow students to listen to music by using their **district-issued** technology (e.g., district-issued laptop).

If the district-issued technology is unable to support students in listening to music, students are only permitted to use their personal internet-enabled device if authorization has been granted by the chief school administrator, principal, or designee after determining no reasonable alternatives exist.

Q10: Can students use internet-enabled devices during extracurricular activities?

For extracurricular activities that occur **before or after** the school day, students are permitted to use their internet-enabled devices unless the school district's policy further restricts student access to internet-enabled devices beyond regular school hours.

For extracurricular activities that occur **during** the school day (e.g., club meetings during lunch periods), students are not permitted to use their internet-enabled devices unless authorization has been granted by the chief school administrator, principal, or designee

after determining no reasonable alternatives exist to use an internet-enabled device for the specific purpose (i.e., an Electronic Sports (Esports) Club).

Classroom Instruction

Q11: Are students allowed to use internet-enabled devices during academic instruction?

Students are allowed to use district-issued technology, such as district-issued laptops, and sponsored platforms during the school day for educational purposes.

During academic instruction, students are not permitted to use their personal internet-enabled devices unless authorization has been granted by the chief school administrator, principal, or designee after determining no reasonable alternatives exist to use an internet-enabled device for the specific purpose.

Q12: Are there situations where students may be permitted to use their personal internet-enabled devices for instructional purposes?

Yes. Students should be permitted to use their personal internet-enabled devices during the school day: to fulfill accommodations in a student's individualized education program (IEP); to support implementation of a 504 Plan; to implement a student health plan; for translation services; for a student caregiver who is routinely responsible for the care or well-being of a family member; when required by law; and in the event of an emergency.

Additionally, there may be specific circumstances when it is determined that there is no reasonable alternative to students using an internet-enabled device for instructional purposes (e.g., personal tablet, laptop, digital camera, etc.). In these circumstances, the chief school administrator, principal, or designee, must authorize use of personal internet-enabled devices. It is recommended that boards of education include in their policy a list of approved circumstances where there is no reasonable alternative to a student using an internet-enabled device for instructional purposes as well as a procedure for requesting exceptions to the district policy.

Q13: Can a cell phone or other internet-enabled device be written into a student's IEP, 504, or student health plan?

It is possible for a cell phone or other internet-enabled device to be included in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504, or student health plan when the team determines that the device is necessary to support the student's access to education, health needs, or functional independence.

In these cases, the device is considered an accommodation or assistive technology, and its use is permitted under the terms outlined in the student's plan. The use of the device must:

- Be directly related to the documented educational, medical, or accessibility need
- Align with the specific conditions, settings, and purposes described in the plan
- Follow any additional guidelines established by the school to ensure appropriate and non-disruptive use

School staff should be informed of the accommodation and support implementation consistent with the student's plan.

Requests to include a device as an accommodation should be reviewed through the appropriate IEP, 504, or health planning process. Decisions are made on an individual basis, considering the student's unique needs and whether the device is required for the student to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) or to safely participate in the school day.

Off-School Grounds

Q14: Can students use internet-enabled devices on school buses?

Yes. Unless the school district's policy further restricts student access to internet-enabled devices, students may use internet-enabled devices on school buses. Upon the start of the school day, personal internet-enabled devices must be stored for the entirety of the regular school day.

Q15: Is a student restricted from using their cell phone or other internet-enabled device when a student leaves school grounds (e.g., off-campus lunch, internships, etc.)?

No. When a student leaves school campus, whether for an open lunch period, internship, or other purpose, they should be permitted to use their personal internet-enabled devices.

However, upon returning to the school's campus, the devices must be stored for the remainder of the school day.

Q16: Is a student permitted to use their cell phone or other internet-enabled device when attending a school-sponsored field trip?

A chief school administrator, principal, or designee may authorize that students are permitted to use their cell phone or other internet-enabled devices on a field trip after determining that no reasonable alternatives to using an internet-enabled device exist to participate in the field trip.

It is recommended that boards of education consider including participation in field trips in their policy's list of approved circumstances where there is no reasonable alternative to a student using an internet-enabled device as well as a procedure for requesting exceptions to the district policy.