

Staff Report



February 11, 2025

To Board of Education

From Sean Nosek, Superintendent/CEO

Re **Personal Digital Device Restrictions in Schools - Update**

This report is presented to the Board of Education for information.

BACKGROUND:

In September 2024, AP 345 (Student Use of Personal Digital Devices in Schools) was implemented in all schools, K-12. This administrative procedure was developed in the spring of 2024 through consultation with various stakeholders and in alignment with direction from the Ministry of Education and Child Care.

Through the initial implementation period in September, the administrative procedure has been well received by all middle and secondary schools. Additionally, School Codes of Conduct and Board Policy have been adjusted to reflect changes in the expectations of student use of personal digital devices in schools.

Results from a survey completed by school administrators in January 2025 show:

- On average school administrators rated the effectiveness of restrictions as an 8/10.
- 100% of school administrators responded that students always or often understand what the restrictions are.
- Themes emerging around what has worked well: high compliance and understanding, positive impact on learning environment, support from staff and parents, improved classroom management, and clear and consistent policy.
- Themes emerging around what has been challenging: inconsistent enforcement, student resistance, parental influence, challenge with vulnerable students, and policy implementation and monitoring.

Deputy Superintendent Nathan Ngieng will provide an update to the Board of Education highlighting the feedback (summary details attached) from middle and secondary principals and vice-principals regarding the newly implemented restrictions for the use of personal digital devices in schools.

Update on Personal Digital Device Restrictions – February 2025

On average, the participants rated it 8/10 for effectiveness

Summary details:

1. Students understand what the restrictions are
 - a. Always or often (100%)
2. Students comply with the restrictions
 - a. Always or often (86%)
3. What has been working well
 - a. **High Compliance and Understanding:** Students understand and comply with the personal digital device restrictions, with a culture of keeping phones in lockers during school time.
 - b. **Positive Impact on Learning Environment:** The restrictions have fostered a more engaging and interactive learning environment, with students paying more attention in class and interacting more during breaks.
 - c. **Support from Staff and Parents:** Staff feel supported by administration, and there have been no parent complaints. Consistent messaging and clear expectations have led to high compliance among students.
 - d. **Improved Classroom Management:** Teachers report improved classroom management and a more respectful atmosphere, with students understanding the importance of the restrictions and complying with them.
 - e. **Clear and Consistent Policy:** The policy is straightforward, with clear expectations district-wide around cell phone usage in middle school. Different approaches are used by staff to manage phones in classes.
4. What has been challenging
 - a. **Inconsistent Enforcement:** Some teachers struggle to enforce the school policy consistently, leading to varied expectations and difficulties in monitoring compliance. This inconsistency is seen as a weak link in the policy's effectiveness.
 - b. **Student Resistance:** Students continue to find ways to circumvent the restrictions, such as bringing multiple devices or using smartwatches. Some students refuse to comply with the policy, and a small number of students with significant needs present ongoing challenges.
 - c. **Parental Influence:** Parents often support their children's use of devices, sometimes encouraging it for communication during emergencies or daily interactions. This parental support can undermine the school's efforts to enforce the policy.
 - d. **Challenges with Vulnerable Students:** Working with the most vulnerable students, particularly those with significant mental health needs or those classified as 'Tier 3,' is challenging. The school aims to avoid punitive measures but struggles to achieve compliance without them.
 - e. **Policy Implementation and Monitoring:** The policy is generally sound, but its implementation faces challenges such as ensuring all staff are on board, managing consequences, and addressing privacy concerns. The school is working to refine and reinforce clear expectations around device usage.

5. Additional comment summary

- a. Staff appreciate the district's direction, leading to fewer issues and conflicts over personal devices. The policy has improved staff morale by reducing the need for constant reminders. There are concerns about whether Chromebooks should be added to the list of personal devices. Issues include planned fights recorded on social media and parents expecting the school to handle social media problems without monitoring their child's device use. The policy is generally supported, but smartwatches present a loophole. Technology integration should be innovative and intentional. Most students comply, but some need lockable bags to regulate phone usage. The policy has been effective, with no major frustrations or parent pushback. AP 345 provides clear procedures and flexibility for managing device use.