

**EAST PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY**

Policy: Personal Electronic Devices and Cell Phones

Policy Number: ?

Effective Date: August 1, 2026

Responsible Office: Superintendent of Schools

Review Cycle: Annually

I. PURPOSE

The East Providence Public Schools recognizes that personal electronic devices can create significant distractions during the school day and can negatively impact student learning, school climate, privacy, and the safety of students and staff.

This policy is established pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws § 16-21-43 and is intended to provide a consistent, systematic, and equitable districtwide standard governing personal electronic devices.

The goal of this policy is to create schools where students can focus on learning, engage with their peers and teachers, and participate fully in the educational environment without the distraction or inappropriate use of personal electronic devices.

II. LEGAL AUTHORITY

Rhode Island General Laws § 16-21-43 requires every public school to adopt a policy regarding personal electronic devices and requires the policy to include a prohibition on students having physical access to covered personal electronic devices during the school day.

The statute requires the School Committee to establish the policy in conjunction with the Superintendent and in consultation with applicable collective bargaining representatives. The policy must be enforced consistently and systematically while minimizing unnecessary conflict among students, families, educators, and staff.

The District shall comply with all applicable Rhode Island Department of Education regulations and guidance.

III. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this policy, a personal electronic device includes, but is not limited to:

Smartphones and cellular telephones;
Smartwatches;
Personal tablets;

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Personal computers, devices, or laptops;

Other personally owned electronic devices capable of communication through the internet or a wireless network.

Devices owned or provided by East Providence Public Schools for educational purposes, including District-issued devices, are not considered personal electronic devices under this policy.

The school day shall have the meaning established by the Rhode Island Department of Education and applicable state regulations.

IV. GENERAL REQUIREMENT

Students shall not have physical access to personal electronic devices during the school day.

Accordingly, students may bring a personal electronic device to school, but the device must be powered off or placed in a non-communicating mode and secured in a manner that prevents the student from physically accessing or using the device during the school day.

V. SECURE LOCKING POUCH SYSTEM REQUIREMENT

To provide a consistent and equitable method of complying with this policy, East Providence Public Schools shall utilize a Yondr or comparable secure locking pouch system for student personal electronic devices at schools designated by the Superintendent.

Each participating student shall be assigned a District-approved locking pouch.

A. Beginning of the School Day

Students shall:

Turn off their personal electronic device;

Place the device inside their assigned locking pouch;

Securely lock the pouch at the designated entry location; and

Keep the locked pouch in their possession, backpack, or other location designated by the school for the remainder of the school day.

Once properly locked, the student shall not have physical access to the device inside the pouch.

B. During the School Day

Students shall not:

Open, unlock, tamper with, or attempt to defeat the locking mechanism of the pouch;

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Remove a device from the pouch;
Use or possess an unlocked personal electronic device;
Give their pouch or device to another student for the purpose of circumventing this policy;
Use another student's device to circumvent this policy.

Staff shall not routinely unlock or open a student's pouch during the school day.

C. End of the School Day

At the conclusion of the school day, students may unlock their assigned pouch at a designated unlocking station or other location established by the school.

Students shall remove their device and secure the empty pouch for use on the next school day.

VI. POUCH RESPONSIBILITY

The pouch remains the property of East Providence Public Schools.

Students are responsible for:

Bringing their assigned pouch to school each day;
Keeping the pouch in good condition;
Not intentionally damaging, altering, or tampering with the pouch;
Immediately reporting a damaged or malfunctioning pouch to school administration.

A student whose pouch is lost, damaged, intentionally altered, or destroyed may be subject to appropriate disciplinary consequences and/or restitution consistent with District policy and applicable law.

No student shall be denied access to instruction solely because of an accidental malfunction of a pouch. The school shall provide an alternative method of securing the student's device while the issue is resolved.

VII. EXCEPTIONS

Consistent with Rhode Island General Laws § 16-21-43, exceptions shall be provided when a student's personal electronic device is necessary for:

Assistive technology identified in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or as otherwise required under an IEP;
A Section 504 Plan;
Documented medical needs, including but not limited to glucose monitoring or other medically necessary monitoring;

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A documented plan supporting an emergent multilingual learner when such access is necessary to provide appropriate language access services; or
An emergency.

Any routine exception shall be documented in the student's applicable plan or approved through the process established by the Superintendent.

Students receiving an approved exception shall not be unnecessarily segregated from students who do not have an exception.

The Superintendent shall establish procedures for identifying, documenting, and communicating approved exceptions to appropriate school personnel while maintaining student privacy.

VIII. EMERGENCIES

Nothing in this policy shall prevent a student from accessing a personal electronic device when an emergency requires such access and school administration authorizes or determines that access is necessary.

During an emergency or emergency response, school administration shall determine the appropriate method of communication with families.

Parents and guardians should not expect students to use personal cell phones as the primary means of communication during an emergency. The District will utilize its established emergency communication systems and procedures.

IX. PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION

Parents and guardians are encouraged to contact students through the school's main office during the school day when immediate communication is necessary.

Schools shall provide parents and guardians with clear information regarding:

The District's personal electronic device policy;
Locking pouch procedures;
Emergency communication procedures;
Approved exceptions; and
Consequences for violations.

X. ENFORCEMENT

This policy shall be enforced consistently and systematically throughout East Providence Public Schools.

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The District shall use a progressive and reasonable approach to violations, with the goal of compliance rather than punishment.

Each school will establish their individual procedures consistent with this policy and consequences may include:

First violation:

Student conference and parent/guardian notification; parent device pick up.

Second violation:

Parent/guardian notification and additional school-based consequences.

Repeated or intentional violations:

Additional consequences consistent with the Student Code of Conduct, which may include parent/guardian conferences and other appropriate disciplinary measures.

Intentional destruction or tampering with a a locking pouch may result in restitution and additional consequences.

A student's refusal to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action consistent with the Student Code of Conduct.

Nothing in this policy shall prevent administration from addressing additional misconduct associated with the use of a personal electronic device, including bullying, harassment, threats, recording without authorization, cheating, or other violations of District policy.

XI. SEARCH AND PRIVACY

Consistent with Rhode Island General Laws § 16-21-43, no school official, employee, or agent shall search the contents of a personal electronic device covered by this policy when the device has been retained by the school during school hours and is not in the student's possession in a locked pouch or container.

This policy does not authorize school personnel to access, inspect, review, or search the contents of a student's personal electronic device.

Any search or investigation involving a personal electronic device outside the circumstances addressed by this provision shall be conducted only in accordance with applicable law and District policy.

XII. SCHOOL-SPONSORED ACTIVITIES

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The Superintendent shall establish administrative procedures governing personal electronic devices during school-sponsored activities occurring outside the regular school day, including athletics, field trips, extracurricular activities, and other District-sponsored events.

Such procedures shall be consistent with Rhode Island law and shall recognize that certain activities or circumstances may require different communication or safety procedures.

XIII. STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

All District employees shall receive appropriate information regarding this policy and their responsibilities for implementation.

Staff members shall not be expected to physically confront students or engage in unnecessary disputes regarding personal electronic devices.

When a student violates this policy, staff shall follow the administrative procedures established by the Superintendent and building administration.

XIV. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

The Superintendent shall develop administrative regulations necessary to implement this policy, including:

Locking pouch distribution and replacement;
Arrival and dismissal procedures;
Procedures for students arriving late or leaving early;
Procedures for emergencies;
Procedures for approved exceptions;
Procedures for damaged or malfunctioning pouches;
Parent/guardian notification;
Progressive disciplinary responses;
Staff training; and
Annual review of the policy's effectiveness.

XV. ANNUAL REVIEW

The Superintendent shall review the implementation and effectiveness of this policy annually and make recommendations to the School Committee for any necessary revisions.

The District shall also incorporate applicable guidance and recommendations issued by the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the Rhode Island Office of the Attorney General.

XVI. EFFECTIVE DATE

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This policy shall take effect August 1, 2026, and shall remain in effect until amended or rescinded by the East Providence School Committee.

LEGAL REFERENCE:

R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-43

RIDE Regulations Governing the School Calendar and Length of the School Day

Applicable Rhode Island Department of Education guidance

CROSS REFERENCES:

Student Code of Conduct

Student Technology/Acceptable Use Policy

Student Records and Privacy Policy

Emergency Response Procedures

IEP and Section 504 Procedures

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