

V. A. 37 SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY: PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND CELL PHONES

RI Gen. Law § 16-21-43

Effective Date: August 1, 2026

Review Cycle: Annually

I. PURPOSE

East Providence Public Schools recognizes that unmonitored physical access to personal electronic devices during the school day creates significant learning distractions, degrades student mental health and social engagement, and increases opportunities for academic dishonesty and cyberbullying.

Pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws § 16-21-43, this policy establishes a consistent, districtwide standard to eliminate physical access to personal electronic devices during the school day as defined by the Rhode Island Department of Education. The goal of this policy is to cultivate an instructional environment centered on active learning, meaningful interpersonal interactions, and personal safety.

II. LEGAL AUTHORITY

This policy is enacted in strict compliance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-43, which mandates that every public school department implement a policy prohibiting student physical access to covered personal electronic devices during the school day as defined by the RI Department of Education.

In accordance with statutory mandates, this policy has been developed by the School Committee in conjunction with the Superintendent of Schools, in consultation with applicable collective bargaining representatives, and incorporating guidance issued by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE), the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the Rhode Island Office of the Attorney General.

III. DEFINITIONS

- **Personal Electronic Device (PED):** Any non-district-owned, personally owned device capable of communication via cellular network, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, or the internet. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Smartphones and cellular phones
 - Smartwatches, Metaglasses, and wearable technology capable of messaging, calling, or internet access
 - Personal tablets, e-readers, and personal laptops/computers
 - Wireless headphones, earbuds, and audio listening equipment
 - Other personal devices capable of messaging, recording, or wireless transmission

- **District-Issued Technology:** School-owned Chromebooks, iPads, tablets, or computing devices provided to students for educational purposes are not considered personal electronic devices under this policy.

IV. GENERAL REQUIREMENT

Students are prohibited from using personal electronic devices during the school day as defined by the Department of Education. Personal electronic devices must be silenced and stored out of sight, in a backpack, locker, or classroom storage door pocket during all class periods, or other storage system as defined by the school.

While students may bring personal electronic devices onto school grounds, all covered devices must be powered off or placed in silent/non-communicating mode and kept out of sight during the school day as defined by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

VII. MANDATORY STATUTORY EXCEPTIONS

In accordance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-43, documented exceptions to the physical access ban shall be granted when a personal electronic device is necessary for:

1. **Individualized Education Program (IEP):** Assistive technology or auxiliary devices explicitly identified in an active IEP.
2. **Section 504 Plan:** Devices required as a reasonable accommodation under a documented 504 Plan.
3. **Medical Needs:** Medically necessary monitoring (e.g., continuous blood glucose monitors, seizure alerts) coordinated through the school nurse and documented in an Individualized Health Care Plan.
4. **Emergent Multilingual Learners (MLL):** Approved language access devices specified within a student's documented MLL support plan.

Any of the above exceptions shall be discussed, agreed upon by the necessary team, and documents (ie. IEP, 504 plan, Individualized health plan, etc.). Exceptions may also be made in the event of an emergency as approved by Administration.

Students receiving authorized statutory exceptions shall not be segregated, stigmatized, or subjected to disciplinary action for utilizing approved devices strictly in accordance with their documented plan.

VIII. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES & PARENT COMMUNICATION

In the event of a schoolwide emergency or lockdown, the district will initiate emergency communications using established district messaging systems. Parents and guardians are advised not to

expect direct cell phone contact from students during emergencies, as uncoordinated phone use can compromise safety protocols and emergency response operations.

Parents needing to contact a student for urgent matters during the school day have the option of calling the school's main office directly or emailing (secondary only) their child's EP Schools email address.

IX. ENFORCEMENT & PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINARY RESPONSE

Enforcement of this policy shall be consistent, systematic, developmentally appropriate, and non-discriminatory. Violations will be handled under the district Behavior Matrix and Student Code of Conduct.

Violation Level	Administrative & Disciplinary Response	Parent/Guardian Notification
1st Offense	Device confiscated/mandatory use of the pouch system until the end of the school day.	Parent/guardian notified.
2nd Offense	Device confiscated/mandatory use of the pouch system office until the end of the day; office detention	Parent/guardian notified and/or conference required.
3rd Offense	Device confiscated/mandatory use of the pouch system; parent/guardian pick-up of cell phone required; mandatory use of pouch system for 5 school days; In school intervention	Mandatory administrative meeting with parent/guardian
4th and Beyond	Loss of personal electronic device privileges during school hours; required use of pouch system for a minimum of 30 school days and up to the remainder of the school year; administrative disciplinary action per Behavior Matrix. In school intervention assigned.	Parent conference.

X. SEARCH AND PRIVACY PROTECTIONS

Strictly adhering to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-43, no school official, employee, or agent shall search, inspect, or view the contents of any student personal electronic device retained, confiscated, or secured under this policy.

Searches of electronic device contents are strictly prohibited unless conducted under separate, lawful authority in full compliance with constitutional requirements and applicable state law.

XI. SCHOOL-SPONSORED & EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Device usage during field trips, athletic events, after-school clubs, and district-sponsored extracurricular activities occurring outside regular instructional hours shall be governed by the Student Behavior Matrix and specific safety rules established by supervising teachers, coaches, or administrators.

XII. ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES & RIDE FILING

The Superintendent of Schools shall establish all necessary administrative regulations regarding classroom expectations, staff enforcement procedures, and compliance monitoring.

Upon adoption or any subsequent revision by the School Committee, this policy shall be formally filed with the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) in accordance with state reporting mandates.

XIII. RESTITUTION

Students and/or parents/guardians are responsible for the proper care and security of any district-provided storage system. In the event of destruction, loss, or intentional damage of a district pouch, a replacement fee of \$35 will be assessed to the student.

This policy shall be disseminated to all students and parent/guardians upon passage.