

STUDENT USE OF CELL PHONES AND OTHER PERSONAL WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICES

North Carolina recently joined more than 20 other states and the District of Columbia by passing a law that restricts the use of cellular phones and other wireless communication devices during the instructional day. The law and this policy recognize that such devices can disrupt the learning environment and should therefore only be permitted by students in limited and clearly defined circumstances.

The Southeastern Academy School Board promotes digital literacy, citizenship, and agency as key factors in helping students make healthy choices about their learning and digital habits. The Board supports intentional, standards-based instruction that cultivates these student skills and fosters ethical digital behavior and effective learning as described in the North Carolina Digital Learning Standards for Students and as referenced in [SeA's Internet Safety Policy and Procedures](#).

The Board also prioritizes the socio-emotional health and well-being of students, safe, orderly schools, and engaging classroom environments conducive to learning. Accordingly, the Board seeks to minimize distraction and disruption for learners and teachers, including those brought about by inappropriate use of personal communication devices and device accessories (hereafter “personal wireless communication devices”).

For the purpose of this policy, “*personal wireless communication devices*” are any portable electronic devices that have the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two or more entities. *Personal wireless communication devices* may include, but are not necessarily limited to: cellular telephones, paging devices, two-way radios and similar devices, smartphones, smartwatches, smart glasses, tablet computers, laptop computers, gaming devices, Bluetooth® headphones, earbuds, smart glasses, smartwatches that depend upon a connection to a smart phone or other communication device, and other such internet-accessing devices (whether by cellular, wired, or wireless connection). Smartwatches may be worn and used as watches throughout the school day, but any features that require wireless connections to a smartphone must be disabled when use of the *personal wireless communication device* is prohibited.

A. Communication Expectations

The school day is a time for students to learn and grow, and uninterrupted class time is beneficial for all students. Southeastern Academy asks that families reach out to the appropriate school staff member (e.g., front office staff, student support services, school administrator, or classroom teacher) via phone, email, or otherwise to share an unexpected schedule change for their student. Staff will partner with families to help ensure students receive the information in a timely manner.

It is the hope of SeA that families will discuss this policy with their children and support a learning environment free of distractions.

B. Authorized Use

The Board supports clear expectations for student behavior. To promote student classroom engagement, prevent disruptions to safe, orderly school environments, and assist students, these parameters guide the authorized student use of *personal wireless communication devices* during the school day.

1. ALL Students

Students are permitted to possess *personal wireless communication devices* at school. Students must keep *personal wireless communication devices* turned off and put away during the school day. For the purpose of this policy, a device is “put away” when it is out of sight and not easily accessible (e.g., stored in a locker, backpack, or bag). Students may not display, use, or make devices visible during this time period unless one of these exceptions applies:

- a. Use of the *personal wireless communication device* during school hours is specifically authorized or required by a student’s individualized education program (IEP), Section 504 plan, or the individualized health plan (IHP) on file for that student, or has been approved by the administration for translation purposes, assistive communication, or a safety plan.
- b. The *personal wireless communication device* is displayed, used, or made visible for instructional purposes with the prior authorization of the classroom teacher consistent with a school-wide rule regarding such instructional use.
- c. School staff, in their discretion, may authorize brief use of a *personal wireless communication device* if there is a reasonable and legitimate need to communicate with someone outside the school during the instructional day. Students must ask for permission in advance and must honor any specific directions from staff regarding the duration or specific time of day for any such authorized use.

2. Buses

Although use is generally permitted before and after school, use of *personal wireless communication devices* may be regulated or prohibited on school buses by transportation or school staff when such devices interfere with the safe operation of the buses. Audio should be played only with headphones or earbuds and at a reasonable volume so as not to disturb other students or distract the driver. Students should still be able to hear directions from the driver or district staff while using headphones or earbuds.

C. Consequences for Unauthorized Use

SeA hopes that all students will follow this policy and support a learning environment free of distractions. In addition to imposing disciplinary consequences when authorized by the Student Code of Conduct, school staff are authorized to temporarily confiscate a student’s personal device.

1st offense: The phone/headphones may be held in the office/classroom for the student to retrieve at the end of the school day.

2nd offense: The student may receive an office-referral and the parent will receive communication regarding the infraction. The phone/headphones/wireless communication device can be picked up from the front office by a parent. May receive up to a 3-day suspension.

3rd offense: Students will receive consequences as stated in the Student Code of Conduct. May receive up to a 10-day suspension; may be recommended for exclusion only if the principal determines that aggravating circumstances warrant a more severe response and provides notice of those aggravating circumstances in the notice of suspension.

D. Search of Personal Wireless Communication Devices

In accordance with Student Searches (Legal Reference, et al.), a student's *personal wireless communication device* and its contents, including, but not limited to, text messages and digital photos, may be searched whenever a school official has reasonable suspicion to believe the search will provide evidence that the student has violated or is violating a law, Board policy, the Student Code of Conduct or a school rule.

E. Responsibility and Security

Whenever *personal wireless communication devices* are confiscated pursuant to this policy, staff are expected to take reasonable measures to store those devices until they are returned to the student or parent/guardian. However, students remain personally and solely responsible at all times for the security of their *personal wireless communication devices*. The school system is not responsible for the theft, loss, damage, or replacement of such devices.

Legal Reference: [N.C. Gen. Stat. House Bill 959](#) (regulation of student use of wireless devices).

Legal Reference: [§ 115C-47](#), [§ 115C-288](#), [§ 115C-307](#), [§ 115C-390.2](#), [§ 115C-391.2](#)
(Student Search)

This policy aligns with North Carolina General Statute [§ 115C-76.100](#).