

DEVICES DOWN. POSSIBILITIES UP.

BOCES 2 DISTRACTION-FREE SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTATION FAQ

Background Information

Why is BOCES 2 implementing this policy?

This policy complies with New York State Education Law §2803, which requires all public schools to adopt distraction-free guidelines that prohibit student use of internet-enabled personal devices during the school day. The goal is to foster safer, more focused and more engaging learning environments.

What is considered an internet-enabled device?

Any personal device capable of connecting to the internet and accessing online content, including:

- Smartphones
- Tablets
- Smartwatches
- Other wireless devices

School-issued devices used for instructional purposes are not restricted under this policy.

When does this policy go into effect?

All BOCES 2-operated buildings will begin enforcing the policy on the first day of the 2025-26 school year.

Communication and Emergencies

How can families contact students during the school day?

Families should call the main office of the student's program. Staff will relay messages or bring students to a school phone when needed.

Contact numbers include:

- Career and Technical Education (WEMOCO, Springdale Farms and URMCC Strong): 585-352-2471
- Ridgecrest Academy: 585-617-2950
- Westside Academy: 585-617-2550
- Westview Exceptional Children: 585-617-2570

What if there is an emergency outside of school?

Families can call the main office. Staff will ensure that the student is notified and allowed to call home using a school phone.

What happens in an emergency at school?

In a school-wide emergency, BOCES 2 will activate its emergency response plan and communicate with families through its mass notification system. Accurate, timely information will be shared directly from the school.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION

31%

of 8-year-olds had a smartphone in 2021, compared to 11% in 2015



97%

of children use their cell phones during the school day



55%

of students ages 13-17 report experiencing cyberbullying



64%

of teens (ages 13-17) have been exposed to inappropriate content



83%

of educators support bell-to-bell cell phone restrictions



Data from the New York State United Teachers Bell-to-Bell Local President Toolkit

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Device Storage and Safety

Where will student devices be kept?

Each program will provide secure, designated storage for personal devices. Depending on the location, this may be a classroom-based system or a main office storage area. Detailed instructions will be shared by each program before the school year begins.

Can a student just keep their phone in their backpack or pocket?

No. Devices must be stored in the assigned secure location for the duration of the school day. Keeping a device on hand, even if unused, does not meet the requirements of the state policy.

Unique Circumstances

Are there any exceptions to the policy?

Yes. Students may use their personal internet-enabled devices:

- For medical or health-related reasons
- When explicitly required by an IEP or 504 Plan
- With teacher authorization for an educational activity
- For translation or communication accessibility tools

What if a student needs to use a device to self-regulate or manage anxiety?

BOCES 2 recognizes that personal devices have become regulation tools for some students.

Accommodations can be provided through the IEP or 504 process or in collaboration with school support staff. Families are encouraged to discuss individual needs with their student's program administrator.

What if a student needs to use a device to self-regulate or manage anxiety?

The policy does not apply during off-campus work-based learning experiences. Students are expected to follow the expectations of their assigned worksite.

Violations and Consequences

What happens if a student violates the policy?

BOCES 2 will use a progressive, four-step response:

1. First Violation: Device returned to storage and incident documented by teacher. Teacher contacts family.
2. Second Violation: Device returned to storage and a documented referral to an administrator. Administrator contacts family.
3. Third Violation: Referral, continued contact with the family and collaboration with home district to discuss additional supports or program fit.
4. Fourth Violation: Referral, counseling support and continued collaboration with home district and family.

Will students be suspended for breaking the rules?

No. Violations of this policy alone do not result in suspension. Disciplinary action only occurs if behavior escalates to disruption, insubordination or safety concerns during the response process.

Well-Being and Community Voice

How is student mental health being considered?

Many students and families shared that devices help with anxiety and self-regulation. BOCES 2 is committed to providing alternative supports and will work individually with students to develop regulation strategies that do not rely on personal devices.

How was this policy developed?

BOCES 2 gathered feedback from nearly 300 students, staff and family members. The policy reflects shared priorities of safety, learning, equity and consistency while honoring calls for flexibility, compassion and transparency. Additional feedback can be shared with program leadership and administration.