

Testimony Before The RI House Education Committee

April 23, 2025

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A. South Kingstown School District Cell Phone Policy

Cell phones have been found to be among the biggest distractions from learning time. Even when we attempt to keep our phones away, we are distracted by alerts or knowing that the phone is there. The University of Chicago Press notes a study in which, *“Results from two experiments indicate that even when people are successful at maintaining sustained attention—as when avoiding the temptation to check their phones—the mere presence of these devices reduces available cognitive capacity.”* **Teaching and learning are the primary reasons we have school each day.** Resultantly, we passed a cell phone policy in the South Kingstown School District (SKSD) for the 2024-2025 school year. **The purpose of this Kindergarten through 12th-Grade policy is to minimize the distraction of cell phones during the school day so the focus can be on teaching and learning for all SKSD staff and students.**

Students may use school-issued electronics, such as laptops, for academic purposes with teacher permission. Students may **not** use personal electronic devices, e.g cellular phones, during the school day. Headphones or earbuds may be used during class time consistent with student accommodations or modifications, and only while connected to a laptop. Any other personal electronic devices, which are distracting students from learning, are not permitted to be used during the school day. This policy offers guidance regarding how personal electronic devices required for needs such as medical, emergency, etc. will be managed during the school day.

Students who violate this policy will be required to surrender their personal electronic device(s). The device will be housed in the main office, where it will be returned to students at the end of the school day. Students who repeatedly violate this policy will be progressively disciplined as appropriate by staff, teachers, Deans, and/or School Administrators, according to the infraction table.

There are two types of violations of this policy:

- A minor violation is the use of a personal electronic device during the school day without permission. A first offense should be addressed by the classroom teacher, and also referred to the appropriate dean or administrator for documentation. Additional offenses would be referred to the appropriate dean or administrator.
- A major violation is the use of a cell phone or other personal electronic device during the school day to video record, audio record, live stream, or photograph any student or staff member without his or her consent. Under no circumstances is this permissible.

Consequences for violations of this policy are outlined in the infraction table below. In addition to the consequences explicitly listed, administration will consider other actions for major violations on a case-by-case basis, including, but not limited to removal from class, bullying/harassment investigation, and/or police involvement. Students who refuse to surrender their phone will be subject to further disciplinary action including being asked to leave the building for the day.

Infraction	First Offense	Second Offense	Third Offense	Four or more
Electronic Device Violation (minor)	Confiscation, warning, and parent contact by teacher, dean, and/or administrator based on the situation	Confiscation, office detention and parent contact by dean, and/or administrator	Confiscation, office detention or up to one day of AEP and parent contact by dean, and/or administrator	Confiscation, parent contact and up to two days of AEP and/or Social Probation by dean, and/or administrator
Electronic Device Violation (major - used to photograph, audio record, video record others w/o expressed and active consent)	Confiscation, and up to 2 days AEP, parent conference by dean, and/or administrator	Up to 3 days AEP, device confiscation during school hours in main office Parent meeting by dean, and/or administrator	Up to 5 days AEP or OSS (if harassment/cyberbullying determined), device confiscation during school hours in main office by dean, and/or administrator	Up to 5 days AEP or OSS (if harassment/cyberbullying determined), device confiscation during school hours in main office by dean, and/or administrator Parent must pick up device daily

The SKSD expectation is that staff will model the purpose of this policy for our students, i.e., minimize the distraction of cell phones and other personal electronic devices during the school day so the focus can be on teaching and learning for all SKSD staff and students. Therefore, the use of phones (incl. receiving/sending texts, phone calls) by staff should be limited to non-contact time when no students are present e.g. in office areas, staff room, empty classrooms.

B. South Kingstown School District Cell Phone Policy Guidance

To best support our students in complying with this policy, The South Kingstown School District is partnering with a company to provide secure storage pouches for student devices. This means that all students must store their phones in pouches upon entering the school building.

- All students will be assigned a pouch for their phones which they will utilize while they are students in the SKSD. Students will take their pouch to and from school with them each day. Students will store their phones in their pouch until the end of school day. Each student will maintain possession of their pouch throughout their time as a SKSD student.
- **Students who demonstrate that they are distracted by other personal electronic devices, e.g. smartwatches or ear buds, will be required to also store those devices in their pouch.**
- If a student does not have a cell phone, they are still required to bring their pouch to school every day. The parent/guardian will be notified if the student fails to comply. **Parents/Guardians will need to attest in writing that their child does not have a phone.**
- The pouch is the property of SKSD and is considered on loan to the student during the school year. The student is responsible for the pouch and is required to keep it in their possession at all times. If a student loses or damages their pouch, the same procedures already in place for vandalism, property misuse or damage will be followed.
- Upon entering school each day, students will place their phone inside of their pouch, and lock it in front of designated staff.

- o If a student needs to leave school early for an approved early dismissal, unlocking bases will be available to allow for a quick opening of the pouch.
 - o If a student has an urgent personal or family situation, they can ask permission from their teacher for a pass to the Main Office, where they may use their phone or a school phone to handle the situation. In this case every student is expected to return to class with a pass from the receiving staff as soon as possible, and their cell phone is returned to their pouch before returning to class.
- Unlocking bases will be available at the conclusion of the school day for students to open their pouches.
- Any tampering, damage to the pouch, or use of an alternate phone and/or electronic device will be subject to disciplinary action.
- If a student continuously does not comply with the expectations outlined above, SKSD reserves the right to revoke all electronic privileges. Habitual violators will be subject to a re-entry protocol.
- Students bringing personal electronic devices to school do so at their own risk. SKSD is not responsible for the loss of such devices. SKSD will continually review student adherence to the rules for the acceptable use of electronic devices and reserves the right to revoke this privilege at any time.
- School administration will annually share with staff who to contact if students are not complying with this policy during learning time, so that such infractions can be addressed outside of the classroom setting.
- Student use of pouches on field trips is at teacher/administrator discretion. Unlocking bases will be supplied as needed.
- *Velcro pouches* are available for students who need access to their phone for medical reasons. Students with velcro pouches will otherwise need to keep their phones in their pouches. The infraction table in this policy will apply to students who do not comply with this provision.
- Students who do not bring their pouches to school and are unwilling to turn over their phone in a manner consistent with the policy guidance will be sent home. The school will conduct a parent/guardian re-entry meeting to ensure the student is complying with the policy.
- Unlocking bases will be part of “to go” bags in the event of an evacuation.

C. Observations from the the 2024-2025 School Year at South Kingstown High School

The goal for the 2024-2025 school year was to remove cell phones as a distraction during the school day, so phones are not a barrier to teaching and learning. What we have seen is a significant reduction in students on cell phones during the school day, especially in classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, gymnasium, and library. It is important to note that like any school policy, some students are looking for ways to not comply. However, there are two reasons why I feel that having our cell phone policy has been successful. First, we are no longer relying on consistency from classroom to classroom. Our prior procedure was no cell phones out during learning time, but it was unsuccessful due to inconsistency from classroom to classroom that led to administrator, teacher, and staff frustration. Second, students who are violating the 2024-2025 cell phone policy by not having their cell phone in their pouch, are aware that using their cell phone during school hours will result in mapped out consequences. This awareness has still resulted in their reduced use.