

Cell Phone Use at School

Many parents are concerned about Governor Glenn Youngkin's Executive Order 33 and new public school policies regarding cell phone usage at school. We prepared this document to help parents and students understand this evolving situation.

Executive Order 33

On July 9, 2024, Governor Youngkin signed Executive Order 33 regarding the use of cell phones in public schools. The Governor explained that “creating a cell phone-free education environment in public schools is not only a prudent measure, but an essential one to promote a healthier and more focused educational environment where every child is free to learn.” Among the specific benefits identified were improved student mental health, reduced distractions, and improved focus and engagement. Accordingly, the Governor directed state agencies to provide guidance on how school districts can implement “cell phone-free education policies and procedures.”

The Virginia Department of Education issued its final Guidance for Cell Phone-Free Education Pursuant to Executive Order 33 on September 16, 2024. The guidance requires Virginia school divisions to “review existing policies and/or work to create or revise policies that adhere with the following minimum guidance no later than January 1, 2025.”

Frequently Asked Questions

Can my student have a cell phone or personal electronic communication device at school?

Yes. Students of all ages may have these devices at school if parents decide their child should bring one. All devices, however, must be turned off and stored away at school. The meaning of “stored away” will vary by school division (and even among schools within a school division).

Does my student’s grade affect how he/she is allowed to use a device on school property?

	Use Permitted “Bell to Bell”	Use Permitted on School Property Outside of “Bell to Bell”
Elementary School	NO	NO
Middle School	NO	NO
High School	NO	YES

Is a student with an IEP, a 504 Plan, and/or an individualized health care plan allowed to use his/her cell phone or personal electronic communication device while at school?

The guidance allows an exemption if possession, access, or use of the device is necessary due to the student’s disability. Any exemption must be formally documented as part of the student’s IEP, 504 Plan, and/or individualized health care plan. Schools and families should collaborate to explore potential alternative to using cell phones or personal electronic communication devices.

How can my student contact me if he/she is not allowed to use his/her cell phone?

Students must use school-based communication methods to communicate with parents in non-emergency scenarios. This might be in the classroom, office, or other centralized location.

What if there is a school emergency?

School divisions must develop crisis and contingency plans for emergency situations at school. Each school division must publicly share certain aspects of its plan, including family notification processes during crisis situations. School divisions must be clear in protocols whether students can access stored phones and devices during a school-based emergency.

What if I need to contact my student during the school day?

Parents should contact the school's front office if they need to communicate with their student during the school day. This applies to both family emergency and non-emergency situations. Schools are encouraged to develop (and share with parents) a family-based emergency protocol and "to ensure a family can reach an adult quickly and talk through how their child will be notified and supported."

Is the school allowed to communicate with my child by social media?

VDOE's guidance addresses the school division's use of social media to communicate with students during school hours. Middle school and high school staff "must use [a] non-social media-based app for communications with students regarding activity and athletic scheduling information during school hours." The guidance does not address this topic for elementary school students.

Can my student's school have a policy that differs from VDOE Guidance?

Yes. The VDOE guidance's goal is to help school divisions develop cell phone and personal electronic communication device policies that will "allow teachers to focus on classroom instruction and not manage cell phone usage class to class." As such, VDOE encourages each school division to use the guidance "as the floor" in developing its own cell phone and personal electronic communication device policies.

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