



**STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** District Superintendents

**FROM:** C. Matthew Ferguson, Ed.D., Esq.  
Deputy Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer  
Division of College, Career, and Military Readiness

**DATE:** September 10, 2024

**RE:** Cell Phone Policy

The State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the [policy](#), as required by Proviso 1.103 in the South Carolina 2024-2025 budget. In doing so, the State has taken a practical step toward providing students and teachers the freedom to focus on learning. The Proviso states:

*1.103. (SDE: Anti-Bullying/School Safety) To receive state funds allocated for State Aid to Classrooms, a school district shall implement a policy adopted by the State Board of Education that prohibits access to personal electronic communication devices by students during the school day. For purposes of this provision, a personal electronic communication device is considered to be a device not authorized for classroom use by a student, utilized to access the Internet, wi-fi, or cellular telephone signals.*

As outlined in our [memo on June 27, 2024](#), local districts must now adopt a local policy that must be fully implemented in every school no later than the beginning of the January 2025 semester. Districts should notify the SCDE of their policy implementation by completing [this form](#).

The policy adopted by the SBE includes several key definitions that must be followed to ensure full compliance with the Proviso:

1. **Personal electronic device**, referred to as “device,” means any device utilized to access the internet, wi-fi, cellular telephone signals, or to capture images or video. This includes, but is not limited to, cell phones, smart watches, tablets, and gaming devices.

2. **Personal Electronic Device accessories**, referred to as “device accessories,” include any wired or wireless accessory or wearable technology that connects to a device and any other accessory commonly used in conjunction with a personal electronic device.
3. **School day** is defined as the period of time that a student is present on the school campus from their arrival (i.e., tardy bell) until afternoon dismissal at the end of the instructional day. This policy may also apply to school buses, field trips, and athletic events, at the district’s discretion. The applicability of this regulation to these activities will be determined by the school district.<sup>1</sup>
4. **Access** is defined as viewing, holding, wearing, or otherwise using a device for the purpose of communication, internet access, gaming, recording, or any other function commonly associated with devices. During the school day, devices should be powered off and stored as directed by the school district. Exceptions granted for medical necessity, authorized for classroom use, or other authorized reasons should be in writing and are not considered violations of this definition.

Please reference the full policy as adopted by the SBE for additional details regarding the process for locally approved educational usage of devices, implementation, and enforcement. As noted in the model policy, there are multiple opportunities for school districts to pass local policies with requirements beyond the minimum outlined in the SBE policy.

As school districts work to implement this policy, the SCDE has created a webpage that explains the positive impact of phone-free policies and how the policy can be implemented and communicated effectively. We have featured schools across South Carolina that have already implemented policies allowing students to focus on academics, social skills, and friendships. Our communications initiative is called Free to Focus SC, and you can find out more information at [ed.sc.gov/freetofocus](http://ed.sc.gov/freetofocus).

The SCDE recently hosted all district Public Information Officers to share strategies regarding effective communication and stands ready to help administrators and educators with any questions you may have. The SCDE will continue to update the Free to Focus SC page with FAQs, implementation guides, and other tools to help educate and inform all audiences of the necessity and benefits this policy provides.

A special focus will be placed on emphasizing best practices regarding parent communication and reunification plans in the event of a school emergency. The Department would urge districts to avoid framing this policy as a “ban,” which is an inaccurate description of what the policy requires. Phones *are not* required to be “banned” from school campuses but *are* required to be “off and away” for the entirety of the school day.

If you have any questions regarding the implementation of this policy, please reach out to Robert Cathcart, Policy & Legal Advisor, at [rdcathcart@ed.sc.gov](mailto:rdcathcart@ed.sc.gov) or at 803-734-2230.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of “School Day” includes recess, lunch time, and all times between classes.