Tips for Managing Communications Devices in Schools

As the technology behind electronic devices such as cell phones continues to expand, principals and vice-principals have noticed an impact in schools on learning, safety, privacy and behaviour.

While some school boards have developed guidelines around the appropriate use of these communication devices, others have left it to individual schools and principals to develop such policies. Guidelines developed at the board or school level should address

- the ethical use of cell phones and electronic devices
- safety issues from both parents' point of view and the school's
- consistency across a school or board and
- a strong educational component.

The use of the social media and messaging for bullying and harassment has become a serious problem of increasing magnitude. These activities, when taking place off the school site or outside school hours, are normally not school matters, but rather community or police matters. However, on occasion these activities can have an impact on the school and negatively affect the safety, culture and the learning environment at the school, thereby becoming school matters and issues of concern for school leaders.

These issues will likely increase since bullying and cyber bullying, even when taking place off school premises, are infractions that can lead to a suspension. Cyber-bullying falls under the section of bullying in the [Accepting Schools Act](#) and a principal is responsible for investigating any matter reported under these subsections.

Cellular phones and smartphones are disruptive if they are activated in class. Even if used for silent messaging, text message and notifications distract the student's attention and can interfere with both learning and teaching. Communications devices also have the potential to be used for academic dishonesty.

Camera capability on smartphones can be used in a manner that violates the privacy, dignity and safety of students and staff.

Suggested Guidelines for Electronic Devices

During the school day, the use of cell phones and other electronic devices should be restricted, unless they are being used with the teacher's permission for learning purposes.

- During classroom instruction, all cell phones and electronic devices should ideally be stored elsewhere (in a locker) but at minimum should be powered off and secured out of sight. They should not be used to make or receive phone calls, send or receive text messages, send or receive e-mails, access the Internet or apps, watch TV, listen to or download music or download files.

• Cell phones provide easy access to the Internet and text messaging between students. As such, they should be prohibited during tests and exams to prevent cheating.

• The privacy, dignity and safety of others must be maintained through the appropriate use of cell phones and electronic devices. Students should be prohibited from taking or posting photos of other students or staff without consent.

• Phones with camera capability should not be allowed in washrooms or changerooms.

• The use of cell phones by the principal and vice-principal (or other staff) to ensure student safety must be consistent with any guidelines set out by the school.

School Follow-Up Procedures

• Ensure parents know that they can contact their child through the main office if there is an emergency – they do not need to call their child's cell phone.

• Encourage parents to leave messages for their children at the office for nonemergencies. Invite the student for whom the parent has left a message to report to the office.

• Remind students that these devices are often the targets of theft. They should be secured in their lockers for safety. Ensure that students and staff are aware that the school is not responsible for the replacement of such items that may be stolen or lost.

• Include guidelines/policies around the appropriate use of electronic devices in the School Code of Conduct and the Student Handbook.

• Include the guidelines/policies in communications to parents/community (info board outside office/newsletter/website/social media accounts).

• Refer to the guidelines/polices during your first School Council meeting and Curriculum Night.

• Review the board's computer policy to ensure the acceptable use of cell phones and electronic devices.

• Display signage throughout the school building (sample attached) that outlines your school's policy around the use of cell phones and electronic devices.

• Ensure teachers understand and support the guidelines since they will largely be the ones to enforce them.

• Educate your students about popular websites and apps such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These sites are growing at an enormous rate everyday. Students need to understand that what they post to these sites – including personal information and pictures – can be accessed by millions of people worldwide. Any such communication is neither private nor protected under privacy law.

• Let students and parents know that cyber-bullying through electronic devices, even if it occurs away from the school, is subject to in-school discipline, even if it occurs away from school.