

Standards for the Use of Personal Mobile Devices and Social Media in Schools

Parent Guide

Background

Cellphones and other personal mobile devices are an ever-present feature of our daily lives, and Alberta's classrooms are no exception. These devices can be used as research and learning tools, to stay up to date on practice or club schedules, and to keep in touch with family in case of emergency. But they can also be a distraction within an educational environment and can sometimes be used inappropriately within a classroom or school.

In recent years, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia have all announced province-wide restrictions or bans on mobile devices in schools, with certain exceptions.

Ministerial Order

On June 17, 2024, the Government of Alberta [announced](#) new rules to limit the use of personal mobile devices in classrooms during instructional time, and social media on school networks and devices. These changes were announced to reduce distractions, maximize learning time, support student mental health, and reduce opportunities for cyberbullying during the school day.

The [Standards for the Use of Personal Mobile Devices and Social Media in Schools](#) set minimum requirements for Alberta's K-12 public, separate, francophone, charter, and independent school authorities, and private Early Childhood Services operators.

Locally developed policies and procedures must meet the provincial standards; however, there are areas of flexibility to meet the unique needs of communities and students these school authorities serve.

General restrictions

Every school authority is required, at a minimum, to restrict students':

- use of personal mobile devices during instructional time.
- access to social media on school networks and school devices.

Areas of flexibility

Your school authority's policies and or procedures must include the general restrictions above, as well as the following:

- where students will store their mobile devices during class time (e.g. in a student's school bag, their locker, or a secure location such as a locked cupboard);
- a description of what constitutes "social media" (e.g. what platforms are considered social media, or a list of social media platforms that are restricted from school networks and devices);
- roles and responsibilities of children, students, parents, teachers and the principal in enforcing the restrictions;
- progressive consequences for non-compliance, including a requirement to notify parents if the student violates the policy or procedure;
- annual notification of and easy access to the policy or procedure for parents and students; and
- the mandatory exceptions set out in the provincial standards.

Your school authority may also have stricter policies or procedures, so long as the mandatory exceptions are permitted.

Mandatory exceptions

School authorities must allow for the following exceptions, as determined by a principal or equivalent:

- Use of personal mobile devices must be permitted for health or medical reasons or to support special learning needs.
- Use of personal mobile devices may be permitted for educational or other purposes.
- Limited access to social media platforms for educational or other purposes.

Timing

The Ministerial Order comes into effect September 1, 2024, which means when students return for the 2024-25 school year, they will not be able to access personal mobile devices during instructional time, nor will they be able to access social media on school networks or devices. The mandatory exceptions mentioned above must be allowed.

Some school authorities may have their specific policies or procedures completed by that time, but others may not. School authorities have until January 1, 2025, to finalize and share their policies regarding storage, roles and responsibilities, consequences, and annual notification. These policies must be readily available and easy for parents and students to access.

Input

Research

Many studies and reports point to the negative impact of personal mobile devices/social media on developing brains, academic performance and mental health, including:

- [The 2023 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report](#)
- [Smartphone Bans, Student Outcomes and Mental Health](#), February 2024
- [Jon Haidt, The Case for Phone-Free Schools](#), June 6, 2023
- [Social Media and Youth Mental Health: U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory](#), 2023
- [Cell Phones, Student Rights, and School Safety: Finding the Right Balance](#), *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 2021
- [Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity](#), April 3, 2017

Engagement

Alberta's government heard from students, parents, teachers, school staff and others before introducing new standards. This included:

- The Education Minister met with the Minister's Youth Council – about 40 junior and senior high students with diverse interests, identities, backgrounds and perspectives from all regions of Alberta – in February 2024 to discuss several topics, including cellphone use in schools.
- Parents, teachers and school staff shared feedback on student cellphone use through an online survey between April 16 and May 3, 2024. The survey received over 68,000 responses, with almost 90 per cent of respondents reporting concern over student cellphone use at school.
- Education stakeholders were invited to participate in both the online survey and virtual engagement sessions that took place in April 2024. Stakeholders asked for provincial support for the issue, while still allowing for local autonomy.

For more information

If you have questions or concerns about your school authority's policies or procedures, including exceptions, contact your local school and/or school authority directly. They are your best point of contact for how restrictions will apply to your child or student.