

Toronto District School Board

Policy P106

Title: **PERSONAL MOBILE DEVICE USE IN SCHOOLS**

Adopted: April 16, 2025
Effectuated: April 16, 2025
Revised: N/A
Reviewed: N/A
Authorization: Board of Trustees

1. RATIONALE

The Personal Mobile Device Use in Schools Policy (the “Policy”) was developed in accordance with the resolution of the Board of Trustees of January 31, 2024.

The Policy supports implementation of the Ministry of Education’s Policy / Program Memorandum No. 128: The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct (PPM No. 128) and is aligned with TDSB’s policies and procedures, including but not limited to: the Acceptable Use of Information Technology Resources (P088), the Communications Policy (P104), the Caring and Safe Schools Policy (P051), the Equity Policy (P037), and the Human Rights Policy (P031).

2. OBJECTIVE

- To outline requirements for the appropriate use of Personal Mobile Devices by students, staff and other members of the TDSB School Community at schools;
- To advance a conducive learning environment and promote responsible Digital Citizenship;
- To reduce negative impacts of excessive screen time and social media use on students’ achievement, well-being, and mental health.

3. DEFINITIONS

Board is the Toronto District School Board, which is also referred to as the “TDSB”.

Bomb Threat refers to a protocol used for conveyance of a message that is designed to warn and/or alarm people to an impending detonation of an explosive or incendiary device to cause damage, death, or injuries, whether or not such a device actually exists.

Cyber-Bullying, as per subsection 1(1) of the *Education Act*, refers to bullying by electronic means, including, (a) creating a web page or a blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person; (b) impersonating another person as the author of content or messages posted on the internet; and (c) communicating material electronically to more than one individual or posting material on a website that may be accessed by one or more individuals.

Examples of cyber-bullying may include:

- sending or sharing hateful, insulting, offensive, and/or intimidating electronic communication or images via text messages, emails, direct messages;
- revealing information considered to be personal, private, and sensitive without consent;
- making and/or engaging, and/or participating in fake accounts on social networking sites to impersonate, humiliate and/or exclude others;
- excluding or disrupting access to, a student on purpose from online chat groups, access to accounts and during digital gaming sessions;
- increasing the use of digital platforms enhances the threat of cyber-bullying as well as other safety risks.

Designated School Staff, for the purpose of this Policy, refers to school administrators and employees overseeing implementation of this Policy, including but are not limited to principals, vice-principals, child youth workers, early childhood workers, education assistants, special needs assistants, and professional support services staff.

Digital Citizenship refers to the responsible and ethical use of technology, encompassing the behaviors, attitudes, and actions of individuals in digital environments. Digital Citizenship encompasses various aspects such as digital literacy, online safety, privacy, cybersecurity, etiquette, and the ethical use of digital resources and emphasizes the importance of fostering a positive and inclusive digital culture where individuals contribute to creating a safe and productive online community.

Educator refers to teachers regulated under the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*, 1996, and early childhood educators regulated under the *Early Childhood Educators Act*, 2007.

Emergency, in the context of this Policy, refers to any sudden, unforeseen event that poses an immediate risk to the health, safety, or well-being of students, staff, or visitors within the school premises. Emergency situations may require prompt action to prevent harm or provide immediate assistance.

Hold and Secure refers to a protocol used in response to an external danger (off school property) which poses no immediate threat to the school. This could be a police pursuit, a crime in progress or an active search by local police for a known dangerous offender. Staff, students and visitors are considered to be safe inside the school, once they do not leave the building.

Instructional Day refers to the period of time, that covers all scheduled periods of instruction, breaks, lunchtime, and other activities that contribute to the K-12 educational environment, including before and/or after school programs, and encompassing both instructional and non-instructional activities.

Instructional Time refers to the specific class period during which structured educational activities, lessons, or teaching sessions occur within a school day. Instructional Time excludes breaks, lunch periods, and non-academic activities, focusing solely on the time dedicated to direct learning experiences for students.

Lockdown refers to a protocol that is used in response to a major incident or threat of violence within a school, or in relation to the school.

Personal Mobile Device refers to any personal electronic device that can be used to communicate or to access the Internet, such as a cellphone, tablet, laptop, smartwatch, or portable game console, and includes fixtures and attachments that can be paired with and connected to Personal Mobile Device, including earbuds and headphones.

School Community, for the purpose of this Policy, refers to TDSB students, employees, parents/guardians/caregivers, school council members, volunteers, Board permit holders and visitors on school premises or participating in school-sponsored activities.

Social Media refers to a variety of online platforms/applications, and other sites and services that permit users and organizations to share information/content over the internet and to interact with other users.

TDSB is the Toronto District School Board, which is also referred to as the “Board”.

4. RESPONSIBILITY

The Director of Education holds primary responsibility for the implementation of this Policy.

Within the Director's Office, the responsibility for the coordination and day to-day management of the Policy is assigned to the Associate Director, Instructional Innovation and Equitable Outcomes.

5. APPLICATION AND SCOPE

This Policy applies to all members of the School Community, including TDSB students, employees, parents/guardians/caregivers, school council members, volunteers and visitors on school premises or while participating in school-sponsored activities during the Instructional Day.

6. POLICY

6.1. Guiding Principles

- 6.1.1. TDSB upholds its commitment to learning through technology, Digital Citizenship and equity of access to technology.
- 6.1.2. TDSB is committed to exploring and adopting new information and communication technologies and devices that support student achievement, teaching and learning.
- 6.1.3. TDSB is equally committed to exercising due diligence in identifying and mitigating potential risks associated with technologies.
- 6.1.4. TDSB affirms its continuous commitment to principles of equity, fairness, and transparency when mitigating and managing risks associated with information and communication technologies.
- 6.1.5. TDSB acknowledges the direct impact of the use of Personal Mobile Devices and screen time in schools on students' academic success, mental health and well-being.
- 6.1.6. TDSB upholds the importance of a balanced approach to technological benefits and potential drawbacks of new technologies, including the use of Personal Mobile Devices.

6.2. 1:1 Student Device Program

- 6.2.1. To promote equity of access to technology, the Board will strive to provide every TDSB student with a mobile device for educational purposes through the 1:1 Student Device Program.
- 6.2.2. Implementation of the 1:1 Student Device Program will continue to be subject to TDSB budgetary restrictions and financial viability.

6.3. Restrictions to Social Media Platforms

- 6.3.1. TDSB will restrict access to all social media platforms on school networks and school devices, subject to exceptions in s. 6.3.3.
- 6.3.2. Social media restrictions on school networks will not apply to SMS text messaging.

- 6.3.3. TDSB will determine exception protocols for the use of social media for pedagogical or work-related purposes.

6.4. Use of Personal Mobile Devices

- 6.4.1. **Members of School Community:** Members of the School Community are expected to respect the need of others to study and work in an environment that is conducive to learning and teaching.
- 6.4.2. All members of the School Community must not use Personal Mobile Devices during Instructional Time, except under the following circumstances:
- for educational purposes;
 - for health and medical purposes;
 - to support special education needs.
- 6.4.3. Personal Mobile Devices must not be used for accessing or distributing inappropriate content, engaging in cyberbullying, and/or illegal activities as outlined in the Communications Policy (P104).
- 6.4.4. **Students:** Personal Mobile Devices may be used at school for educational (such as, but not limited to, in-class activities, translation services, excursions/fieldtrips, extra-curricular activities, and before/after-school programs), health and medical purposes or to support special education needs only, as directed by and with explicit permission from the Educator or Designated School Staff.
- (a) Students in grade 6 and below are required to store their Personal Mobile Devices out of view and powered off or set to silent mode throughout the full Instructional Day, except when their use is explicitly permitted by the Educator or Designated School Staff.
- (b) Students in grades 7 to 12 are required to store their Personal Mobile Devices out of view and powered off or set to silent mode during Instructional Time, except when their use is explicitly permitted by the Educator or Designated School Staff.
- Students in grades 7-12 may use their Personal Mobile Devices during non-Instructional Times, such as between classes and during lunch periods, provided such use does not disrupt school operations and the learning environment or contravene applicable TDSB policies and procedures.
- (c) In schools that include students from both grade groups outlined in (a) and (b) above (including K-8 schools and grades 6-8 middle schools), the Principal may extend the K-6 restrictions of personal mobile devices to grade 7 and 8 students, upon engagement of parents, guardians and caregivers.

6.4.5. **School Staff:**

(a) Use During Instructional Time

Staff may use Personal Mobile Devices during Instructional Time for educational purposes or in case of Emergency.

Personal Mobile Device use should be minimized during Instructional Time to make sure that full attention is given to teaching and supporting students.

(b) Use During Non-Instructional Time

Staff may use Personal Mobile Devices during non-Instructional Times, such as breaks, lunch periods, and planning periods, provided such use does not disrupt school operations or the learning environment or contravene applicable TDSB policies and procedures.

(c) The use of Personal Mobile Devices by staff must be consistent with professional conduct in accordance with the Board Code of Conduct (PR585) and may not negatively impact their availability to students or colleagues.

6.5. **Duty to Accommodate under Ontario Human Rights Code**

6.5.1. TDSB will uphold its duty to provide reasonable accommodation for the use of Personal Mobile Devices, to the point of undue hardship, for students and staff in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the Board's Human Rights Policy (P031).

6.6. **Emergency Situations**

6.6.1. **Threats to School Safety:** Personal Mobile Devices must not be used by students when Bomb Threat, Hold and Secure, or Lockdown protocols are initiated.

6.6.2. TDSB staff must follow instructions outlined in the Emergency and Crisis Response Plan under the Threats to School Safety Procedure (PR695).

6.6.3. **Other Emergency:** In other cases of Emergency, students may be allowed to use their Personal Mobile Devices to contact parents/guardians/caregivers in assigned locations after notifying an Educator or Designated School Staff. With permission from an Educator or Designated School Staff, students will have access to a school phone in case of an emergency to contact their parents/guardians/caregivers.

6.6.4. Educators and/or Designated School Staff will provide directions and facilitate communication as needed.

6.7. Enforcement and Compliance

- 6.7.1. Students along with their parent/guardian/caregiver are responsible for their personal mobile device, how they use it and the consequences of not following this Policy on Personal Mobile Device use.
- 6.7.2. Students are encouraged not to bring Personal Mobile Devices to schools unless required for educational purposes, health and medical purposes, or to support special education needs.
- 6.7.3. Parents/guardians/caregivers are encouraged to reinforce expectations and standards for acceptable behaviour at home with their students, and support school staff in the enforcement of this Policy.
- 6.7.4. Deliberate non-compliance with this Policy will result in disciplinary actions in accordance with the PPM No. 145, Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour.
- 6.7.5. Students will be required to hand in their Personal Mobile Devices used in violation with section 6.4 of this Policy for the duration of Instructional Day for students in grades 6 and below, and for the duration of Instructional Time for students in grades 7 to 12.
- 6.7.6. Personal Mobile Devices cannot be confiscated and must be handed in by students voluntarily. Students refusing to hand in their Personal Mobile Device will be sent to the principal's office.
- 6.7.7. School principals will have discretion under PPM No. 145 to consider a range of responses to address non-compliance, including suspension.

6.8. Personal Mobile Device Storage

- 6.8.1. School principals in coordination with Educators and Designated School Staff will establish protocols for storage of handed in Personal Mobile Devices.

6.9. Privacy Considerations

- 6.9.1. Students, staff and other members of School Community, including parents/guardians/caregivers are responsible for the security and privacy of their Personal Mobile Devices in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Policy (P094) and the Acceptable Use of Information Technology Resources Policy (P088).
- 6.9.2. Personal Mobile Devices must not be used to access or disclose personal or confidential information about students, staff or other members of the School Community, unless it is for work-related purposes for staff.

- 6.9.3. It is prohibited to take or share audio/video recordings or photos of members of the School Community without explicit consent.

6.10. Notifications, Education and Awareness

- 6.10.1. This Policy will be communicated to all students, staff, and parents/guardians/caregivers at the beginning of each academic year and posted on the schools' websites for easy access.
- 6.10.2. TDSB will disseminate education and evidence-based guidance materials to parents/guardians/caregivers, students, and staff on responsible Digital Citizenship, impacts of screen time on students' achievement, well-being, and mental health, and best practices and appropriate use of Personal Mobile Devices.
- 6.10.3. TDSB will conduct information sessions on implementation of this Policy and will provide, as required, training and/or professional development to specific school administrators and staff.

7. SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES

The Director of Education is authorized to issue operational procedures to implement this Policy.

8. EVALUATION

This Policy will be reviewed as required but at minimum every five (5) years after the effective date.

9. APPENDICES

10. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Legislation

- *Ontario Human Rights Code*

Policies and Procedures

- Acceptable Use of Information Technology Resources (P088)
- Caring and Safe Schools Policy (P051)
- Communications Policy (P104)
- Equity Policy (P037)
- Human Rights Policy (P031)
- Board Code of Conduct (PR585),
- Code of On-line Conduct Procedure (PR536)
- Progressive Discipline Procedure (PR702).
- Promoting a Positive School Climate Procedure (PR697)
- Social Media and Online Content Procedure (PR735)
- Threats to School Safety Procedure (PR695)

Other Documents:

- Ministry of Education, Policy and Program Memorandum No. 128: The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct
- Ministry of Education, Policy and Program Memorandum No. 145: Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour