

Distraction-Free Schools

A Quick Guide for New York K-12 School Administrators

Bell-to-bell restrictions on smart devices effective 2025-2026 school year

N.Y. Education Law § 2803 was signed into law by NYS Governor Kathy Hochul May 9, 2025. Here is a brief guide for school administrators.



Applies to: ► **School Districts** ► **Charter Schools** ► **BOCES**



DEVICES

Any smartphone, tablet, smartwatch, or other device capable of connecting to the internet*



TIME PERIOD

Entirety of every instructional day during all instructional time and non-instructional time



LOCATION

In, on, or within any building, structure, athletic field, playground, or land contained within the boundary line

**Does not apply to non-internet-enabled devices (such as cell phones not capable of connecting to the internet), or internet-enabled devices supplied by the school that are used for an educational purpose.*

Policy Development

Adopt a written policy prohibiting the use of internet-enabled devices by students during the school day anywhere on school grounds.

Policy Provisions

The policy must include:

- One or more methods for parents to contact the student during the school day
- Written notification to parents of these methods upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year
- One or more methods for on-site storage where students may store their internet-enabled devices during the school day¹

Stakeholder Involvement

Consult local stakeholders in the development of the policy prior to its adoption, including but not limited to: Parents • Students • Employee organization representing each bargaining unit.

Authorized Exceptions

The policy may authorize student use of an internet-enabled device:

- If authorized by a teacher, principal, or the school district, charter school, or BOCES for a specific educational purpose
- Where necessary for a student's healthcare
- In the event of an emergency
- For translation services
- For family caregiving responsibilities²
- Where required by law

The policy may not prohibit a student's use of an internet-enabled device where it is included in the student's:

- Individualized education program (IEP)
- Section 504 plan³



DEADLINES

No later than August 1, 2025:

- Adopt an internet-enabled device policy, as detailed above
- Publish policy publicly on school/entity website
- Translate policy, upon request by a student or parent, into any of the [12 most common non-English languages in the state](#)

No later than September 1, 2026, and each September 1 thereafter:

Publish an annual report on website detailing policy enforcement in the prior school year, including:

- Non-identifiable demographic data of students who have faced disciplinary action⁴ for non-compliance
- Analysis of any demographic disparities in enforcement of the policy
- A mitigation action plan, if a statistically significant disparate enforcement impact is identified.

This is intended to be a brief guide. For details, refer to N.Y. Education Law § 2803 (available at www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EDN/2803), and consult with state or local education authorities or legal counsel. For State-offered guidance and resources, visit www.ny.gov/programs/distraction-free-schools-implementation-resources.



Headquartered in Albany, NY, the Evaluation and School Improvement Solutions unit of Measurement Incorporated provides consulting services to K-12 schools, districts, and other entities nationwide, including policy development and implementation. For details, visit us at www.mi-schoolservices.com.

Endnotes:

1. Guidance from www.ny.gov/programs/distraction-free-schools-implementation-resources indicates that "student backpacks are not an acceptable storage option"; and while storage may include student lockers, "allowing continuous and unsupervised student access to covered devices when stored in a locker would not meet the law's objective...."
2. Exceptions are reviewed and determined on a case-by-case basis by a school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor, where the student caregiver is routinely responsible for the care and wellbeing of a family member.
3. Plan developed pursuant to section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794, which prohibits exclusion or discrimination based on disability.