

Office of Education



Seventh-day
Adventist® Church

OHIO CONFERENCE

Model Zero-Tolerance Student Cell Phone Policy

Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

*Aligned with Ohio Revised Code Section 3313.753
Columbia Union Conference Education Code
North American Division -- Journey to Excellence 2.0 Framework*

Adopted: April 20, 2026

Effective Date: _____

Review Date: _____

Section I: Preamble and Philosophical Framework

1.1 Mission Alignment

The Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists operates its K-12 schools as instruments of the Church's educational mission: to restore in each student the image of their Creator through the harmonious development of the physical, mental, and spiritual powers. This mission, articulated in the North American Division's Journey to Excellence 2.0 framework, calls every Adventist school to lead students to encounter Jesus, accept His gift of salvation, and follow Him.

A school campus is sacred space -- a place set apart for learning, fellowship, worship, and character formation. Unfettered access to personal cellular communication devices during the school day introduces distractions that undermine each of these purposes. Research consistently demonstrates that the mere presence of a smartphone reduces cognitive capacity, impairs attention, and disrupts the social interactions that are essential to healthy adolescent development.

1.2 Digital Stewardship

Seventh-day Adventist education teaches that every human capacity -- including the capacity to use technology -- is a gift from God to be stewarded wisely. The Adventist worldview cycle of Creation-Fall-Redemption-Re-creation provides the lens through which we understand technology:

- **Creation:** Technology is a good gift, reflecting the creative capacity God placed in humanity.
- **Fall:** Technology can be misused in ways that harm relationships, erode attention, expose children to harmful content, and displace time that should be devoted to learning and spiritual growth.
- **Redemption:** Through intentional boundaries -- such as this policy -- schools help students develop self-discipline and learn to use technology purposefully rather than compulsively.
- **Re-creation:** The ultimate goal is to prepare students to be thoughtful digital citizens who honor God in every dimension of life, including their technology use.

This policy is not anti-technology. Ohio Conference schools integrate technology into instruction through school-managed devices (e.g., Chromebooks, iPads) under educator supervision, consistent with NAD Technology Standards (ISTE/CSTA-aligned). The purpose of this policy is to ensure that personal communication devices do not compromise the learning environment during the school day.

1.3 Legislative Context

Ohio Revised Code Section 3313.753, as amended by the state budget bill signed June 30, 2025, mandates that all public school districts prohibit student cell phone use during the instructional day, effective January 1, 2026. Although this statute does not apply to private or parochial schools, the Ohio Conference voluntarily aligns with its requirements for the following reasons:

1. To ensure that Ohio Conference families experience consistent expectations whether their children attend public or Adventist schools.
2. To demonstrate institutional responsibility and position Ohio Conference schools as leaders -- not laggards -- in student well-being.
3. To align with the growing consensus among Seventh-day Adventist schools across the North American Division, including peer institutions in the Columbia Union, Southern Union, Pacific Union, and Lake Union Conferences.

1.4 Alignment with NAD and Columbia Union Standards

This policy is consistent with:

- The North American Division Working Policy on student conduct and school operations.
- The NAD Principals Handbook (2024), which establishes redemptive discipline as the foundational approach: "True discipline is not punitive but seeks to develop student character through Christian principles."
- The Columbia Union Conference Education Code (2023), Sections 1000-1999, governing school policies within the Union.
- Journey to Excellence 2.0's Core Elements, particularly Equity, Adventist Worldview, and Coherence.
- NAD Technology Standards (TDEC), which call for purposeful, educator-supervised technology integration.

Section II: Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following terms shall have the meanings assigned below:

Term	Definition
Cellular Communication Device (CCD)	Any handheld, portable electronic device capable of making or receiving voice calls, text messages, or data transmissions, including but not limited to: smartphones, basic cell phones ("flip phones"), and any device equipped with a SIM card or eSIM.
Secondary Device	Any electronic device other than a CCD that is capable of sending or receiving communications, accessing the internet, or capturing images/audio/video when not being used for a teacher-directed academic purpose. This includes, but is not limited to: smartwatches with messaging or cellular capability (e.g., Apple Watch, Samsung Galaxy Watch), tablets, personal laptops, portable gaming consoles with communication features, wireless earbuds or headphones with independent connectivity, and portable Wi-Fi hotspots.
School Day	The period beginning at the time of a student's arrival on school grounds (or the first bell, whichever occurs first) and ending at the time of the student's final dismissal from school grounds. For students participating in before-school or after-school programs operated by the school, the School Day extends to include those programs.
Instructional Time	All periods during the School Day when students are scheduled for academic classes, chapel, assemblies, lunch, recess, passing periods, and any other school-supervised activity.
Off and Away	The required state of all CCDs and Secondary Devices during the School Day: powered completely off (not merely silenced or set to "airplane mode") and stored out of sight in the location designated by local school administration.
Centralized Storage	A school-provided, supervised storage system -- such as a locked cabinet, "phone hotel," numbered pouch system (e.g., Yondr), or similar apparatus -- where student devices are deposited upon arrival and retrieved at dismissal.
Individual Storage	Student-managed storage in which the device is powered off and placed in a closed backpack, locker, or other location designated by the school, and remains untouched for the entirety of the School Day.
Designated Personnel	The school employee(s) authorized to receive and relay emergency communications from parents/guardians to students. In schools with more than 40 students, this is the Front Office staff. In schools with 40 or fewer students, this is the Principal or Classroom Teacher as determined by the school's staffing plan.
Documented Medical Necessity	A current, written order from a licensed healthcare provider (physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant) specifying that a student requires continuous access to a particular device for health monitoring (e.g., continuous glucose monitor, insulin pump with smartphone interface). The documentation must be on file with the school and reviewed annually.

Term	Definition
IEP/504 Accommodation	A specific provision in a student's current Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Accommodation Plan that explicitly requires the use of a personal electronic device as an educational accommodation.

Section III: Zero-Tolerance Standard

3.1 The "Off and Away" Rule

All students enrolled in Ohio Conference schools shall keep their Cellular Communication Devices and Secondary Devices in the "Off and Away" state for the entirety of the School Day.

This means:

1. The device must be powered completely off -- not silenced, not on vibrate, and not in airplane mode.
2. The device must be stored in the location designated by the local school administration (either Centralized Storage or Individual Storage; see Section V).
3. The device must not be accessed, handled, or visible at any time during the School Day.

3.2 Secondary Device Prohibition

Using a Secondary Device to circumvent the cell phone prohibition is a direct violation of this policy subject to the full Disciplinary Matrix (Section VII). Examples of prohibited conduct include but are not limited to:

- Sending or receiving personal messages via a smartwatch.
- Using a personal laptop or tablet to access social media, personal messaging apps, or non-academic websites during Instructional Time.
- Using wireless earbuds or headphones to listen to personal content (music, podcasts, calls) without teacher authorization.
- Activating a portable hotspot to provide internet access to personal or other students' devices.

School-issued or school-authorized devices (e.g., Chromebooks, iPads) used under teacher direction for academic purposes are not subject to this prohibition when used in accordance with the school's Acceptable Use Policy.

3.3 Scope

This policy applies to all students at all Ohio Conference schools, grades K-12, at all times during the School Day, in all locations on school grounds, including but not limited to: classrooms, hallways, restrooms, the cafeteria, gymnasium, chapel, outdoor areas, and parking lots.

Section IV: Exceptions

Exceptions to this policy are strictly limited to the following four categories. No other exceptions shall be granted.

4.1 Documented Medical Necessity

A student who requires continuous access to a device for health monitoring (e.g., a smartphone paired with a continuous glucose monitor or insulin pump) may be granted an exception, provided that:

1. A current written order from a licensed healthcare provider is on file with the school, specifying the device, the medical condition, and the necessity for continuous access.
2. The exception is reviewed and renewed annually.
3. The device is used exclusively for the documented medical purpose. Any non-medical use of the device during the School Day constitutes a violation of this policy.
4. The school nurse or designated staff member is informed and has a copy of the medical documentation.

4.2 IEP/504 Accommodations

A student whose current IEP or Section 504 Accommodation Plan explicitly requires the use of a personal electronic device as an educational accommodation may use the device in accordance with the specific terms documented in the plan. The accommodation must:

1. Be written into the IEP or 504 Plan by the student's educational team.
2. Specify the device, the purpose, and the conditions of use.
3. Be reviewed at each annual IEP/504 meeting.

4.3 School-Directed Educational Use

A teacher or administrator may, on a case-by-case basis, direct students to use a personal device for a specific, time-limited educational activity. In such cases:

1. The teacher must provide explicit, documented instructions for the activity.
2. The device may only be used for the stated purpose during the designated time.
3. The device must be returned to the "Off and Away" state immediately upon completion of the activity.
4. This exception should be used sparingly and only when school-provided devices are insufficient or unavailable.

4.4 Emergency Situations

In the event of an emergency as defined by the school's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, the building administrator or designee may authorize temporary device use. Students must comply with all directions from school personnel during an emergency, and normal policy restrictions resume immediately upon the administrator's direction.

Section V: Local Implementation and Storage

5.1 Authority of Local Administration

Each Ohio Conference school's administration, in consultation with its School Board, has the authority to determine whether the school will use Centralized Storage, Individual Storage, or a hybrid approach. This flexibility recognizes the diversity of Ohio Conference schools, which range from small multi-grade schools with fewer than 20 students to large academies with more than 550 students.

Regardless of the storage method chosen, every school must ensure that:

1. All students and parents/guardians are informed of the specific storage protocol before the start of the school year.
2. The storage method is consistently enforced for all students.
3. Stored devices are reasonably secure from theft or damage.

5.2 Implementation Strategies by School Size

Small Multi-Grade Schools (20 or Fewer Students)

These schools often have one to two classrooms, a single teacher or a small team, and limited administrative infrastructure. Recommended approaches:

- **Centralized Collection Basket or Caddy:** A simple, labeled, wall-mounted pocket organizer or over-the-door shoe organizer in each classroom. Students place powered-off devices in their assigned pocket upon arrival. Cost-effective and easy to monitor.
- **Backpack Storage:** For schools where centralized storage is impractical, students power off devices and place them in a designated pocket of their backpack, which is stored in a common area. The teacher conducts a brief visual check at the start of each day.
- **Communication:** The Principal or Classroom Teacher serves as Designated Personnel for emergency parent communication.

Medium Schools (21-150 Students)

These schools typically have multiple classrooms, a principal, and some administrative support. Recommended approaches:

- **Classroom Phone Stations:** Each classroom is equipped with a numbered pocket chart or locking cabinet. Students deposit devices upon entering their first class. Homeroom teachers manage collection and return.
- **Locker Storage:** If the school has student lockers, devices are stored in lockers upon arrival and may not be accessed until dismissal.
- **Communication:** The Front Office (or receptionist/secretary) serves as Designated Personnel.

Large Academies (151-550+ Students)

These schools have full administrative teams, multiple buildings, and complex schedules.

Recommended approaches:

- **Centralized Phone Hotel:** A secured, staffed location (e.g., near the main entrance or front office) where students deposit devices upon arrival using a numbered or barcode-scanned system. Devices are retrieved at dismissal. This is the gold standard for large schools.
- **Yondr-Style Pouches:** Each student receives a lockable neoprene pouch at the beginning of the year. Devices are placed in the pouch and magnetically locked upon arrival; they are unlocked at dismissal stations.
- **Homeroom Collection:** Homeroom teachers collect and lock devices in a classroom safe or cabinet at the start of the day and return them at dismissal.
- **Communication:** The Front Office staff serves as Designated Personnel. A dedicated phone line or extension should be publicized for parent emergency calls.

Section VI: Emergency Communication Protocols

One of the most common concerns from families is: "How do I reach my child in an emergency?" This section establishes clear, reliable protocols.

6.1 Large Schools (More Than 40 Students)

1. All urgent parental communication must be directed to the school's Front Office via the published school telephone number.
2. Front Office staff will take a message and deliver it to the student's current teacher.
3. The teacher will relay the message to the student at the earliest appropriate opportunity.
4. In a genuine emergency requiring the student's immediate departure, the Front Office will escort the student to the office and facilitate parent contact.
5. The school's published phone number, office hours, and emergency contact procedures must be included in the Student Handbook, posted on the school website, and distributed to all families at the beginning of each school year.

6.2 Small Schools (40 or Fewer Students)

1. All urgent parental communication must be directed to the Designated Personnel -- the Principal or Classroom Teacher, as determined by the school's staffing plan.
2. The Designated Personnel will relay the message to the student directly.
3. In schools with a single teacher, the teacher's direct phone number (or a dedicated school line) must be published as the emergency contact.
4. If the Designated Personnel is unavailable, a backup contact must be designated and communicated to families.

6.3 Building-Level Emergencies

In the event of a building-level emergency (lockdown, evacuation, severe weather), the school will follow its Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. Parents will be notified through the school's established communication channels (e.g., mass notification system, school website, social media). Students shall not use personal devices during an emergency unless explicitly directed to do so by school personnel.

Section VII: Disciplinary Matrix

7.1 Redemptive Discipline Philosophy

Consistent with the NAD Principals Handbook (2024) and the Adventist philosophy of redemptive discipline, consequences under this policy are designed to be restorative rather than punitive. The goal is to help students develop self-governance -- the internal discipline to manage their own technology use -- rather than to simply impose external control. Each interaction with a student regarding a violation should include a conversation about digital stewardship and the reasons behind the policy.

7.2 Tiered Consequences

Level	Infraction	Consequence	Follow-Up
Level 1	First offense: device seen, heard, or used during the School Day.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Device confiscated by staff. 2. Device returned to student at end of day. 3. Verbal warning and digital stewardship conversation. 	Written notification sent to parent/guardian. Incident documented.
Level 2	Second offense: device seen, heard, or used during the School Day.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Device confiscated by staff. 2. Device held until parent/guardian retrieves it in person. 3. Conversation about responsible use. 	Parent/guardian contacted directly. Incident documented.
Level 3	Third offense: device seen, heard, or used during the School Day.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Device confiscated. 2. Loss of on-campus device privileges for minimum 10 school days. 3. Mandatory parent-admin conference before privileges restored. 	Parent conference required. Behavioral contract signed. Incident documented.
Level 4	Fourth+ offense, or use involving academic dishonesty, cyberbullying, harassment, or unauthorized recordings.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Device confiscated. 2. Device privileges suspended for remainder of semester/year. 3. Additional discipline up to and including suspension. 	Mandatory parent-admin conference. Counselor/pastor referral. Comprehensive documentation.

7.3 Important Notes on Discipline

- **Resetting the count:** The violation count resets at the beginning of each school year.
- **Equity:** Consistent with Journey to Excellence 2.0's emphasis on equity, consequences must be applied uniformly to all students regardless of grade level, enrollment status, or family involvement. Administrators shall monitor disciplinary data to identify and address any disparate impact.
- **Liability:** The school is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged personal devices. Students who bring devices to campus do so at their own risk. This limitation of liability should be clearly stated in the enrollment agreement and Student Handbook.

Section VIII: Extracurricular Activities and Off-Campus Trips

8.1 Authority of Teacher-in-Charge

For off-campus trips, field trips, athletic events, and after-school activities, the teacher-in-charge or supervising administrator has the authority to set and enforce specific device parameters appropriate to the activity. This may include:

- Maintaining the standard "Off and Away" rule for the duration of the trip.
- Permitting limited, supervised device use for educational purposes (e.g., photographing a museum exhibit for a class project).
- Collecting devices at the beginning of a trip and returning them at the end.
- Establishing device-use windows during long travel times.

8.2 Communication Requirements

Before any off-campus trip or overnight activity, the teacher-in-charge must:

1. Communicate the specific device rules for that trip to parents/guardians in writing.
2. Provide parents/guardians with a direct contact number for the teacher-in-charge or chaperone for use during the trip.
3. Ensure at least one supervising adult has a functioning device for emergency communication.

8.3 Overnight Trips and Boarding Students

For overnight trips and, where applicable, boarding academies, the dean or supervising adult shall establish and publish evening device parameters. These may include designated "tech time" windows followed by device collection for the night. The exact parameters are at the discretion of the supervising adult, but must be communicated to students and parents in advance.

Section IX: Parent and Guardian Responsibilities

The success of this policy depends on a partnership between the school and the home. Parents and guardians are asked to:

1. Read and sign the Cell Phone Policy Acknowledgment Form at enrollment or re-enrollment each year.
2. Refrain from calling or texting students on personal devices during the School Day. Use the school's published phone number and Designated Personnel for all communications.
3. Reinforce the principles of digital stewardship at home, consistent with the Adventist worldview.
4. Support enforcement by not requesting exceptions or intervening when consequences are applied.

5. Ensure that their child's device is in working order and can be powered completely off (devices that cannot be powered off, such as certain smartwatches without a power-off function, should not be worn to school).

Section X: Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: My child needs a phone for safety on the way to and from school. Can they still bring it?

Yes. Students may bring a CCD to school. The policy only requires that it be powered off and stored in the designated location during the School Day. Students may use their device before arriving on school grounds and after being dismissed.

Q2: What if my child forgets the policy and accidentally uses their phone?

The policy is communicated at the beginning of each school year through the Student Handbook, parent meetings, and the signed Acknowledgment Form. Unintentional violations are treated the same as intentional violations -- the phone is confiscated for the day (Level 1). Consistent enforcement prevents selective application and protects all students equally.

Q3: How can I reach my child in a true emergency?

Call the school's Front Office (large schools) or the Designated Personnel (small schools). The staff will deliver your message to your child immediately. In a genuine emergency requiring your child's immediate departure, the office will bring your child to the phone or arrange for pick-up. This method is actually faster and more reliable than texting a student during class.

Q4: What if my child has a medical device that connects to their phone?

A Documented Medical Necessity exception will be granted. Bring a current written order from your child's healthcare provider to the school office. The exception will be specific to the medical purpose -- non-medical use of the device during the School Day will still be considered a violation.

Q5: My child uses their phone as a calculator / for music / to check the time. Are there alternatives?

Schools provide the tools students need for academic work, including calculators and school-issued devices. Wristwatches without smart features are permitted. Personal music devices are not permitted during Instructional Time. These boundaries are part of the learning environment.

Q6: What about smartwatches?

Smartwatches with messaging, cellular, or internet capability are classified as Secondary Devices and are subject to this policy -- they must be powered off during the School Day or left at home. Basic fitness trackers and non-smart wristwatches are permitted.

Q7: Is the school liable if my child's phone is lost, stolen, or damaged while stored?

No. While schools take reasonable precautions to secure stored devices, the school is not responsible for personal property. Students who prefer not to assume this risk should leave their devices at home.

Q8: Does this policy apply during lunch and recess?

Yes. The "Off and Away" rule is in effect for the entire School Day, including lunch, recess, passing periods, chapel, and assemblies.

Q9: My child is in the car rider line after school. When can they use their phone?

The School Day ends at final dismissal. Once a student has been officially dismissed and has left the school building, they may power on and use their device. Schools should clearly define the "dismissal point" so there is no ambiguity.

Q10: Why is this policy stricter than what some public schools require?

Adventist education aspires to create sacred space for the holistic development of each student -- mind, body, and spirit. Our policy reflects not only alignment with the Ohio legislative standard, but our commitment to the Journey to Excellence framework and the Adventist philosophy of digital stewardship. Peer Seventh-day Adventist institutions across the NAD -- including Spring Valley Academy, Collegedale Academy, La Sierra Academy, and Great Lakes Adventist Academy -- have adopted similar or stricter standards with overwhelmingly positive results.

Section XI: Policy Administration

11.1 Effective Date and Review

This policy shall take effect on the date adopted by the Ohio Conference Board of Education and shall be reviewed no less than annually. The Conference Superintendent of Education shall oversee the review process and recommend amendments to the Board as necessary.

11.2 Local Adoption

Each Ohio Conference school shall adopt this model policy or a local policy that meets or exceeds its standards. Local policies must be approved by the school's Board and submitted to the Ohio Conference Office of Education for review. Any local provision that is less restrictive than this model policy must receive written approval from the Conference Superintendent of Education.

11.3 Training and Communication

The Ohio Conference Office of Education shall provide:

1. An annual training module for teachers and staff on policy enforcement, including de-escalation strategies and the redemptive discipline approach.
2. Template documents for schools to use, including: the Cell Phone Policy Acknowledgment Form, the Documented Medical Necessity Request Form, and the Behavioral Contract.
3. A parent communication toolkit (sample letters, FAQ sheets, and presentation slides) for use at orientation and back-to-school events.

11.4 Data Collection and Reporting

Each school shall maintain records of cell phone policy violations and report aggregate data to the Ohio Conference Office of Education annually. This data will be used to:

- Assess policy effectiveness.
- Identify trends and areas for improvement.
- Monitor for disparate disciplinary impact, consistent with Journey to Excellence 2.0's equity standard.
- Inform future policy revisions.

ADOPTED BY THE OHIO CONFERENCE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Conference President

Superintendent of Education

Date

Date

Appendix A: Cell Phone Policy Acknowledgment Form

Office of Education



OHIO CONFERENCE

Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Student Cell Phone Policy Acknowledgment

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the Ohio Conference Model Zero-Tolerance Student Cell Phone Policy. I agree to comply with all provisions of this policy, including the "Off and Away" rule, the storage requirements established by my school, and the Disciplinary Matrix.

I understand that:

- My child's Cellular Communication Device and any Secondary Devices must be powered off and stored as required during the School Day.
- Violations will result in consequences as outlined in the Disciplinary Matrix (Section VII).
- The school is not liable for lost, stolen, or damaged personal devices.
- Emergency communication should be directed to the school's Designated Personnel, not to the student's personal device.

School

School Year

Student Name (Print)

Parent/Guardian Name (Print)

Student Signature

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Date

This form must be completed and returned to the school office within the first two weeks of the school year.