July 17, 2024

Dear Chair Kadera & School Board Members,

Arlington Parents for Education (APE) applauds the Arlington School Board’s decision to create a personal device usage policy across APS.

This is an important and necessary step, and the policy created has the opportunity to really make a difference in the lives of APS students, their families, and the teachers and staff who support them.

To achieve the greatest benefit for students - academically and socio-emotionally - we have compiled findings, based on the latest research and information available, to support implementation of a policy which follows best practices for APS students.

Additionally, we recognize that while we know it is the right decision to implement a personal device policy, some parents and families of APS students will not be in favor of such a policy. To that end, we have included with this letter a document that outlines “Common Away for the Day Concerns” which can be leveraged as an educational piece for the APS community. Please feel free to use this content in whatever way it can be helpful.

K-12 personal device usage recommendations:

- Students should be prohibited from using personal cell phones, smart watches, non-school-issued tablets and personal bluetooth headphones during the school day, including lunch and other “free” periods. This will improve not only academic outcomes but also the socio-emotional development of students.

- When personal devices are away for the school day, the burden of policy reinforcement and execution is removed from the teacher’s role, allowing them to focus on academics and student well-being.

- Personal device usage during the school day should be prohibited inside all APS buildings, adjacent outdoors areas, athletic fields, and parking lots.
• Students who can leave their personal devices at home should do so. Students unable to leave home without a personal device should power off the device upon entering school in the morning and leave the powered-off device in a secure location.

  ○ Depending on the school, devices may be left in the following secure areas:
    ■ An assigned locker
    ■ An assigned athletic locker
    ■ A vehicle in a school parking lot
    ■ A homeroom or the last classroom the student is assigned to during the school day
      • For schools with block scheduling or different final classes
day-to-day, a homeroom storage location may work best

  ○ Important Considerations to Avoid:
    ■ Devices should not all be kept in the same location to make obtaining devices at the end of the school day easier.
    ■ Students should not be allowed to keep personal devices in their backpacks or on their person because research by NIH and UNESCO has shown the presence of a device itself is distracting. Removing the temptation of looking at the device gives the student the greatest opportunity to focus on academics.
    ■ Students should not be allowed to check their devices while on academic breaks during the school day because this takes away critical socio-emotional peer development time. Given the national mental health crisis, providing students the opportunity to interact during the school day is critically important developmentally.

• Exceptions to the device-usage policy must be considered, especially when it comes to student health and safety. All measures must be taken to achieve enforcement of the policy, with only a principal (or the appropriate IEP or 504 “team” where applicable) being empowered to exempt a student from the policy. Students in this case must use the device consistent with the granted exception.

• Emergency communication procedures with parents and the community must be clearly communicated and presented adjacent to the device-usage policy.

• A method for how communication during the school day may take place between parents and students must be clearly outlined and allow parents a way to get important and timely messages to their student(s) during the school day.

• Consequences must be clearly communicated to students, faculty and parents.

  ○ Per the APS School Health Advisory Board’s 2024 report recommendation, the recommended consequences are as follows per day:
- 1st time: Student may retrieve his/her device at the end of the school day from the main office with a reminder of this policy.

- 2nd time: Student may retrieve his/her device at the end of the school day from the main office with a reminder of this policy. An email will also be sent home to the student's parent/guardian as a courtesy notification.

- 3rd time: The student’s parent/guardian will need to pick up the device from the main office. Please note that after the second infraction, the device will only be released to the student's parent/guardian.

- Subsequent infractions: The student’s parent/guardian will need to pick up the device from the main office, as well as have a conference with the student's administrator. A consequence will be assigned.

- Parents must receive communication regarding why the policy is being put in place so that everyone can reach the same level of understanding on what is best for students' academic and socio-emotional health while at school. Common concerns about Away for the Day personal device policies are included with this letter and can be found here.

- Follow-through and enforcement of the policy is imperative and must be clearly communicated to ensure that it is successful.

We applaud the APS School Board for tackling this timely issue and keeping the best interest of its students, their learning, and their well-being in mind.

Sincerely,

Arlington Parents for Education

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