Tenafly Public Schools

District Guiding Philosophy for the Instructional Use of Technology

Purpose

This document establishes Tenafly Public Schools' guiding framework for the instructional use of technology. It provides direction for curriculum design, instructional decision-making, technology selection, and professional learning to ensure that digital tools are used purposefully to support high-quality teaching and student learning.

District Philosophy

Tenafly Public Schools recognize that technology is a valuable instructional tool when used thoughtfully and intentionally. Digital resources can expand access to information, support differentiated instruction, and allow students to collaborate and create in new ways. At the same time, research demonstrates that technology should support, not replace, the core elements of effective teaching and learning.

Technology integration is most effective when digital tools are intentionally selected to support learning goals and instructional strategies. In Tenafly classrooms, technology use begins with clear learning objectives and sound instructional practice, with digital tools serving to strengthen and extend those goals.

The district is committed to maintaining a balanced instructional environment in which technology enhances learning while preserving essential elements of high-quality education, including teacher-student interaction, discussion, reading, writing, inquiry, and hands-on learning.

Core Principles

The following principles guide how technology is selected, integrated, and evaluated within Tenafly Public Schools.

Principle 1: Technology Supports Instruction

Technology should be used only when it meaningfully enhances instruction or enables learning experiences that would not otherwise be possible.

The most powerful learning environments continue to rely on strong relationships between teachers and students, direct instruction, discussion, and collaborative learning.

Effective technology use occurs when digital tools are aligned with the subject matter being taught and the instructional approaches used by teachers. Technology should support how students explore ideas, practice skills, collaborate with peers, and demonstrate understanding rather than functioning as a substitute for instruction.

Principle 2: Developmentally Appropriate Technology Use

Students' developmental needs change as they progress through school, and technology use should reflect these differences.

Younger learners benefit most from:

- Hands-on exploration
- Physical manipulation of materials
- Play-based learning
- Face-to-face communication
- Guided instruction from teachers

The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that excessive screen exposure during childhood may interfere with language development, attention, and social interaction and recommends limiting screen time for younger children while prioritizing direct interaction and experiential learning (AAP, 2016; AAP, 2020).

For this reason, Tenafly Public Schools support limited and intentional technology use in elementary grades, particularly in Kindergarten through Grade 2.

Principle 3: Balanced Learning Environments

Students benefit from a variety of instructional approaches that include both digital and non-digital learning experiences.

- Print-based reading and writing
- Classroom discussion and debate
- Collaborative problem solving
- Hands-on science and inquiry
- Project-based learning

Research indicates that excessive screen exposure may displace activities that support academic development, including reading and conversation. Studies published in JAMA Network Open have identified associations between increased screen time and lower academic performance in reading and mathematics among school-age children (Madigan et al., 2019; Tamana et al., 2019).

For this reason, Tenafly Public Schools prioritize a balanced instructional approach in which digital tools complement, rather than replace, essential learning experiences.

Principle 4: Active Learning Over Passive Consumption

When technology is used in classrooms, priority should be given to active learning experiences such as:

- Research and inquiry
- Writing and editing
- Creative media production
- Collaboration and communication
- Problem solving

Technology should support purposeful learning activities that deepen students' engagement with academic content, including analyzing information, constructing arguments, creating original work, and collaborating with peers.

Passive consumption of digital content, such as extended video viewing, should be limited and used only when instructionally appropriate.

Research from the American Psychological Association indicates that active engagement and social interaction are key components of effective learning and cognitive development.

Principle 5: Preparing Students for a Digital Society

As students progress through middle and high school, technology will increasingly support:

- Digital research and information literacy
- Academic writing and collaboration
- Media creation and communication
- Data analysis and problem solving
- Responsible digital citizenship

Principle 6: Intentional Alignment of Technology, Instruction, and Content

Technology decisions in Tenafly Public Schools are guided by the principle that digital tools should complement both the academic content being taught and the instructional methods used by teachers.

When selecting or using digital tools, educators should consider the following questions:

- Does the technology support the learning goals of the lesson or unit?
- Does it enhance the instructional strategies used by the teacher?
- Does it help students engage with content in ways that deepen understanding?

Technology that does not meaningfully support these elements should be reconsidered or replaced with more effective approaches.

Developmental Progression of Technology Use

Technology integration will increase gradually as students develop the cognitive and academic skills necessary to use digital tools effectively.

Grade Level	**Technology Approach**
Grades K–1	Minimal and teacher-directed use
Grades 2–5	Guided, technology use for research, writing, and creative projects
Grades 6–8	Regular use for research, collaboration, and multimedia projects
Grades 9–12	Purposeful integration for advanced academic work and college/career readiness

Commitment to Digital Citizenship

Tenafly Public Schools are committed to ensuring that students learn to use technology responsibly and ethically. Students will develop the ability to:

- Evaluate digital information critically
- Communicate responsibly online
- Protect personal data and privacy
- Understand the impact of digital technology on society

At the elementary level, these skills will be taught through instruction in the media centers. At the middle and high school levels, these competencies will be reinforced within content-area classes so that students apply responsible technology use within authentic academic contexts.

Implementation and Ongoing Review

These principles guide district decisions related to curriculum development, selection of instructional technology tools, professional learning for educators, and evaluation of technology effectiveness. The district will periodically review instructional technology practices to ensure continued alignment with research on teaching, learning, and student development.

Conclusion

Technology is an important part of modern education, but its effectiveness depends on how it is used. Tenafly Public Schools believe that the most powerful learning environments combine strong teaching, meaningful relationships, active engagement, and purposeful technology integration. By maintaining a balanced and developmentally appropriate approach, the district ensures that technology enhances learning while preserving the human-centered instructional practices essential for student success.

References

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