Montgomery County Public Schools
UNLEASHING POTENTIAL

MCPS
Family FAQ: Personal Mobile Devices Guidance

What Montgomery County families need to know for the 2026–2027 school year

Why is MCPS expanding personal mobile devices being away all day to Kindergarten through Grade 12?

Q: Why is this happening this school year?

Maryland passed a new state law, the Joanne C. Benson Maryland Phone-Free School Act (HB 525), which requires every school district to have a policy limiting student use of phones and other electronic devices during the school day. The state law takes effect in the 2027–2028 school year, but MCPS is starting the transition now, in 2026–2027, so that staff, students, and families have a full year to adjust before it becomes a state requirement.

Q: Why is MCPS doing this?

The goal is to support students' health, safety, and well-being, cut down on classroom distractions, and help students stay engaged in learning.

Q: What is a "personal mobile device" (PMD)?

Any device your child brings from home that connects to the internet or sends/receives voice, video, or text. That includes phones, tablets, e-readers, personal laptops, smart watches, smart glasses, and anything with a microphone, camera, speaker, or headphones/earbuds (including AirPods). Devices issued by the school are not included.

Q: What is the "Academic Day"?

The Academic Day covers the entire school day from the first bell to the dismissal bell. This includes class time, lunch, recess, and passing periods like walking in the hallway or using the restroom.

What are the rules during the school day?

Q: Can my child bring a phone to school?

Yes. Students may have a personal device with them on school property, but it must stay put away and unused for the entire Academic Day from the start of the instructional day until the official end of the school day.

Q: Can my child use their device before or after school?

Yes. Devices may be used before the school day officially begins and after it officially ends, following each school's procedures. Students are also expected to follow the district's Responsible Use Guidelines and Regulation IGT-RA (rules for using MCPS networks and technology responsibly).

Are there any exceptions?

Yes, the regulation allows device use during the Academic Day in a few specific situations:

- Identity verification: High school students may briefly use a device to log into sites like College Board or IB, with teacher permission and oversight.
- School transportation: Students may use a device on an MCPS or chartered bus, as long as it doesn't interfere with safe operation of the bus.

- IEP, 504, or medical accommodations: Students with an IEP, 504 Plan, or another documented need may use a device to manage a health condition or support an approved accommodation.
- Emergencies or caregiving needs: Administrators can approve device use case-by-case for genuine emergencies or caregiving responsibilities.
- Language translation: To support multilingual students when a school-issued device isn't available or sufficient.

Q: My child doesn't have an IEP or 504 Plan, can they still get permission to use a device?

Yes. A student without an IEP or 504 Plan may be permitted to use a personal mobile device (PMD) as an accommodation when the need is identified in consultation with appropriate school staff, unless the use is restricted under Regulation ILA-RA. The principal should ensure the accommodation is documented in Synergy by selecting the cell phone icon on the student's profile to indicate that the student is authorized to use a PMD as an accommodation.

Q: Who decides what counts as an emergency?

The school administrators. An emergency is an unexpected situation that puts someone's health, safety, or well-being at immediate risk and requires prompt communication; for example, a serious illness, injury, or family emergency requiring immediate contact with a parent, guardian, or emergency responder.

Q: Can my child use their phone during standardized testing?

Generally, no, the Maryland State Department of Education prohibits device use during standardized testing for security reasons. Any exception requires approval from the district's assessment office and must follow MCPS testing rules.

Internet, Safety, and Monitoring

Q: Why does it matter if my child uses the school Wi-Fi versus their own cell data?

MCPS filters internet content on its own network to help block harmful material. A personal cellular connection doesn't have that same filtering. Students are still expected to follow this regulation even if they connect to the internet through their own data plan instead of the school network.

Q: Does MCPS monitor devices connected to the school network?

Yes. MCPS reserves the right to monitor and investigate device activity on its network.

What happens if the rule isn't followed?

Q: What if my child uses their device when they're not supposed to?

Schools respond using the progressive discipline approach in the MCPS Student Code of Conduct — starting with the least restrictive response, such as a reminder or a restorative conversation. This could increase to confiscation of the phone and it being secured until the end of the school day when it can be picked up by the student. Repeated infractions could result in the student not being permitted to bring their cell phone to school. Staff will consider your child's age, developmental level, and any relevant circumstances.

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MCPS Student Code of Conduct (Link to Full Document)

STUDENT BEHAVIORS AND INTERVENTIONS LEVELS OF RESPONSE

Governance	LEVEL 1 Classroom and Teacher-led Responses	LEVEL 2 Teacher-led/referred and Administrative Supported Responses	LEVEL 3 Administrative Supported and/or Removal Responses (In-School Intervention or In-School Suspension)	LEVEL 4 Administrative Supported and Short-term Out-of-school Exclusionary Responses (1-3 days)	LEVEL 5 Administrative Supported and Long-term Out-of-school Exclusionary Responses (4-10 days)	LEVEL 6 Administrative Supported and Out-of-School Exclusionary Responses, Extended Suspension (11-44 days) or Expulsion (45 or more days)	Context and factors to be considered in determining levels of response
Progressive Discipline, Restorative Approaches, "Mitigating" and "Aggravating" criteria on page 8, must be considered prior to determining an appropriate level of intervention.							
INAPPROPRIATE USE OF PERSONAL ELECTRONICS (802)[4] MCPS refers to these as "Personal Mobile Devices" or "PMDs" See MCPS Regulations: *COG-RA, Personal Mobile Devices; IGT-RA, User Responsibilities for Computer Systems, Electronic Information,* and *Network Security; ILA-RA, Assessments with Security and Reporting Requirements*	Persistently using or displaying a personal mobile device in defiance of MCPS rules for PMDs[4,5]						Misconduct away from MCPS property may be subject to disciplinary action when there is a connection back to the school setting, regardless of whether the instructional environment is in person or virtual, when the conduct creates a risk of harm to other students while they are at school; or the conduct interferes with the educational environment. Student Data Privacy Violations: Students are prohibited from uploading, feeding, or inputting any Personally Identifiable Information (PII), confidential district data, or private personal records of peers or MCPS staff (including grading sheets, drafts of peer work, or private messages) into unauthorized, public generative AI platforms. The dissemination of misinformation or disinformation (i.e. deep fakes) and surveillance based use on PMDs are a significant risk to student safety.
		Using or displaying a personal mobile device in violation of MCPS rules for PMDs, after student has been warned					
			GRADES 6-12				
			Communicating information using a PMD that violates the privacy of others; to record or post fights, jeopardizes the health or safety of students or employees; is obscene or libelous; causes disruption of school activities or MCPS operations; perpetrates academic dishonesty; or violates the security of MCPS computer systems, related technology, or electronic information (including grades or other student information)			
				Using a PMD in a manner that causes disruption to the MCPS network or operations, including using a PMD to alter records or destroy electronic property, or using an MCPS device in combination with an external proxy or virtualized browser in an attempt to disrupt the MCPS network. The use of artificial intelligence (i.e., deep fakes) to create harm.			

Q: Can a teacher or principal take my child's phone away?

Yes. School staff may confiscate a device that is being used in a way that goes against MCPS regulations.

Who is responsible for my child's device?

Q: Is MCPS responsible if my child's phone is lost, stolen, or damaged at school?

No. MCPS does not take responsibility for the loss, theft, or damage of a personal device, or for its unauthorized use. Families should weigh this when deciding whether their child brings a personal device to school.

How can I support my child?

Q: Can I contact my child on their personal device during the school day?

Parents/guardians are asked to avoid contacting their student(s) directly on personal devices during the school day. For urgent, non-emergency messages, please contact the school's main office. School staff will ensure that important information is communicated to students in a timely manner.

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Q: How can I support the school to successfully implement cell phone restrictions during the academic day?

We encourage families to talk to their student about the MCPS cell phone policy and support their student by:

- Discussing that the rules regarding cell phones are to support their learning and social emotional well-being by minimizing distractions,
- Contacting the school's front office (rather than the student directly) if there is a family emergency.
- Only communicating about non-urgent matters before or after the school day.
- Waiting to respond to non-urgent texts from students until the school day is over.

Have more questions?

Talk with your school's principal or main office for school-specific procedures, or reach out to the MCPS Division of School Leadership and Improvement (240) 740-3110 for questions about the regulation itself.