

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Worcester for Safe Student Technology to present a petition to limit individual device use in Pre-K through second grade**

WORCESTER, Mass. -- Worcester for Safe Student Technology (WSST), a community advocacy group of parents, caregivers, and educators will be presenting a [petition](#) in front of [Worcester School Committee on Thursday, June 25](#) urging Worcester Public Schools to limit student use of individual internet-connected devices in pre-K through second grade classrooms.

The petition also asks Worcester School Committee and Worcester Public Schools (WPS) to adopt policies that prioritize hands-on, teacher-led, screen-limited learning in early elementary education. As of June 19, the petition has 444 signatures from parents, caregivers, students, and educators across 51 schools in the district.

The petition formally submitted to the Worcester School Committee specifically lists exemptions for students who require assistive technology accommodations and to allow for individual device use during technology enrichment class. Several parents and educators from WSST will offer public comment at Thursday's School Committee meeting to encourage their representatives to vote in favor of the petition and a related advocacy ask to reallocate iPad funding to more fiscally responsible uses.

### **Swap iPads for Library Books**

Worcester School Committee is also finalizing its Fiscal Year 2027 Budget, which is set to include initiation of a 4-year lease on 1,000 iPads. WSST proposes that this funding could be used instead to purchase books to stock new school libraries. Through a separate parent-led initiative, [Worcester Elementary School Library Coalition](#), students at seven elementary schools across the city will have a new school library staffed with a certified teacher, but three of those schools must rely on [community donations](#) to purchase books before the next school year starts.

As Worcester grapples with [reading achievement rates far below the state average](#), the opportunity to pause new investments in technology and redirect funding to one of the most powerful levers for improving literacy— a book in a child's hands – is a promising first step towards a deeper conversation about what our city's young learners need and how schools can best meet those needs. Six school committee members would need to vote in agreement to make this budgetary change.

Ahead of this meeting, a few School Committee members have been receptive to concerns around technology and WSST's proposals.

“Worcester is fortunate to have a group of parents that are engaging at a very high level on this issue that we know nationwide has the attention of parents and educators,” said at-large Worcester School Committee Member Sue Mailman. “We need to decide as a city what is best for our young learners and so I am supportive of reducing one-to-one devices in pre-k through grade two.”

### **Los Angeles Unified School District**

Worcester isn’t alone in taking a closer look at technology use in schools. Across Massachusetts and throughout the country, communities are grappling with technology’s negative impacts, particularly on children, and school districts are often at the center of proposed policy solutions.

Earlier this year, the Los Angeles Unified School District’s board voted 6-0, with one recusal, to pass a resolution that requires the district to create a screen time policy for each grade and subject, prohibit students in kindergarten and first grade from using devices, clarify the process for parents to opt their child out of using technology at school, and audit its education technology contracts.

### **Setting a Strong Foundation**

While every family has a different relationship with technology, all families deserve a meaningful voice in how and when young children use technology. Early childhood is a critical time for building attention, vocabulary, self-regulation, creativity, empathy, and social skills.

Individual device use takes away time from engaging in hands-on learning, play, movement, and direct interaction with teachers and peers, which are the building blocks of a strong academic foundation. Learning is a fundamentally social activity, and when young children learn offline, they get the added benefits of building their attention, listening, and language skills.

### **Worcester for Safe Student Technology**

WSST formed after a few parents connected informally and realized they weren’t alone in their concerns about the effects of technology on their children’s school experience, or in their personal experiences trying to get more information from Worcester Public Schools. The group held a meeting in April to gather community priorities. The amount of time Worcester’s youngest learners were spending on individual devices, what opportunities that screen time was pushing out, the resulting impacts on student learning and well-being, and a desire for greater transparency and communication from Worcester Public Schools, emerged as priorities.

“There have been studies done about the detrimental effects of technology in the classroom. While I am not completely against technology, I am also aware of its impacts on critical thinking, reading, and writing. I think this is a great first step in removing unnecessary technology from the classroom and getting our students back to what has been proven to work,” said a WPS parent.

## **Continuing the Conversation**

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, technology has become more ubiquitous than ever. When schools had to close their doors to keep students, teachers, and families safe, technology was a lifeline that allowed learning to continue. Now that students have returned to the classroom, it's time to think more critically and strategically about how screen-time is used, for what age group, and for what purpose. WSST is making space for the community to have those conversations and urges Worcester Public Schools and Worcester School Committee to join them.

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