

HARTFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT “Distraction Free” Procedure

In accordance with New York State’s “Distraction-Free Schools” law (*S.3006 / A.3006*), which prohibits the use of internet-enabled devices during the school day, including during passing time and lunch, this document establishes the daily guidelines to enact the law.

Prohibited Items

- This policy applies to all personally owned internet-enabled devices, including, but not limited to: cell phones, smartwatches, earbuds/headphones, tablets or personal devices, etc. School issued Chromebooks or any other school-issued internet enabled device are exempt from this policy.

Device Storage Requirements

- Upon entering the building, all personal devices must be turned off or silenced and stored securely in the student’s locker, backpack, or the secure storage cabinet in the Main Office.
- Devices cannot be visible or accessible during the school day, unless explicitly permitted by a staff member.

Parent Communication

- Parents/Guardians who need to contact their student during the school day should:
 - Call the Elementary or Middle/High School Office at 518-632-5222 and a staff member will relay urgent messages to the student or arrange for a student to call home.
 - Drop off a written note at the Elementary or Middle/High School Office which will then be delivered to the student by school staff.
 - Students may request to use a school phone during non-instructional times or in the case of emergency.

Progressive Disciplinary Steps

- A progressive discipline approach will be followed, beginning with warnings and parental contacts and escalating if repeated violations occur.
 - First Violation: Warning and Education
 - Verbal Warning by staff member
 - Device must then be securely stored in the student’s locker, backpack, or the secure storage cabinet in the Main Office.
 - Second Violation: Confiscation and Parent Notification
 - Device is confiscated and stored securely in the office until the end of the day
 - Student is assigned an after-school or lunch detention
 - Parent/Guardian is notified by phone or email
 - Third Offense: Family Conference and Behavior Plan
 - Device is confiscated and stored securely in the office until the end of the day
 - Student is assigned to the alternative learning center for insubordination
 - Student and their parent/guardian must attend a meeting with the building principal to review the action and develop a behavior support plan, which may

include requiring the student to store the device in the secure storage cabinet in the Main Office.

- Fourth Offense:
 - Device is confiscated and stored securely in the office until the end of the day
 - Student is assigned to the alternative learning center for insubordination, possibly for multiple days
 - Parents/Guardians are notified of the continual misconduct
 - Student is required to utilize the secure storage cabinet in the Main Office each day
 - If the pattern of behavior continues, an escalated response will be implemented.

Faculty / Staff Responsibilities

- Faculty and Staff have an important role in maintaining the policy and are required to:
 - Clearly communicate expectations at the start of the year
 - Address violations calmly and respectfully
 - Apply the policy consistently and equitably
 - Avoid public embarrassment or confrontation whenever possible

Parent / Guardian Role

- Parents / Guardians are an essential partner in the successful implementation of the state law. We encourage our parents/guardians to:
 - Support the school's effort to maintain a distraction-free learning environment
 - Help students understand appropriate technology use during the school day
 - Use school office communication channels to reach your child if needed during school hours

HARTFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
FAQ “Distraction Free” Policy

Q: Why is the school district implementing a “distraction-free” policy?

A: This policy is being implemented in compliance with New York State Education Law, which now requires all public-school districts to adopt a "distraction-free" learning environment. Our district is committed to adhering to the law while supporting a focused, productive educational experience for all students.

Q: Why is New York State requiring this policy?

A: The intent of the new state law is to:

- Enhance student focus and engagement in the classroom.
- Reduce social pressures and digital distractions related to personal device use.
- Improve academic performance and classroom culture.
- Support healthy social interactions among students.
- Help decrease instances of cyberbullying and inappropriate online behavior during the school day.

The overall goal is to foster a safer, healthier, and more academically driven school environment.

Q: What does the “distraction-free” policy really entail?

A: The policy prohibits students from using personally owned, internet-enabled devices during the school day. These devices must be turned off and stored away from use during school hours.

Q: Specifically, what devices are restricted under this policy?

A: The following personally owned internet-enabled devices are not allowed during the school day:

- Cell phones
- Smartwatches
- Earbuds or headphones (*unless provided or authorized for instructional use*)
- Tablets or similar devices

Note: School-issued devices (such as Chromebooks) are still permitted for educational purposes and under teacher supervision.

Q: How can I communicate with my student during the school day?

A: While students may not access their personal devices, parents/guardians can communicate with their student in the following ways:

- Call the school office and staff will relay urgent messages or arrange for the student to return the call.
- Drop off a written note which will then be delivered to the student through the main office.
- Student use of school phones. Students may request to use a school phone during non-instructional time or in the event of an emergency.

Q: Can my student keep their device in their locker?

A: Yes. Devices may be stored in lockers, but must remain off and untouched throughout the school day. According to state law, students may not use their device even when visiting their locker.

Q: Are students allowed to carry their phones at all, even if turned off?

A: No. New York State is requiring internet-enabled devices are turned off and securely stored.

Q: Will the district offer a secure location for students to store their devices?

A: Yes. The district has purchased and will install “cell vaults” in the Main Offices. These secure storage units allow students to voluntarily store their devices during the school day if they prefer not to use their locker. Students who are in continual violation of the law may be required to store their device in the “cell vaults”.

Q: Did the district receiving funding to help implement this law?

A: Yes. New York State allocated \$2,082 for Hartford. These funds are being used to purchase the “cell vaults”.

Q: Other schools are providing secure pouches for students to store their phones. Did Hartford explore this option?

A: Yes, the district did explore this option. However, the cost to provide a secure pouch for each middle and high school student was over \$9,000, while New York State only allocated Hartford \$2,082. In addition to the high cost, reviews and research on the effectiveness of the pouches did not support the investment at the local level.

Q: What happens if my student is caught using their device during the school day?

A: The district will follow a progressive disciplinary process, which begins with a verbal warning and escalates to potential in-school or out-of-school suspension for repeated insubordination and the required use of the cell vaults.

The goal is to guide students toward responsible behavior and compliance, not punishment.

Q: Will students still be allowed to use devices on the bus or after school?

A: Yes. The policy applies only during the official school day, from arrival through dismissal. Students may use their personal devices before school, after dismissal, or on the bus, unless otherwise directed (*e.g., during a school trip*).

Q: Can students use their personal devices during lunch or free periods?

A: No. The law requires that personal devices be completely stored and unused during the entire school day, including during lunch, study hall, or any non-instructional time.

Q: Can students listen to music or use headphones with school devices?

A: Only if it is part of a teacher-directed activity or an approved accommodation. Otherwise, the law does not permit the use headphones or earbuds during the school day.

Q: How will this policy be enforced consistently across grade levels and classrooms?

A: The school staff will receive clear guidelines and training to ensure consistent enforcement. Building-level administrators will monitor implementation and address any inconsistencies or concerns that arise.

Q: As a parent, I disagree with this policy and want to be able to contact my child directly.

A: We understand and respect your concerns. However, this is not a district-created policy, it is a state-mandated law that all public schools in New York must follow. The district is required to enforce this policy and appreciates your partnership in helping students adjust to these new expectations.

Q: How will the district support students in adjusting to this change?

A: Teachers and counselors will talk with students about managing device habits, staying focused, and building healthy boundaries with technology.

Q: Will this affect students who use their phones for mental health coping strategies (e.g., music, journaling apps)?

A: The district recognizes that some students rely on devices to manage stress or anxiety. If a student has documented mental health needs, we encourage families to work with the school counselor or psychologist to explore appropriate accommodations that comply with the law.

Q: What if there's a school-wide emergency—how will I know my child is safe?

A: In the event of an emergency, the district has established communication protocols in place to notify families through the ParentSquare messaging system (*calls, texts, emails*) and posts on our website and social media page.