



Guidelines for Establishing Personal Mobile Device Policies in Schools

Guidelines for Policy Development

April | 2026

Government of
Northwest Territories

K'áhshó got'jne xədə k'é hederı ɬedjhtl'é yerınıwə nı dé dúle.
Dene Kədə

ʔerıhtl'ıs Dēne Sųlıné yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theɬą ɬat'e, nuwe ts'ēn yóttı.
Dēne Sųlıné

Edı gondı dehgáh got'je zhatıé k'éé edatl'éh enahddhə nıde naxets'é edahlı.
Dene Zhatıé

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijəhch'uu zhit yinoththan jı', diits'ət ginohkhıi.
Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqluta.
Inuvialuktun

Ć'ɖǀ ǀǀᑭᑦᑲᑦ ᐱᑦᑭᑦᑲᑦ ᐃᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ, ᐃᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ.
Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.
Inuinnaqtun

kīspin kī nitawihtīn ē nīhīyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.
nēhiyawēwīn

Tłıchq yatı k'èè. Dı wegodı newq dè, gots'o gonede.
Tłıchq

Indigenous Languages
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Une version française de ce document est disponible.

Guidelines for Establishing Personal Mobile Device Policies in Schools

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has developed these guidelines to assist District Education Authorities (DEAs) and District Education Councils (DECs) in creating Personal Mobile Device (PMD) policies that align with the Territorial School Code of Conduct and positively impact student engagement and mental health.

When drafting a PMD policy, DEAs and DECs should consider the following:

- *Ensure the policy is enforceable, inclusive and equitable*
- *Keep the policy general enough to apply to a wide range of situations*
- *Align the policy with digital citizenship and safety, educational goals, and responsible and ethical use of technology.*
- *Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of students, educators, administrators and parents in implementing the policy.*
- All policies must be approved by the DEAs and DECs.

A template that may be used to draft a PMD policy is included in appendix A. An example of a PMD policy which addresses all the key features of these guidelines is included in appendix B.

Rationale for creating the guidelines

While PMDs can offer educational benefits, their widespread use in classrooms has raised concerns about student distraction, reduced engagement and increasing negative impacts on the mental health of both students and educational staff.

In response, a growing number of Canadian jurisdictions have introduced policies to restrict or ban PMD use during instructional time. These measures aim to foster more focused and effective learning environments, promote digital well-being and citizenship, and address issues such as cyberbullying and social isolation.

Under the NWT *Education Act*, the Minister of Education Culture and Employment does not have the authority to establish territory-wide policies regarding the use of PMDs in the classroom. The responsibility for creating policies lies with the territory's DEAs and DECs.

What to include in a Personal Mobile Device Policy?

1. Administrative Information

Administrative information should be addressed in the policy, including but not limited to:

- Effective date
- Date of latest revision
- Approval Authority. For example, education body, DEA, school.

2. Policy Purpose

Indicate the rationale for the policy, including any possible connections to the Territorial School Code of Conduct or School Code of Conduct or similar documents.

3. Definitions

Define any terms used in the policy that have a specialized meaning. This should include at a minimum what is defined as a Personal Mobile Device. Other definitions may include apps and social media, instructional time, and specific techniques used such as “off and away” or “cell phone hotels”. These will be dependent on your context and policy.

4. Policy Statement

Scope/applicability of the policy

Provide a brief statement of the DEA’s or DEC’s intent regarding the use of personal mobile devices in the classroom and an indication of how broadly the policy applies (scope/applicability of the policy). This may include:

- grade-level specific policies (for example elementary grades vs. high school),
- limitations around instructional hours, and/or
- To whom does this policy apply (students and staff or students alone).

Permitted use

Indicate when and where PMDs can be used and occasions when PMDs will be permitted (for example field trips, to teach about digital citizenship, digital literacy and respectful online behaviour).

Include in the policy:

- Times and locations where PMDs can be used (if applicable).
- Occasions when PMDs will be permitted.

Prohibited use

- Indicate when and where PMDs cannot be used and occasions when PMDs will not be

permitted. Clearly identify prohibited uses of PMDs that may:

- interfere or threaten to disrupt school operation (for example use of PMDs during emergency situations),
- interfere or threaten to interfere with public or private rights of others (for example recording audio and/or video without consent), and
- lead to unethical academic behaviour (for example use of PMDs during assessments).

Exceptions

- Clearly identify exceptions that may address medical needs and/or accessibility accommodations.
- Describe how exceptions may be granted (if applicable).

5. Consequences for non-compliance

Outline what actions will occur (progressive consequences) if a student and/or staff member does not follow the policy. Include, if any, connections to the School Code of Conduct.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Clarify the roles and responsibilities of students, educators, administrators and parents/guardians alike. A clear breakdown of roles and responsibilities will help the implementation phase of the policy. Add a disclaimer regarding the liability of the school towards PMDs. Further information is detailed below.

Students

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of students (for example respect privacy and safety of peers and staff). Include proper practices and storage of devices (for example PMDs are to be placed in airplane mode during instructional hours and kept in the student's locker).

Educators

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of educators (for example modeling appropriate PMD use and enforcing the policy consistently)

Administrators

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of administrators (for example modeling appropriate PMD use, communicating the policy to staff and families, handling escalated violations to the policy).

Parents/Guardians

- Clarify the expectations of parents/guardians (for example supporting the school's policy, discussing appropriate PMD use with their child, ensuring devices are used

responsibly, and how to reach their child during the day if needed.

Disclaimer

- Add a disclaimer regarding the liability of the school towards PMDs. For example: The school and its staff are not liable for loss, damage or theft of any personal mobile device brought to school.

7. Monitoring and Review

In your policy, identify the review date and the way this policy will be monitored, reviewed, and updated to reflect emerging evidence, evolving educational practice, and legislative or policy changes.

Guideline review

ECE will review these Guidelines on a regular cyclical basis and update them, as required, to reflect emerging evidence, evolving educational practice, legislative or policy changes, and feedback from education bodies.

Appendix A: Policy Template

[Policy #] [Policy Name]

Approving Authority:	
Original Approval Date:	
Effective Date:	
Date of Last Review:	
Next Review Date:	

Policy Purpose

[Indicate the rationale for the policy, including any possible connections to the Territorial School Code of Conduct or School Code of Conduct or similar documents.]

Definitions

- [Define any terms used in the policy that have a specialized meaning. This should include at a minimum what is defined as a Personal Mobile Device. Other definitions may include apps and social media, instructional time, and specific techniques used such as “off and away” or “cell phone hotels”. These will be dependent on your context and policy.]*

Policy Statement

[Provide a brief statement of the District Education Authority’s intent regarding the use of personal mobile devices in the classroom and an indication of how broadly the policy applies (scope/applicability of the policy). This may include grade-level specific policies or limitations around instructional hours.]

Permitted Use

- [Indicate when and where PMDs can be used and occasions when PMDs will be permitted (for example field trips, to teach about digital citizenship, digital literacy and respectful online behaviour).]*

Prohibited Use

- [Indicate when and where PMDs cannot be used and occasions when PMDs will not be permitted (for example use in private settings like change rooms and bathrooms, for recording audio and/or video without consent, and use that may lead to unethical academic behaviour).]*

Exceptions

- [Identify exceptions that may address medical needs and/or accessibility accommodations.]*

Consequences

- [Outline what actions will take place (progressive consequences) if a student does not follow the policy. Include, if any, connections to the School Code of Conduct.]*

Roles and Responsibilities

Students

- *[Clarify the roles and responsibilities of students (for example respect privacy and safety of peers and staff). Include proper practices and storage of devices (for example PMDs are to be placed in airplane mode during instructional hours and kept in the student's locker).]*

Educators

- *[Clarify the roles and responsibilities of educators (for example modeling appropriate PMD use and enforcing the policy consistently).]*

Administrators

- *[Clarify the roles and responsibilities of administrators (for example modeling appropriate PMD use, communicating the policy to staff and families, hand handling escalated violations to the policy).]*

Parents/Guardians

- *[Clarify the expectations of parents/guardians (for example supporting the school's policy, discussing appropriate PMD use with their child, ensuring devices are used responsibly, and how to reach their child during the day if needed).]*

Disclaimer

- *[Add a disclaimer regarding the liability of the school towards PMDs. For example: The school and its staff are not liable for loss, damage or theft of any personal mobile device brought to school.]*

Monitoring and Review

[Specify who is responsible for monitoring (for example schools administrators), how feedback on the policy can be submitted for review, and when is the next scheduled review date of the policy.]

Appendix B: Actual Example of a PMD Policy

TITLE	Personal Mobile Devices in School
PROCEDURE NUMBER	
NEXT REVIEW DATE	
DATE OF APPROVAL	
ISSUING AUTHORITY	
ACCREDITATION STANDARD	

POLICY AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

The **[education body]** is committed to providing a safe and effective learning environment for all staff and students. The **[education body]** believes that students and staff should be focused on educational, cultural, social-emotional, and other educational learning while in school. The **[education body]** is also concerned that research has indicated that excess cell phone usage is linked with negative effects on mental and physical health. As a result, personal mobile devices will be restricted in all **[education body]** schools to prevent distraction, support peer relationships, and maximize learning time.

[education body] students will have the opportunity to use **[education body]** provided devices for the purpose of learning.

PURPOSE/RATIONALE:

[Education body] schools have a commitment to safety and recognize that each student's behaviour is influenced by their mental health and wellness. For all students to gain from the learning experiences, social and cultural environments, and build upon their peer and adult relationships, the **[education body]** is providing clear expectations that personal mobile devices are not permitted during school time and guidelines for consequences for failing to adhere to this expectation.

These restrictions are not intended to impact the need for students to have access to technology required for their learning (provided by the **[education body]**), or assistive technology for students with those needs.

DEFINITIONS:

Off and Away – Off refers to all notifications silenced including ringers and vibration settings. The device is not playing media or sending signals to the user. Away refers to the device not being accessed at any point and kept fully out of sight. Keeping a device in a pocket is not away, nor is listening to music considered off.

Personal Mobile Device (PMD) - A personal mobile device is any personal electronic device that can be used to communicate or access the internet, such as a cell phone or tablet. This term is intended to include smart watches, headphones, earbuds and other accessories.

SCOPE/APPLICABILITY:

This standard operating procedure will apply to all staff and students registered at and attending **[education body]** schools, including alternative programming.

PROCEDURE:

1. Students in grades JK-12 will not be permitted to carry or use a PMD at any time while at school. This includes class time, extra-curricular practices, cultural activities, and break times (see #2 for limited exceptions). Parents/guardians of grade JK-12 students are encouraged not to send a PMDs with their child to school.
2. PMDs are not permitted to be used in classrooms or during cultural activities; PMD must be “off and away” during these times. Parents, guardians, and students in grade 9-12 are expected to use technology responsibly therefore, a school policy may allow Grade 9-12 students restricted PMD privileges and usage during break times.
3. There are no exceptions to the procedures outlined in #1 and #2. Staff are not permitted to give approval to use PMDs in any classroom or during school activities.
4. School rules may permit the use of PMDs on buses, on field trips, and extra-curricular trips, but are governed by the overarching **[education body]** Personal Mobile Device standard operating procedures.
5. Schools must notify students and parents of the rules and processes for confiscating PMDs. The schools are not responsible for lost or stolen devices and recommend all students leave their devices at home.
6. No PMD may be connected to the **[education body]** networks and/or Wi-Fi. This applies to both staff and student PMDs. There will be special events where a guest network may be created for a limited period (ex: youth gathering or career fair).
7. Consequences may include but are not limited to: confiscation of the device for a period of the principal’s discretion (typically progressive 1 day, 2 days, 5 days, etc.), contact with parents to collect the device, restorative consequences, loss of privileges, and in-school suspensions.
8. At any time, unauthorized use of a mobile device (including but not limited to: harassment, bullying, or unauthorized photography or video recording) will result in consequences based on the school discipline policies, including suspension.
9. Parents/guardians who wish to contact their students during the school day may leave a message at the front desk. Students who need to contact home during the school day will be encouraged to do so at breaks, unless they are unwell.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

CROSS-REFERENCES:

ATTACHMENTS:

REFERENCES:

APPROVAL:

Reviewed and Approved By:

(Signed, Position, and Dated)

Reviewed and Approved By:

(Signed, Position, and Dated)