

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Policy: Personal Wireless Devices & Digital Wellness

Section 1: Purpose & Vision

1.1 Vision: Disconnected to Reconnect

The BIE recognizes that while mobile technology is a powerful tool, unrestricted access to personal wireless devices during the school day is linked to increased anxiety, cyberbullying, and reduced academic focus. This policy is designed to build a culture of responsible device use, not solely to restrict access, so that students can engage deeply with their teachers, peers, and heritage without interference from digital distractions.

1.2 Scope and Applicability

- **Bureau Operated Schools (BOS):** This policy is MANDATORY for all Bureau-Operated schools.
- **Tribally Controlled Schools (TCS):** This document serves as a MODEL POLICY. Tribal School Boards retain full sovereignty to adopt, adapt, or reject this framework to fit their community needs.
- **Residential Life & Dormitories:** Device expectations for students residing in BIE dormitories follow a distinct, structured residential schedule. Full details on these guidelines are in Section 2.3.
- **Personal Wireless Device:** A *personal wireless device* is any privately owned or non-school-issued electronic device that is capable of transmitting, receiving, storing, or accessing data through wireless communication technologies (including but not limited to Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, cellular networks, or radio signals). Such devices include (1) smartphones and other mobile phones; (2) smartwatches and other wearable technology; (3) wireless earbuds and headphones; (3) tablets and e-readers; (4) laptop and notebook computers; (5) portable gaming devices; and (6) any accessory with wireless communication capability.

Section 2: General Device Policies

2.1 Rules for Personal Wireless Devices During School Hours

- **The Core Rule:** Use of personal wireless devices is strictly prohibited from the moment a student enters the school building until the completion of the student's academic programming, unless otherwise noted by this policy.
- **Storage Requirements:** All personal wireless devices must remain powered off and stored completely out of sight in the student's backpack or locker for the duration of the school day.
- **Smartwatches:** Students may wear smartwatches solely for safety and tracking purposes (e.g., passive GPS location tracking or emergency SOS features). These devices must remain in "Do Not Disturb" mode, meaning they are silenced and receive no notifications. Use of a smartwatch for any reason other than safety or tracking purposes constitutes a direct violation of this policy.
- **Laptops and Tablets:** Student-owned personal computing devices, such as laptops and iPads, are classified as personal wireless devices and subject to the same restrictions. To ensure instructional equity, maintain network security, and comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) filtering requirements, students must use only school-issued devices for all digital instructional activities.
- **Extracurricular Activities/Field Trips/Non-School Hour Activities:** During any extended academic programming and all extracurricular or non-academic activities, including after-school programs, Saturday School, intersessions, field trips, tutoring, athletics, and clubs, use of personal wireless devices is permitted only at the supervising staff member's discretion. *Extended academic programming means any school-sponsored instructional time outside the regular school day intended to deliver academic instruction.*

2.2 Residential Life & Dormitories

- **Scope & Philosophy:** Recognizing that BIE dormitories serve as a student's home away from home, this policy shifts from the strict academic day restrictions to a structured residential schedule. The goal is to support mental wellness and healthy sleep habits while giving students the time they need to decompress, connect with family, and enjoy leisure in the evening. Dorm policies should reflect student age, staffing capacity, and local conditions.

- **Afternoon Decompression:** Upon returning to the dormitory from the academic day, students are permitted to use personal wireless devices in designated common areas to relax, listen to music, and communicate with family.
- **Study Hall:** Personal wireless devices are not permitted during mandatory study hall periods. Students must rely on school-issued devices for their academic assignments.
- **Evening Leisure:** Following the academic day and study hall, students may use their personal wireless devices in common areas and dorm rooms for general leisure and dinner until the designated digital curfew.
- **Digital Curfew and Overnight Storage:** Residential programs may implement a digital curfew (recommended 30 minutes before lights out) to support sleep hygiene. Devices may be stored in designated areas or secured in accordance with dorm policy. All personal wireless devices must be turned in to residential staff or secured in designated device storage areas. Devices are not permitted in sleeping quarters overnight.

Section 3: Exceptions & Safety

3.1 Medical Exemptions (IDEA/ADA/504 Compliance)

- **Exemption Criteria:** Students requiring a personal wireless device for ongoing medical needs (e.g., paired continuous glucose monitors, seizure alerts) or as Assistive Technology (AT) outlined in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan are exempt from these restrictions.
- **Device Protections and Connectivity:** Authorized medical and AT devices, including smartphones or smartwatches actively paired with health monitors, must be allowed to remain connected throughout the school day. Staff may not confiscate, power off, or restrict these devices unless required for immediate student safety.
- **Documentation and Approval:** Any device use specified in a student's current IEP or Section 504 Plan is permitted in accordance with that plan. No additional approval is required. Any changes to device use must be addressed through the IEP or Section 504 team process. For students without an IEP or Section 504 Plan, parents or guardians may submit medical documentation to the school for review. The school may grant a temporary accommodation or determine whether a referral for evaluation under Section 504 or IDEA is appropriate.

- **Identification:** To prevent confusion, approved students will be provided with a designated "Device Pass." Furthermore, teachers must leave a notification in the substitute lesson plan, and schools must ensure an alert is logged in the NASIS system.
- **Privacy and Dignity:** Students utilizing approved devices must not be singled out or publicly questioned regarding their medical status. Any concerns regarding device misuse will be addressed privately and in accordance with the student's documented disability or medical needs.
- **Usage Boundaries:** Devices approved for medical or accessibility purposes must be used strictly for their approved function. Accessing the device for non-approved personal communication or entertainment remains a policy violation.

3.2 Emergency Protocols

- **Crisis Situations and Override Access:** In the event of a school-wide lockdown, crisis, or active emergency, students must have a clear and immediate pathway to contact emergency services. Students are permitted to use their phones to communicate with family, but only immediately after following safety directions from staff. Schools should ensure that these emergency communication procedures are accessible, reliable, and clearly communicated to students.
- **Daily Emergencies:** For emergency communication, parents are required to contact the Front Office. Staff will relay messages to students in a timely manner. To support the instructional environment, parents are asked to refrain from calling or texting their student's personal wireless device during the school day.

3.3 Tribal Sovereignty & Cultural Use

- **Cultural Documentation:** Teachers may grant *specific, time-bound permission* for students to use phones for cultural projects (e.g., recording an Elder's story, language preservation apps) if no other school-issued device is available.
- **Data Sovereignty:** Students are strictly prohibited from uploading recordings of sacred ceremonies or sensitive cultural practices to public social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) while on school grounds.

Section 4: Implementation & Staff Expectations

4.1 Violations of Policy: The "Three Strikes" Model (Suggested)

Implementation should not detract from instructional time. Schools may adopt systems that streamline compliance and minimize classroom disruption. To avoid criminalizing student behavior, schools shall adopt a graduated response:

- **1st Offense (Redirect):** Verbal warning; student must put the device in the appropriate storage immediately.
- **2nd Offense (Confiscate):** The device will be placed by the student in a designated area (e.g., the teacher's desk) and returned to the student at the end of the class period.
- **3rd Offense (Escalate):** Device confiscated and turned into the Front Office; parent/guardian must pick it up.
- **Refusal to Surrender:** Refusal to hand over a device constitutes "Insubordination," and may carry separate consequences under the Student Code of Conduct.
 - **4.1.1 De-escalation Protocol (Refusal to Surrender):** To maintain a safe and focused classroom environment, teachers are expected to prioritize de-escalation over immediate confiscation. If a student refuses to surrender a device during a 2nd or 3rd offense, staff must follow these steps:
 - **Avoid Power Struggles:** Teachers must not engage in a public argument or attempt to remove the device from the student's possession physically.
 - **Provide a Clear Choice:** Calmly offer the student one final opportunity to comply by stating the immediate choice and the resulting consequence. For example: "You may place the phone in the caddy now, or I will need to submit an administrative referral for insubordination."
 - **Disengage and Document:** If the student continues to refuse, instruct them to place the device out of sight in their backpack, disengage from the confrontation, and immediately resume classroom instruction.
 - **Administrative Escalation:** At the next natural break in instruction, the teacher will submit a disciplinary referral to the Front Office. School administration or security will then be responsible for handling the violation and securing the device for parent pickup, ensuring all

necessary due process requirements are met. Device violations alone do not constitute grounds for suspension or expulsion, but may contribute to broader behavioral interventions.

4.2 Staff Modeling (Digital Role Modeling)

We recognize that students learn by observation. Therefore, school staff are expected to model healthy digital habits.

- **Instructional Time:** Teachers and staff should refrain from using personal wireless devices for personal business (texting, scrolling) during active instructional time.
- **Emergency Exception:** Staff use of phones for school safety, emergency communication, or two-factor authentication for school accounts is permitted.

4.3 Infrastructure & Filtering (CIPA)

- **Network Isolation:** Student and staff personal wireless devices are not permitted to join the secure BIE Admin/Student Wi-Fi network.
- **Filter Bypass:** Use of VPNs (Virtual Private Networks) or hotspots to bypass school content filters is a violation of the Technology Acceptable Use Policy.

4.4 Liability for Personal Property

- BIE or its employees are not financially or legally responsible for the loss, theft, or damage of personal wireless devices brought onto school property. This limitation of liability applies to devices kept in student possession, placed in classroom or school storage systems, or temporarily held by staff in accordance with school policy.
- Schools must establish and implement standard procedures for the handling of devices when they are held by staff, including the use of designated secure storage locations and documentation of collection and return. For residential students, schools must define procedures for device return when parent or guardian pickup is not feasible.

Section 5: Conclusion & Acknowledgments

5.1 Conclusion and Shared Commitment

- The BIE prioritizes the academic success, cultural connection, and holistic wellness of every student. While technology remains an essential educational tool, this framework ensures that our classrooms remain dedicated spaces for active learning and genuine peer engagement. We are taking proactive steps to safeguard instructional time and support our students' mental health. Shifting digital habits requires a community effort, and we invite our families, staff, and Tribal partners to join us in modeling healthy digital boundaries. Together, we can equip our students with the focus and resilience they need to thrive both inside and outside the classroom.

Policy Acknowledgment & Signature Page

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read, understand, and agree to adhere to the expectations outlined in the BIE Personal Wireless Devices & Digital Wellness Policy.

Student Acknowledgment: I agree to follow the personal wireless device policy expectations and understand the consequences of violating this policy.

Student Name (Print): _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Acknowledgment: I have reviewed this policy and agree to support the school in enforcing these boundaries to protect instructional time and student wellness. I understand the procedures for emergency communication and device confiscation.

Parent/Guardian Name (Print): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Administrator Acknowledgment: I commit to upholding this policy fairly and consistently to ensure a focused, safe, and productive educational environment for all students.

Administrator Name (Print): _____

Administrator Signature: _____ Date: _____