



Mrs. Traci Ferreira, Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am writing to inform you about the Eldred Central District's upcoming implementation of new rules and guidelines regarding student cell phone and personal device use for the 2025-2026 school year, aligning with Governor Kathy Hochul's initiative for "Distraction-Free Schools" across New York State. This statewide ban that was enacted on May 6, 2025, aims to enhance student engagement, reduce distractions, and improve mental health outcomes by limiting the unfettered access to internet-enabled communication devices during the school day.

The "why" for a distraction-free school environment is to improve academic performance, enhance student mental health, and create a better school and classroom environment. Research supports these findings, showing that frequent cell phone use in class leads to lower academic performance and that excessive use is linked to increased anxiety and stress among students. The Surgeon General has also noted that up to 95% of young people ages 13-17 use social media platforms, with over a third using them "almost constantly," increasing their risk of mental health issues.

Key aspects of the new policy include:

- **"Away for the Day" during instructional time:** Cell phones and other electronic devices, including smartwatches and earbuds/air pods, will be turned off and put away from the first class bell to the last class bell.
- **Medical Exceptions:** Students who require their cell phone to monitor a medical condition (e.g., diabetes, epilepsy) may have it with them at all times, but must adhere to all other policy expectations. Please contact the school administration to discuss essential needs for phone approval, and a health plan or prior approval should be in place for medical necessities or emergencies.

We understand that you may need to contact your child during the school day. The new policy will include methods for parents/guardians to contact students during school hours, and written notification of these methods will be provided at the beginning of the school year. Additionally, the policy will outline methods for on-site storage where students will keep their devices during the school day.

We appreciate your cooperation as we implement this new state-mandated policy to create an optimal learning environment for all students. We understand that cell phones have become a part of daily life, and we appreciate your support in this important initiative. By working together, we can ensure a safe, healthy, and focused learning environment for all students.

I will be consulting with parents, teachers and administration in the development of the implementation plan prior to the start of the school year. Once adopted, the implementation plan will be posted in a clearly visible and accessible location on the school district's website. I will be setting up virtual meetings in June and July for parents to have a voice in the implementation of our cell phone ban. If you are interested in being a part of this committee, please email me at ferreirat@eldred.k12.ny.us. The meeting dates will be June 19th, June 30th, July 7th, July 17th, and July 24th. All of these meetings will be virtual, starting at 6:00 pm.

Sincerely,

Traci Ferreira, Superintendent of Schools