



Sharon Springs Central School District

514 State Highway 20 * Sharon Springs, NY 13459

518 - 284 - 2267

Thomas Yorke, Superintendent/Building Principal

August 2, 2024

Dear SSCS Family,

Beginning in the 2024-25 school year, for students in grades K - 10, Sharon Springs Central School will be making our school a personal-device (cell phones, smartwatches, earbuds, ect.) free space to improve the overall well-being of our students so that the focus is on teaching and learning. (Our upperclassmen, as we work to transition them toward independence, will be allowed to carry their devices throughout the day; albeit with the expectation that they are off and placed in the designated area in the classroom and used appropriately out of classrooms).

Sharon Springs Central School will prohibit personal electronic devices from the time students in grades K - 10 enter their first period class until the end of the regular school day at 2:50pm. Such devices must be turned off and stored in a secure container (with devices locked away and labeled).

For **all students**, K-12, any misuse of electronic devices will result in its confiscation until the end of the school day and parents/guardians will be notified. After the first infraction, we have a progressive disciplinary policy in place that includes requiring parents/guardians picking up the device from our school's main office, after school detention, in-school suspension, and/or out-of-school suspension.

We believe that personal devices have many uses. We have, however, also found that learning and social behavior improve drastically when students are device free and therefore more likely to be fully engaged with their teachers and classmates.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the school directly at (518) 284-2266 or tyorke@sharonsprings.org, and/or attend our family forum about the adoption of our new policy on **Thursday, August 15 at 6:30 p.m.** in the Auditorium.

We have compiled an FAQ about the implementation of this new policy (see the additional pages below). If you are unable to attend the forum on August 15th and would like more information, please contact me, Mr. Tom Yorke.

In an effort to best serve your child, we appreciate your support as we adopt this program for the benefit of our students.

Thank you,

Thomas Yorke
K-12 Principal/Superintendent
Sharon Springs CSD

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding a Personal Device Ban (i.e., cell phones, smartwatches, and earbuds - as well as all non-school-issued, internet-enabled devices)

Q: Why is banning personal electronic devices necessary? What makes this a good idea at SSCS?

A: Simply, we want to support students' mental health and physical health, while providing a learning environment that is safe, welcoming and inclusive, and thus conducive to developing the interpersonal skills, personal habits and academic discipline to maximize students' opportunities for success. The research is clear - students are much more likely to be successful (socially, emotionally, and academically) without access to their devices at school.

At SSCS, our faculty and staff pride ourselves on developing positive, close relationships that serve as a cornerstone for all learning. What we have noticed is that personal electronic devices distances students from interpersonal relationships both with our faculty and staff as well as with their peers. We hope with parental support, this policy will move us in a positive direction.

By removing personal electronic devices we hope to:

- **Minimize Distractions:** Personal electronic devices can be a significant source of distraction for students, disrupting their focus and engagement during lessons.
- **Prevent Cheating:** Personal electronic devices can facilitate cheating during exams and assessments, making it easier for students to access information or communicate with others.
- **Reduce Cyberbullying:** Limiting personal electronic device use can help reduce instances of cyberbullying, which carry over from out-of-school hours to during school hours through social media and messaging apps.
- **Promote Social Interaction:** By restricting personal electronic device use, we encourage students to engage in face-to-face interactions and build stronger interpersonal relationships.
- **Enhance Classroom Management:** Our educators often find it easier to manage classrooms without the interference of personal electronic devices, leading to a more orderly, efficient and effective learning environment.
- **Protect Privacy:** Banning personal electronic devices can help protect the privacy of students and staff, as phones can be used to take unauthorized photos or videos.
- **Encourage Responsible Use:** Schools aim to teach students responsible use of technology by setting boundaries and encouraging them to prioritize their education during school hours.
- **Reduce Dependence:** Limiting Personal electronic device use helps students develop skills in managing without constant access to technology, fostering independence and self-reliance.
- **Reduced Anxiety and Stress:** Constant notifications, social media pressure, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) can contribute to anxiety and stress. By limiting phone use, students may experience lower levels of these mental health issues.
- **Improved Sleep Quality:** Students who use their phones less during the day may be less likely to use them late at night, which can lead to better sleep patterns and overall mental well-being.

- **Increased Presence and Mindfulness:** Without the distraction of cell phones, students can be more present and mindful in their activities, which can help improve their mental health and emotional regulation.
- **Reduced Social Comparison:** Social media platforms often encourage comparison with peers, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. By reducing exposure to these platforms during school hours, students may feel better about themselves and their achievements.
- **Enhanced Focus and Academic Performance:** Improved focus and engagement in schoolwork can lead to better academic performance, which can positively impact a student's self-esteem and overall mental health.
- **Encouragement of Healthy Habits:** We can use the opportunity to educate students about the importance of balancing screen time with other activities, such as physical exercise, hobbies, and face-to-face social interactions, which are crucial for mental health.
- **Stronger Social Connections:** Encouraging face-to-face interactions over digital ones can help students build stronger, more meaningful relationships, which are essential for emotional support and mental well-being.

Q: What if I want to reach my child during the school day?

A: We want our students to be engaged with each other and in their learning. If you need to contact your child during the school day, contact the Main Office at (518) 284-2266. Additionally, you are able to email your child using their school-issued email address.

Q: What if there is a school emergency?

A: In case of a school emergency, we direct our students to safety first, following our school emergency preparedness protocol. The district will continuously provide updates to all families throughout the emergency.

Q: My student is a student-athlete, how will they get their device prior to leaving for a game?

A: They will simply follow a protocol for retrieving their device(s) from their first period teacher's classroom, the main office or their homeroom teacher (depending when your child will be leaving).

Q: My student participates in after school activities, how will I be notified in a timely fashion if there is a scheduling change?

A: When there are changes for afterschool activities, the coach, advisor, or administration will send a notification (i.e., text and/or email). Additionally, your child can use their school issued iPad to email you. Finally, we encourage you to download and use the Schedule Galaxy app.

Q: Will my student's devices be safe?

A: Students will leave their devices in a designated, locked container in their first period classroom. The classroom will be locked if the teacher is not present, and students will not be allowed in the device area of the classroom.

The daily process is simple, as students in grades 6 - 10 enter their first period classroom, they will:

1. Turn their device off.
2. Place their personal electronic devices (i.e. smart device, smartwatch, earbuds, etc) inside a designated, labeled shelf inside of a container that is locked in the classroom.
3. Be responsible for picking up their device(s) during homeroom.

*Students arriving late or leaving early will put their personal electronic devices (i.e. device, smartwatch, earbuds, etc) inside a designated container in the Main Office.

Q: If personal devices are “bad for kids,” why are 11th and 12th graders allowed to carry their devices?

A: First off, we are not claiming that personal devices are inherently “bad for kids”; instead, research and experience at SSCS shows us that our younger students are better positioned to be successful academically, socially and emotionally when they are not in possession of a personal device at school.

In collaboration with several parents and our educators, this compromise is being tested to provide our older students the opportunity to exercise more independence. If, however, they violate the expectation that devices are to be stored in a designated area while in class then their devices will be confiscated and subject to the progressive disciplinary plan outlined in the new policy. In other words, students in 11th and 12th grade will continue the previous practice that when they go into a classroom they will place the phone in the designated area.

Q: Why does SSCS issue iPads to students if devices are thought to have a negative impact on students?

A: Issuing school-owned and managed iPads (our iPads are managed with LightSpeed filtering technology) with access to a variety of learning apps and the ability to block educator-determined content offers several benefits:

- Enhanced Learning Opportunities:** iPads provide access to a wide range of educational apps, interactive textbooks, and online resources that can cater to different learning styles and needs, making learning more engaging and effective.
- Consistent Access to Technology:** Ensures all students have equal access to the same technology, reducing the digital divide and ensuring a level playing field for all students regardless of their socio-economic background.
- Customized Learning Experience:** Our educators can select specific apps and resources tailored to their curriculum, allowing for personalized learning experiences that can better meet individual student needs.
- Improved Organization and Efficiency:** iPads can help students stay organized with digital planners, note-taking apps, and cloud storage. This can streamline the learning process and reduce the burden of carrying multiple textbooks and notebooks.
- Immediate Access to Information:** Students can quickly look up information, conduct research, and collaborate with peers in real-time, fostering a more dynamic and interactive learning environment.

- Enhanced Engagement and Motivation:** Interactive and multimedia content can make learning more engaging and enjoyable for students, potentially increasing their motivation and interest in subjects.
- Facilitation of Remote Learning:** iPads enable students to participate in remote learning more effectively, ensuring continuity of education during situations like inclement weather, health crises, or other disruptions.
- Teacher Control and Monitoring:** With school-managed iPads, educators can control which apps and content are accessible, ensuring students are focused on educational activities and preventing distractions from non-educational content.
- Data Collection and Assessment:** Digital platforms can track student progress, providing valuable data that educators can use to assess understanding, identify areas for improvement, and tailor instruction accordingly.
- Economic-friendly Solution:** Reducing the need for printed materials can lead to significant savings on paper and printing costs.
- Skill Development:** Familiarity with technology and digital tools prepares students for future academic pursuits and careers, helping them develop essential digital literacy and technical skills.
- Parental Involvement:** Parents can be more involved in their children's education by using iPads to access assignments, grades, and school communications.

By leveraging these benefits, at SSCS we aim to create a more effective, inclusive, and future-ready educational environment.

The filtering system on the school-managed iPads does not allow access to social media, direct messaging apps, and games; additionally, teachers direct how to use the iPad within students' learning environments.

Q: What if my student gets sick?

A: Your student will be sent to the nurse, who will contact you if necessary. We will work with first period teachers and homeroom teachers to ensure if your child is sent home early that they leave with their personal device(s).

Q: What happens if my student does not follow the new policy?

A: In short, the device(s) will be confiscated, brought to the main office, and returned at the end of the school day from the main office to the student; additionally, parent/guardian(s) will be contacted. There will be, however, [progressive disciplinary action](#) if necessary.

Q: Will the educators at SSCS be banned from using their personal devices?

A: No, however, *educators will not use personal devices while teaching or supervising students* unless it is for a preapproved reason (i.e., our athletic director scheduling/rescheduling events, photography, or a personal, pre-approved reason).