SCHOOLS BEYOND SCREENS PORTLAND

DIGITAL DEVICE AND SCREEN USE POLICY

WORKING DRAFT

August, 2026

Note: This is a living draft, highlighted language is being particularly and actively worked on.

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

A. **Purpose.** This Policy establishes rules for the evaluation, deployment, and use of digital technologies and screen-based devices within the District. It supports PPS's Graduate Portrait and the District's mission to provide an equitable, high-quality education by safeguarding students' physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development, and by ensuring that adopted technologies enhance, rather than diminish learning outcomes and instructional time.

Through clear, consistent, age-appropriate expectations, this Policy reflects a shared responsibility among schools, families, and students to promote academic focus, critical thinking, and healthy, lifelong learning habits, preparing students to be responsible digital citizens throughout their school years and beyond. thoughtfully and responsibly in school and beyond.

B. Scope. This Policy applies to all faculty, staff, students, and administrators across all school grade levels and programs.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A. **Research-backed Pedagogy**. Neuroscientific research shows that effective learning requires sustained focus, deliberate effort, and emotional connection. Students require a balance of direct instruction, social interaction and collaboration, physical activity, and hands-on learning. Technology use should not replace these essential experiences.

B. **Teacher-led Instruction First:** Learning is the most effective when directed and guided by skilled educators and meaningful human interaction. Technology should support and enhance teacher-led instruction, not replace the essential role of educators in fostering engagement, relationships, and learning.

C. **Adaptability**. Cognitive skills and habits of mind enable students to adapt to evolving circumstances and future technological trends. Teaching students to think deeply enables them to use any tool; teaching students to use a specific tool limits them to that tool.

D. **Real-life and Multi-sensory Practices**. Analog learning methods–including whole book reading and handwriting as well as paper based math and use of manipulatives–reliably produce stronger comprehension and retention than digital methods.

E. **Student Health and Well-Being**. Excessive device use has been shown to be correlated with poor attention, distraction, anxiety, depression, myopia, and sleep disruption among children and adolescents. Students deserve learning environments that minimize distractions and maximize engagement. District devices and systems should prioritize curriculum-aligned educational resources and prohibit access to content that does not directly support learning.

F. **Equity and Inclusion**. Excessive reliance on edtech reinforces inequity and widens the achievement gap. The new "digital divide" will be defined by access (or lack thereof) to high quality, screen-free instruction. However, students will need to have access to meaningful opportunities to engage with technology, including for assessments, differentiated learning, instructional accommodations, and accessibility supports while ensuring that no group of students experiences disproportionate exposure to passive or excessive screen time. Use of devices for students with diverse needs, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English Learners, gifted learners, and students requiring specialized instructional support, shall be protected.

G: **Set educators up for success.** Educators need robust support, including time for professional development around research-backed analog instruction and differentiation methods, use of technology-based curriculum with intention and confidence to support student learning, and teaching digital literacy effectively.

H.. **Technology Education vs. Technology-Delivered Education**. Technology Education ("**TechEd**") is distinct from Education Technology ("**EdTech**"). TechEd refers to a *curriculum* of computer literacy and may include, among other things, typing and research instruction. EdTech refers to the delivery of general curriculum (ELA, math, etc.) via digital devices and is not proven to provide students with transferable technological competencies.

I. **Transparency.** Educators need clear guidelines on acceptable digital platforms, devices, and screen use. Families need clear communication at the start of each school year about what to expect regarding screen time, educational app and tool use, and the data privacy policies governing these tools.

See Appendix A *for a list of studies, reports, articles, and other materials regarding the use of educational technology in schools that help explicate these Guiding Principles.*

III. STANDARDS FOR SCREEN USE IN INSTRUCTION

A. **Proven Benefit Standard**. Screens shall be implemented only when other methods of meeting curricular objectives have been found inadequate.

B. **Multi-Sensory Learning Priority.** Screens shall be used only for specific, approved purposes and shall not replace hands-on, experiential learning.

C. **Paper-Based Materials.** Paper materials shall be the default for all reading, writing and math instruction and assignments.

IV. GENERAL RULES AND RESTRICTIONS

The following rules shall apply to all digital device and screen use, except as dictated by Individualized education plans (IEPs), 504 plans, or Personalized education plans (PEPs):

A. **Screen-free K-2**. Individual screen use shall be prohibited for students in grades K-2.

B. **Centralized Device Use for 3-8**. Screen use shall be limited to dedicated computer labs or supervised computer carts for grades 3-8.

C. **K-8 Screen-Free Periods**. Recess, lunch, physical education, passing periods, and before/afterschool programs shall be screen- and device-free for grades K-8 by default. Digital device and media use by students during these times, including movies, videos, gaming or streaming content, may be allowed with administrative or parental approval.

D. **Screen-Free Lunch and PE for Grade 9-12**. The use of computers during high school lunch periods shall be restricted to specific classrooms or library areas specifically designated as study halls.

F. **Offline Homework**. Homework assignments shall be offered in a paper format whenever possible. Internet connectivity shall not be required for the completion of homework assignments.

G. **Prohibition on Gamified Learning Applications**. Gamified learning applications for academic subjects shall be prohibited. For purposes of this Policy, "gamified learning applications" means educational apps/software that relies on extrinsic game mechanics—including but not limited to points, badges, levels, leaderboards, or virtual

rewards—for student engagement with academic content.

H. **Prohibition on Advertisement and Sales.** No advertisements shall appear on any computer device or projected screen at school. Any device used at school, including those used by teachers or administrators, must be installed with premium ad blockers. Furthermore, students and families shall not be required to use any app or website that pushes "paid upgrades," "premium services," "in-app purchases," or similar features.

I. Educational Use of Video, Visual Media, and Other Content

District devices shall be used for curriculum-aligned educational purposes that promote active student engagement during the school day. Non-educational use including passive consumption for entertainment, or video streaming, shall be prohibited and blocked. Educational screen use may include digital learning materials, instructional videos, virtual field trips, digital textbooks, ebooks, audiobooks, accessibility tools, assistive technology, and curriculum-aligned visual media that may be used when they directly support instructional objectives. Instructional video and visual media should be purposeful, curriculum-aligned, time-limited, and used to support active learning whenever possible. Background video or visual media not aligned to active instruction should not be used. Video and visual media should not be used as a substitute for teacher-led instruction, classroom engagement, or active learning experiences, and should be followed by opportunities for discussion, reflection, application, or other forms of student interaction. When not in active use, devices and projection screens should be off and away.

J. **Prohibition on Screen-Time as Reward**. Individual digital device use or screen time shall not be used as a reward, incentive, or behavioral reinforcement for students.

K. **Data Collection**. Students' personal data (including, but not limited to, health records, grades, test scores, immigration status, birth location, household income, and SSNs) shall not be harvested, packaged, or sold by apps or learning management systems. Any apps accessible to students must publish their complete terms of service and privacy policies. The District is not permitted to consent to these terms on behalf of students and families.

L. **Platform and Content Restrictions.** The District shall configure devices and systems with approved, curriculum-aligned applications and websites, restricting access to platforms and websites primarily designed for entertainment or passive consumption. The District will block access to student-led use of YouTube, social media, and streaming platforms, AI/LLM chatbot platforms (ie ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.), along with non-approved gaming platforms. Exceptions may only be permitted for educator-directed instructional use when a platform directly supports curriculum-aligned learning objectives, and follows an administrator approval process.

M. **Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs).** Access to generative AI is prohibited on student-facing, district-issued devices until Board/District adopts an AI policy and research-backed AI literacy curriculum is implemented district wide.

V. TIME LIMITATIONS ON DEVICE USE

A. **Maximum Limits for Screen Use for K-12(excluding TechEd & Film Studies)**.
Total in-class screen time shall not exceed the following:

- **PK through Grade 2**: No routine use.
- **Grades 3-5**: Maximum twenty (20) minutes **per day or 0-100 minutes per week.**
- **Grades 6-8**: Maximum forty-five (45) minutes **per subject, per week; not to exceed (250) minutes per week**
- **Grades 9-12**: Maximum sixty (60) minutes **per subject, per week; not to exceed (300) minutes per week.**

These limits apply to use of individual devices by students as well as "passive screen time" (i.e. teachers showing videos to the class). They do not apply to the use of static, projected materials (i.e. teachers projecting a document or slideshow for common reference).

B. **Exceptions:** Exceptions to the time limitations set forth in this Section may be granted under the following circumstances: (i) emergency situations requiring immediate communication or safety measures; (ii) temporary teacher substitutions where prepared lesson plans necessitate screen-based instruction; (iii) special assemblies featuring guest speakers or presentations that require audiovisual components; (iv) other special circumstances approved in advance by the principal. If an exception is made, it shall be communicated via email to parents in advance unless emergency circumstances require notification after the fact; or (v) IEPs, 504 plans, or PEPs.

C. **Instructional Flexibility.** The District recognizes that some courses and learning experiences may require greater use of technology to achieve their instructional objectives. Screen time guidance should be applied with consideration for the unique requirements of courses such as computer science, graphic design, digital media arts, yearbook, engineering, career technical education pathways, and other technology-intensive programs. In these courses and programs, technology use may exceed general screen time recommendations when it is directly connected to curriculum, student creation, design, programming, production, research, or other active learning experiences. Such use should remain purposeful, instructionally aligned, and consistent with the goals of this policy.

VI. PROHIBITION OF ONE-TO-ONE DEVICES

A. **Prohibition on One-to-One Devices.** District shall not issue individual devices to K-8 students. All student access to digital devices shall be limited to shared devices in dedicated computer labs or supervised computer carts as set forth in Section IV of this Policy.

B. **Availability of Devices for Optional Check-Out**. District shall make a limited number of devices available for students to "check out" for use at home, on an as-needed basis, with written permission from a parent or guardian, for school-related work or access to online services. This will ensure equity in at-home access to computers and online services for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status.

C. **Exceptions.** Exceptions to this prohibition may be granted only with express written approval from the District and only when: (i) the student has a documented need requiring individual device access such as students under 504, PEPs, or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), where use of assistive devices is explicitly required; (ii) parents or guardians have acknowledged in writing their responsibility for supervision and time limits; (iii) no reasonable analog alternative exists; and (iv) the device shall remain on school premises and shall not be sent home with the student.

VII. Parent and Guardian Rights

A. Parents and legal guardians must provide written informed consent for their children to use EdTech at school, including for the use of each individual app and device

B. For true informed consent, parents and guardians shall receive information regarding their child's use of digital tools, including total weekly time their child spends on a device; a complete list of apps, programs, Google Workspace Services, and common websites that are used for learning, including whether any tool or platform incorporates generative AI; information as to how those apps, programs, and websites were vetted to ensure they meet the standards and guidelines to have been deemed appropriate for educational and instruction use; and relevant data share/privacy policies.

C. **Opt-Out Rights.** Parents/guardians may opt their student out of the use of specific digital tools or platforms—including any tool or platform that incorporates generative artificial intelligence—out of taking a device home, or out of device use altogether. The District requires schools to ensure that students whose parents or legal guardians have opted them out will be reasonably and meaningfully accommodated with paper-based lessons, homework, instructions, and assessments.

VIII. DIGITAL TOOL VETTING AND APPROVAL PROCESS

A. Approval Requirement. Any digital tool proposed for introduction into the classroom must undergo a formal vetting process and receive approval prior to deployment. The party requesting approval must identify: (i) the specific problem the tool is intended to solve; (ii) the cognitive process(es) targeted; (iii) the routine or protocol for use; and (iv) the measurable learning outcome anticipated. No tool shall be approved or renewed without a clear, articulated purpose. Documentation regarding the approval status and vetting of any digital tool shall be made available to parents or guardians upon request.

B. Compliance Requirement. Any digital tool that collects student information online or does not operate in an entirely offline capacity must demonstrate compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Student Online Personal Information Protection Act (SOPIPA).

C. Learning Enhancement Standard. No digital tool shall be adopted without independently verified evidence of effectiveness and clear, unequivocal benefits to learning. Students shall not serve as test subjects for unproven educational technologies.

D. Best Available Solution Standard. The proposed digital tool must represent the best available solution, including when compared analog alternatives.

E. Time-Bound Requirement. The approval of all digital tools must be accompanied by recommended limits (including both session length and frequency of use), scaled to the age of the user.

IX. TECHNOLOGY AUDIT PROCESS

A. **Regular Technology Audit**. The District shall conduct regular audits of all digital tools and technologies currently in use across all grade levels and programs. These audits shall evaluate: (i) continued compliance with approval criteria; (ii) actual learning outcomes achieved; (iii) any adverse effects on student health, attention, or well-being; (iv) budget impacts) and (v) availability of improved alternatives.

B. **Audit Committee**. The Technology Advisory Committee (discussed below) shall review audit findings and make recommendations regarding continuation, modification, or discontinuation of digital tools.

C. **Removal of Non-Compliant Tools**. Any digital tool found to be non-compliant with this Policy or failing to demonstrate continued learning benefits shall be removed from use

within thirty (30) days of such determination.

X. FACULTY AND STAFF TRAINING

A. **Ongoing Professional Development**. As technology evolves and research advances our understanding of best practices and the meaning of "digital literacy," all teachers and staff shall participate in appropriately compensated ongoing training regarding the educational opportunities and challenges, and health and safety issues associated with children's use of digital devices. Particular attention shall be paid to actual, evidence-based efficacy of teaching outcomes (digital v. analog methods).

B. **Modeling Appropriate Use**. Teachers shall model appropriate screen hygiene when using their own devices in school settings, demonstrating the behaviors and practices expected of students.

C. **Identification of Problematic Use**. Training shall include best practices for identifying and reducing improper or excessive screen use among students that contributes to distraction, limited attention span, screen addiction, or other adverse effects on learning and well-being.

XI. STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION AND OVERSIGHT

A. **Technology Advisory Committee.** The District shall maintain a Technology Advisory Committee comprising technology personnel, teachers, administrators, psychologists, students, and parents. The Committee shall monitor how technology is implemented throughout the District and evaluate both positive and negative impacts on the growth, development, and well-being of students and the community. The Technology Advisory Committee shall not include, nor consult with, any representatives of technology vendors, or any outside experts who receive tech industry funding.

B. **Committee Responsibilities.** The Technology Advisory Committee shall: (i) review and recommend updates to this Policy annually; (ii) evaluate proposed new technologies prior to adoption; (iii) monitor research and developments in educational technology and child health; The Committee will take care to distinguish between high-quality independent research and research funded by technology companies or industry interest groups. (iv) receive and address concerns from parents, faculty, and staff regarding technology use; and (v) report findings and recommendations to the school board.

C. **Parent Communication.** The District shall maintain transparent communication with parents regarding their findings and recommendations for digital tools and platforms used in instruction, including the educational rationale for each tool and any data collection or privacy implications.

XII. MONITORING, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A. **Policy Review.** The Technology Advisory Committee shall review this Policy annually and make suggestions to the board to update as necessary based on current research, stakeholder feedback, and operational experience. The policy will be updated as needed to reflect new research, implementation feedback, equity analyses, and emerging tools and information. The first annual review shall include feedback from students, educators, administrators, staff, parents, and families regarding policy implementation and perceptions of screen time usage, including focus groups and/or a School Experience Survey question such as "My student(s) spends too much / too little / an appropriate amount of time on devices."

B. **District Annual Report to the Board**

The District shall provide an annual report to the Board, presented no later than [month/timeframe — e.g., the end of each school year or start of the following year], detailing implementation of this Policy. The report shall include, at minimum:

1. Screen Time Data
A summary of average student screen time across the District, compared against the goals and benchmarks established under this Policy.

2. Digital Tools and Platforms in Use
A current inventory of approved applications, digital tools, and commonly used websites utilized for instructional purposes and associated costs.

3. Digital and AI Literacy Curriculum
An update on the implementation/status of digital and artificial intelligence literacy curricula, including progress made, instructional outcomes, and consistency of implementation across schools.

4. Data Privacy Incidents
A summary of any student data privacy issues or incidents that arose during the school year, including the nature of each issue and the steps taken to address or mitigate it.

5. Monitoring and Filtering Systems
An update on the effectiveness of device monitoring and content-filtering systems, including efforts to ensure device use remains educational, minimizes access to distracting or non-instructional content, and maintains a safe digital environment for students. Include filtering mishaps and mitigation strategies.

6. Emerging Research
A summary of relevant, current research on educational technology, screen use, and child development, and how such research may inform future updates to this Policy.

7. Disaggregation of Data

Wherever possible, data provided under this section shall be disaggregated by classroom, grade band, individual school, and historically underserved student groups, to allow the Board to identify disparities in implementation, access, or outcomes.

APPENDIX A: SUPPORTING MATERIALS

The following is a list of studies, reports, articles, and other materials that help form the basis and justification for imposing meaningful restrictions on technology usage in schools:

- Hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Jan. 15, 2026 that featured oral and written testimony from leading experts concerning bipartisan legislation aimed at curbing the harms to children caused by technology, including robust discussion of educational technology.
  - Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath written testimony
  - Emily Cherkin written testimony
  - Dr. Jenny Radesky written testimony
  - Dr. Jean Twenge written testimony
- Faith Bonniger et al., National Education Policy Center, *Fit for Purpose? How Today's Commercial Digital Platforms Subvert Key Goals of Public Education*
- Ben Williamson et al., National Education Policy Center, *Time for a Pause: Without Effective Public Oversight, AI in Schools Will Do More Harm Than Good* ● Mary Burns et al., Brookings Institute, *A new direction for students in an AI world: Prosper, prepare, protect*
- UNICEF, *Child Protection in Digital Education*
- UNESCO, *An Ed-Tech Tragedy? UNESCO's groundbreaking book about changes to education during the COVID-19 pandemic and their implications for the future of learning*
- UNESCO, *Technology in education: A tool on whose terms?*
- Computers & Education, *Assessing the effects of gamification in the classroom: A longitudinal study on intrinsic motivation, social comparison, satisfaction, effort, and academic performance*
- Child Neuropsychology, *Higher Access to Screens is Related to Decreased Functional Connectivity Between Neural Networks Associated with Basic Attention Skills and Cognitive Control in Children*
- 2025 meta-analysis of 117 studies (292,000 children), *Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management*
- *Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management*
- Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath, *The Digital Delusion: How Classroom Technology Harms Our Kids' Learning -- And How To Help Them Thrive Again*

- Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath, *The EdTech Revolution Has Failed: The case against student use of computers, tablets, and smartphones in the classroom*
- ACLU, *Digital Dystopia: The Danger in Buying What the EdTech Surveillance Industry is Selling*
- *Fortune, The U.S. spent $30 billion to ditch textbooks for laptops and tablets: The result is the first generation less cognitively capable than their parents* ● The Economist, *Ed tech is profitable. It is also mostly useless: Independent research identifies few learning gains*

- The Best Parenting Hack Is Being Rich - The Atlantic (August 2026) "*Consider how this all plays out with screens: High-income parents expose their kids to much less screen time than low-income parents do. A recent report from Common Sense Media found that children living in households earning less than $50,000 a year spend twice as much time with screens as children from households earning $100,000 or more. **A Pew report** found that low-income parents were more permissive with all sorts of screen time: They were more likely than high-income parents to let their child watch YouTube daily, for example, or to use smartphones to calm their child down."*
  - Various reporting on LAUSD's defunct "Ed" chatbot:
    - New York Times
    - Los Angeles Times
    - The 74
    - EdSurge
  - NBC News, *Parents say school-issued iPads are causing chaos with their kids*
  - NBC News, *Google's work in schools aims to create a 'pipeline of future users,' internal documents say*
  - New York Times, *How Much Screen Time Is Your Child Getting at School? We Asked 350 Teachers*
  - New York Times, *A.I. Will Destroy Critical Thinking in K-12*
  - New York Times, *Kids Rarely Read Whole Books Anymore, Even in English Class* ● New York Times, *Get Tech Out of the Classroom Before It's Too Late* ● NPR, *The risks of AI in schools outweigh the benefits, report says* ● Wall Street Journal, *Screens Have Taken Over Classrooms. Even Students Have Had Enough. Educators question whether the rapid shift toward more technology has benefited learning*
  - MSN, *U.S. high school students lose ground in math and reading, continuing years-long decline*
  - Presentation given to a New York school board, *Is Educational Technology Hurting Our Children's Education?*
  - The Markup, *This Private Equity Firm Is Amassing Companies That Collect Data on America's Children: Vista Equity Partners has been buying up software used in schools. Parents want to know what the companies do with kids' data*
  - The Atlantic, *The Elite College Students Who Can't Read Books: To read a book in college, it helps to have read a book in high school*

- The Conversation, *The 'one chatbot per child' model for AI in classrooms conflicts with what research shows: Learning is a social process*
- The 74, *Ed Tech Co. That Provides Telehealth to L.A. Students Experiences Data Breach*
- The Guardian, *Switching off: Sweden says back-to-basics schooling works on paper*
- France24, *Back to textbooks: Denmark rolls back digital learning*
- The Guardian, *Madrid plans to limit computer and tablet use in primary schools to two hours a week*

American Academy of Pediatrics, Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement, PEDIATRICS, Jan 20, 2026

APPENDIX B: OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Below is a selection of districts that have approved or enacted policies to limit or reduce the use of screens and educational technology products. **For a current, comprehensive list, see here.**

IN CALIFORNIA:

Beverly Hills Unified School District

BHUSD approved tech resolution for 2026-2027 school year, directing the district to develop a comprehensive student screen time policy with clear guidelines on classroom technology use.

San Marcos Unified School District
YouTube has been blocked for all K-8 students. Teachers can still embed links in Google Classroom for academic purposes.

Orange County Public Schools, Simi Valley Unified, and Fresno Unified Transitioned to a school-based cart model for all TK-8 or TK-5 students. Devices are now stored and accessed at school rather than being assigned to individual students for home use.

IN OTHER STATES:

Baltimore County Public Schools (Maryland)
Elementary Schools discontinued one-to-one device practice. A reduced number of devices is provided during the school day and these are kept at school. Middle Schools no longer allow students to bring devices home.

IN OTHER COUNTRIES:

Sweden

After acknowledging the clear scientific evidence that digital tools impair rather than enhance student learning, the entire country has moved students off digital devices and reinvested in printed books and handwriting on paper.

Madrid, Spain

The regional government of Madrid has limited the use of computers and tablets to a maximum of one hour per week for students in grade 2 or below, 90 minutes per week for students in grades 3 and 4, and two hours per week for students in grades 5 and 6. Elementary school teachers are also banned from assigning screen-based homework.

Victoria, Australia

The state of Victoria has introduced 90 min daily screen time limits for kids in grades 3-6 and has eliminated the use of screens for grades TK-2. [10]