



**STATE OF HAWAII  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
PAPA HO'ONA'AUAO**  
P.O. BOX 2360  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

December 11, 2025

TO: Student Achievement Committee

FROM: Bill Arakaki  
Chairperson, Student Achievement Committee

AGENDA ITEM: Action on proposed draft for Board policy regarding the use of  
electronic communication devices by students in school

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**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- On November 13, 2025, per my memorandum of the same date, the Student Achievement Committee (Committee) agreed that further action on electronic communication device use in schools was warranted, given the impact of such devices on student learning and well-being and that there is currently no relevant Board policy regulating such use. The Committee also delegated to me its authority to address next steps in the policy development process and present a policy draft to the Committee for its consideration.
- The proposed policy draft narrows the scope of the policy to cell phones only and directs the Hawai'i Department of Education (Department) to develop and implement guidelines regulating cell phone use by students in schools that align with the general learner outcomes delineated in the Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards and that reflect students' developmental readiness and maturity.

## **II. BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION**

### Statement of Issue

Board Policy 101-15 requires that “[t]he educational environment provided in each school shall be geared toward meeting the general learner outcomes of the Hawai‘i Content and Performance Standards,” including general learner outcome “(6) the ability to use a variety of technologies effectively and ethically.” In addition, Board Policy E-301 recognizes that “existing and emerging media and technology” should be leveraged “to enhance learning, increase student achievement, [and] prepare students for success in a global society,” which should include cell phones. This policy further requires the Department to “maintain an educational environment that integrates technology in a safe and secure manner for all students and staff.”

The Board recognizes the widespread use of cell phones in schools. The use of this technology in educational settings brings with it both opportunities and challenges for learning as existing Board policy acknowledges.

Cell phones can be used to engage students in innovative learning that can mirror out-of-school, informal learning in a digitally-connected world and can also supplement learning in those schools without one-to-one devices. In addition, they have served as critical lines of connection during school emergencies. At the same time, teachers, parents, and students agree that unregulated use of cell phones can be a distraction from the work of the classroom, facilitate cyberbullying, and mitigate the development of face-to-face interpersonal communication skills.

The current policy landscape for cell phone regulation in schools, including school-based policies across the state, is fragmented. Although the majority of jurisdictions have a policy in place, there is little consistency, with some policies regulating use based on school level, while others ban the use of cell phones altogether. Given the complexity of the issue, a unified Board policy that reflects students’ developmental readiness and maturity will help establish clear expectations and leverage available learning opportunities while promoting a safe and respectful learning environment.

### Policy Development Process

At the September 18, 2025, Student Achievement Committee meeting, the Department shared the results of two cell phone surveys. The first survey collected information from all Department schools on existing rules, guidance, and policies relating to cell phone use during the school day, while the second survey, conducted through Panorama, gathered feedback from students, parents,

teachers, and staff on the impact of cell phone use and the effects of related policies and their implementation.

Acknowledging the widespread presence and influence of cell phones, smart watches, and other related technology, the Student Achievement Committee, at its November 13, 2025, meeting, moved that further action on electronic communication device use in schools was warranted. The Committee also delegated to me the Student Achievement Committee's authority to address next steps in the policy development process and present a policy draft to the Committee for its consideration, in accordance with Board Policy 400-2.

Since then, research has been conducted to inform the drafting of a policy. Findings from the Department's two surveys were further reviewed to determine the current status of school-based policy throughout the state. In addition, information on school cell phone use policies aggregated by the Education Commission of the States was used to identify current and proposed policies in other educational jurisdictions across the nation. Academic research was also consulted to consider the impact of various cell phone policies on students and schools both nationally and internationally.

Given the findings of the Department-initiated surveys and the review of existing research and policy frameworks, it was determined that the scope of the policy should be more narrowly drafted to exclude electronic communication devices other than cell phones, which the attached policy draft reflects.

Should the Committee approve the policy draft attached as **Exhibit A**, it will be sent to the appropriate unions for consult and confer. If changes are determined to be necessary following this step, they will be incorporated into a revised draft that will be presented to the full Board for approval. Appropriate changes may also be made based on testimony and feedback from the Department.

#### Policy Content

The proposed policy draft for cell phone use by students in schools is intended to balance the potential benefits to student learning and engagement with the challenges posed by unregulated use, which can lead to learning disruption and impact student well-being.

In setting minimum requirements and possible exceptions to those requirements, the Board aims to provide the Department and schools with the flexibility necessary to respond to each local school context and students' developmental readiness, while also acknowledging parents' concerns around their students'

safety. It should be noted that nothing in the policy should be construed as prohibiting the Department from permitting schools to establish more restrictive rules and regulations around the use of cell phones by students.

### **III. RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the foregoing, I recommend the Committee approve the policy draft regarding the use of cell phones by students in school as presented in **Exhibit A** of this memorandum, and also recommend that it authorize myself as committee chair to make any changes to the policy draft necessary to respond to feedback received hereafter, for presentation to the full Board.

**Proposed motion: “Moved to:**

- 1. Approve the policy draft regarding the use of cell phones by students in school as presented in Exhibit A of Student Achievement Committee Chair Bill Arakaki’s memorandum dated December 11, 2025; and**
- 2. Authorize Committee Chair Arakaki to make any changes to the policy draft necessary to respond to feedback received hereafter, for presentation to the full Board.”**

## **Exhibit A**

### **CELL PHONE USE BY STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS**

The integration of technology in educational environments continues to evolve as new technologies are developed, which necessitates clear and consistent guidance to ensure that its use in schools supports learning. Students require assistance and instruction to establish healthy and responsible relationships with technology, to build respectful interpersonal communication habits in both digital and physical spaces, and to develop self control.

The Department shall develop and implement guidelines regulating cell phone use by students in schools. Such guidelines shall align with the general learner outcomes delineated in the Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards and reflect students' developmental readiness and maturity.

Such guidelines shall specify where and when cell phones may be used; where and when cell phones must be stored; clear and progressive consequences for violations; and shall require at minimum that

- at the elementary school level, use of cell phones shall be prohibited during school hours;
- at the middle and intermediate school level, use of cell phones shall be prohibited during school hours; and
- at the high school level, use of cell phones shall be prohibited during instructional time; however, schools may exercise discretion regarding the use of cell phones outside of instructional time, including before and after school hours, designated breaks, recesses, and lunch and free periods.

Nothing in this policy shall prohibit the Department from permitting schools to establish rules and regulations around the use of cell phones that are more restrictive.

Exceptions to these requirements may be made under the following conditions:

- In the event of an emergency or perceived threat to personal safety or the safety of others;
- When expressly permitted by a teacher or administrator for curricular or instructional purposes;
- Where required by a licensed physician or surgeon, based on the student's health or well-being needs; or
- Where a student's IEP specifically includes provisions for the use of cell phones

The Department shall periodically review the guidelines and adjust as necessary based on effectiveness and feedback from students, staff, and the community.