



MERRITT SECONDARY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 5100, 1561 Chapman St. Merritt, B.C., V1K 1B8

PERSONAL DIGITAL DEVICE POLICY

Rationale: A personal digital device constitutes any mobile device that can be used to communicate and connect to the internet including but not limited to cell phones, smart watches, laptops, and tablets. As of July 1st, 2024, the British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care has amended the *Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order* to compel boards of education to restrict personal digital devices during the school day. The Merritt Secondary School personal digital device policy is designed to align with the new updated order and School Board policy. The intent of the policy is to increase safety through minimized opportunities for cyberbullying and other inappropriate communication during instructional hours, as well as promote focused and productive learning environments. Restricting personal digital devices is likely to reduce the temptation for students to engage in off task and distracting activities associated with the devices (Smale et al., 2021). As part of the 2023 Adolescent Health Survey, Smith et al (2024) report that top reasons for student cell phone use in school included scrolling social media, connecting with family and friends, and gaming while only 11% of respondents did not use their phone for these activities.

Restrictions: Students in Grade 8-12 are not permitted to use personal digital devices during class periods unless specifically directed by the instructor (e.g. for the purpose of digital literacy learning). During instructional hours, students must turn off their devices and store them in their lockers, backpack, or designated areas. Devices may be used before and after school, and during breaks only. The school is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged personal digital devices.

Exemptions: MSS is committed to equity and accessibility and therefore may allow exemptions to personal digital device restrictions for certain purposes including:

- Medical support needs
- As part of a Competency Based Individual Education Plan or Service Plan
- In case of emergency, students can access their phones with teacher or administrative approval.

Alternate Communication: Families needing to contact their children during instructional hours should do so by calling the school's main office. Messages will be promptly delivered to the students. Students wishing to contact their families can use the school office phones with permission.

Violations: Students in violation of the Personal Digital Device Policy will go through a tiered system of discipline actions.

Level 1- A warning from the classroom teacher and confiscation of the personal digital device for the remainder of the class. The student will then be expected to return the phone to their locker or designated area before the next class.

Level 2- The personal digital device will be confiscated by the teacher and returned at the end of the school day. The teacher will contact the family.

Level 3- The personal digital device will be confiscated and brought to the office, held by a school administrator, and returned at the end of the school day. After multiple office referrals the student will be required to store their phone in the office during instructional hours for a period of 3-5 days. The administrator will contact the family.

Level 4- If continued infractions of the Personal Digital Device Policy occur, they will be addressed individually with the teacher, family, and administrator meeting to discuss a support plan for the student.

More Information: For those interested in learning more about the updated *Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order*, visit the following support guide from the Ministry of Education and Child Care:

https://blog.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/808/2024/04/Personal_Digital_Devices_Support_Guide.pdf

References

Smale, W., Hutcheson, R., & Russo, C. (2021). Cell Phones, Student Rights, and School Safety: Finding the right balance. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (195), 49-64. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1287931.pdf>

Smith, A., Poon, C., Peled, M., Forsyth, K., Saewyc, E., & McCreary Centre Society. (2024). *The Big Picture: An overview of the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey provincial results*. McCreary Centre Society. Retrieved from https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_the_big_picture.pdf