

Special Meeting

July 20, 2026

BOARD MEMBERS

- Adam Krantweiss, Ph.D., **President**
- Jacob Shiffrin, **Vice President**
- Garrick Blalock
- Erin Croyle
- Sara Garner
- Todd Fox
- Jill K. Tripp
- Emily Workman
- Karen Yearwood

SCHOOL DISTRICT BUSINESS

TCIDA PROPOSED SOUTHWORKS TAX ABATEMENT

(View the video recording starting at 0:14)

- The board discussed the SouthWorks redevelopment project and the requested 30-year tax abatement
 - The proposal includes approximately 230 affordable housing units as the first phase of a larger mixed-use development
- **Concerns with Proposed Tax Abatement**
 - The board discussed how the requested 30-year abatement differs significantly from standard 7- or 10-year abatements
 - The proposal would base taxes on 12 percent of first-year net operating income (NOI) rather than assessed property value
 - Members expressed concern that first-year NOI could be manipulated, resulting in artificially low taxes for decades
 - Discussion noted taxes would increase only 2 percent annually, potentially causing the project's tax contribution to decline relative to overall tax growth
- **Potential Financial Impact on the ICSD**
 - Estimated project could generate approximately 150 students, with annual district costs estimated at nearly \$4 million
 - Even if many students already reside within the ICSD, members noted there would still likely be significant additional costs
 - Discussion highlighted concerns that projected tax revenue would be far below the anticipated educational costs
 - Members also noted potential reductions in countywide state aid if students transfer from neighboring districts into the ICSD
- **Affordable Housing Discussion**
 - Members emphasized support for affordable housing while distinguishing concerns about the proposed financing model
 - One member stated the proposal departs from established state affordable housing financing guidelines

- Discussion suggested the developer should meet the same standards required of other affordable housing projects
- **IDA Representation**
 - The board received an update on legislation that would expand the Tompkins County IDA and potentially add a school district representative
 - Legislation has passed both houses of the State Legislature and is awaiting the Governor's signature
 - Members discussed encouraging support for the pending legislation
- **Broader Policy Concerns**
 - Members expressed concern that approving this request could establish a precedent for future phases of the SouthWorks development
 - Discussion noted the full project could eventually include approximately 1,000 residential units
 - Members also discussed uncertainty surrounding additional state infrastructure funding connected to the project
- **Next Steps and Board Action**
 - Consensus emerged that the board should focus on the fiscal impact to the district rather than supporting or opposing the development itself
 - Members discussed requesting additional financial analysis and advocating for tax payments sufficient to offset anticipated educational costs
 - Board members planned to submit written comments and speak individually at the upcoming public hearing
 - The board unanimously approved a motion directing preparation of an official letter to the Tompkins County IDA outlining the anticipated financial implications of the proposed Beacon Communities/SouthWorks tax abatement for the ICSD

BELL-TO-BELL CELL PHONE BAN

([View the video recording starting at 49:17](#))

- The board discussed the district's current bell-to-bell personal electronics policy and whether changes are needed to ensure students do not have access to personal cell phones during the school day
- **Current Policy and Need for Change**
 - The original resolution under discussion was withdrawn after members determined the issue was not the absence of a policy, but rather how the policy is being implemented
 - Members discussed whether the district should:
 - Amend board policy
 - Provide clearer implementation expectations
 - Improve enforcement of the existing policy
 - Some members expressed concern that the current approach is not meeting the intended goal because students continue to access phones during the school day, including through phones stored in backpacks
 - Other members suggested the primary issue may be inconsistent implementation rather than the written policy itself
 - Members generally agreed administrative regulations would provide a faster mechanism for strengthening implementation while preserving the option of future policy revisions
- **Phone Storage Options**
 - Board members discussed requiring students to store phones in a way that makes them inaccessible throughout the school day
 - Storage options discussed included:
 - Secure phone lockers

- Locked phone pouches
 - Other systems that physically separate students from their devices
- Members discussed potential benefits of secure storage systems, including:
 - Reducing classroom distractions
 - Creating clearer expectations for students
 - Reducing the burden on teachers to monitor phone use
 - Improving consistency across classrooms and schools
- Electronic phone lockers were discussed as a possible option that could:
 - Physically remove phones from student access
 - Use individual access codes
 - Track when phones are stored and retrieved
 - Reduce classroom enforcement responsibilities for teachers
- Some members questioned whether changing storage systems alone would solve the problem and emphasized that accountability and enforcement would also be necessary
- Discussion also acknowledged challenges with switching storage systems, including product availability, shipping timelines, and installation requirements
- **Implementation and Enforcement**
 - ITA survey results showed some teachers believe that the current approach needs improvement
 - The primary concern identified by teachers was not the initial reminder to put phones away, but what happens when students do not comply
 - Board members emphasized the need for:
 - Clear implementation plans
 - Consistent expectations across schools
 - Consistent consequences for violations
 - Stronger administrative oversight
 - Several members argued that expecting students to keep phones with them but not use them creates an unrealistic expectation because students remain tempted by access to their devices
 - Members also argued for reducing the role of teachers as phone enforcers so they can focus on instruction and relationships with students
- **Accountability and Discipline**
 - Board members discussed whether stronger consequences are needed when students violate the policy
 - Possible approaches included:
 - Immediate removal of phones when violations occur
 - Moving away from repeated reminders
 - Using progressive, non-exclusionary consequences
 - Increasing administrator responsibility for enforcement
 - Members determined that immediate phone removal could align with progressive discipline requirements, as part of a tiered response system
 - Some raised concerns that inconsistent enforcement may result in some students receiving warnings while others receive stronger consequences
 - Members clarified that students would not be suspended for phone violations under state restrictions and that individual supports could still be provided when appropriate
- **Data Collection and Reporting**
 - Board members emphasized the need for reliable data to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy
 - Concerns were raised that current data may be incomplete because phone-related incidents are not consistently documented

- Some members preferred allowing the superintendent to recommend reporting metrics, while others argued the board should clearly specify requested information to avoid previous communication issues
- Suggested reporting topics included:
 - Implementation progress
 - Students using personal devices through IEPs or 504 plans
 - Discipline data
 - Effectiveness of enforcement
- Members argued in favor of requiring administrators to provide more frequent implementation updates during the first months of any changes rather than waiting for a mid-year report
- Members emphasized the importance of making decisions based on district data rather than individual stories or anecdotes
- Discussion also acknowledged the tension between accurate reporting and perceived consequences for school performance
- **Broader Discussion of Student Technology Use**
 - The conversation expanded beyond phone storage to the broader impact of technology use on students
 - Members discussed:
 - Caregiver education about technology use
 - Preventive strategies to reduce phone dependence
 - Developmentally appropriate consequences
 - Support for students who struggle with technology habits
 - Several members agreed that switching from one storage system to another would not solve the problem by itself
 - Members emphasized that the goal is to improve:
 - Student learning
 - Classroom engagement
 - Social development
 - School culture
- **Student Voice and Equity Considerations**
 - Some board members emphasized the importance of including student perspectives when making policy decisions, arguing that student feedback is especially valuable regarding:
 - Implementation challenges
 - Student experiences
 - Practical solutions
 - Others questioned whether students can fully assess the impact of phone use on their own learning and well-being
 - Members noted the importance of considering how enforcement may affect different student groups, with some arguing that consistent expectations may reduce disparities affecting historically marginalized students
 - The board emphasized that supports should remain available for students who need assistance complying with expectations
- **Impact of Phones on Student Socialization**
 - Members discussed concerns that phones may interfere with student relationships and social development
 - Members emphasized that schools are important places for students to build relationships, practice communication skills, and prepare for adult interactions
- **Proposed Solutions**
 - One member identified three primary challenges and possible solutions:
 - **Student Access to Phones:** Students have easy access to phones during the school day

- Possible solution: Require phones to be stored somewhere students cannot easily access them; storage options could include lockers, secure pouches, or other systems
 - **Lack of Reliable Data:** The district lacks consistent data about implementation and impact
 - Possible solution: Require regular reporting on implementation status, discipline data, and effectiveness
 - **Student Expectations Around Phone Use:** Students have become accustomed to being able to access phones during the school day
 - Possible solution: Move away from reminders and toward immediate phone removal when violations occur
 - **Final Board Action**
 - The board considered several possible actions:
 - Directing the superintendent to revise practices so student phones are inaccessible during the school day
 - Providing implementation status reports
 - Revising disciplinary practices related to phone violations
 - Ultimately, the final motion directed the superintendent to:
 - Revise district practices to require that students' phones are inaccessible during the school day
 - Revise the disciplinary approach to have the immediate removal of phones from students who have them out during the school day
 - The motion passed
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UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS

Dates are subject to change. [View the up-to-date board calendar.](#)

Tuesday, August 11

- 6 p.m. Public Hearing: District Safety Plan
- 6:30 p.m. Board Voting Meeting

Tuesday, August 18

- 5 p.m. Facilities Work Session
- 6 p.m. Finance Work Session

Tuesday, August 25

- 5 p.m. Audit Work Session
- 6 p.m. Board Voting Meeting

HELPFUL LINKS

- [Board Webpage](#)
- [Voting Meeting Recordings](#)
- [Committee Work Session Recordings](#)