

HCPS Instructional Screen Time Guidance

Balanced Technology Use in Grades K–12



Hillsborough County Public Schools recognizes that technology plays an important role in learning, communication, creativity, and future readiness. This guidance reflects our commitment to balanced, developmentally appropriate technology use that preserves opportunities for active engagement, collaboration, inquiry, movement, and meaningful interaction across K–12 classrooms.

Research on Learning & Development



Young children develop language, vocabulary, and reasoning skills through conversation, discussion, and interaction.



Excessive screen exposure may reduce opportunities for sustained attention, deep thinking, and active engagement.



Young learners benefit from multi-sensory experiences, movement, exploration, and collaboration.



Research links extended screen exposure to reduced opportunities for oral language development, social interaction, and self-regulation.



Many children ages 5–8 spend more than 3.5 hours per day engaged with screen media outside of school.

Education Week • JAMA Network Open • American Academy of Pediatrics • PubMed Central (PMC) • Eastern Washington University

Supporting Young Learners in a Digital World

Today's children are growing up in environments with unprecedented access to screens and digital media. While technology offers meaningful opportunities for learning and communication, research increasingly suggests that excessive or passive screen exposure during early childhood may impact attention, language development, comprehension, executive functioning, and opportunities for social interaction. Longitudinal studies have also identified associations between higher levels of screen time in early childhood and lower reading and math achievement outcomes in elementary school.

The primary grades represent a critical developmental window in which students build the foundational skills that support communication, problem-solving, self-regulation, and academic success. Research continues to emphasize that young children learn best through active engagement — including conversation, movement, inquiry, hands-on exploration, collaboration, and meaningful interaction with peers and adults.

While technology can enhance instruction when used purposefully, balanced instructional practices help preserve opportunities for meaningful interaction, active engagement, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences throughout the school day.

The Opportunity Cost of Excessive Screen Use

One of the primary concerns surrounding excessive screen use in elementary classrooms is the opportunity cost associated with it. Opportunity cost refers to what students may lose access to when instructional time is spent elsewhere.

When significant portions of the school day are spent on screens, students may have fewer opportunities to engage in discussion, inquiry, movement, collaboration, writing, and hands-on learning experiences.

For young learners, these experiences are not supplemental — they are foundational to learning and development.



Less Time In...

Passive viewing
Digital platforms
Isolated clicking or tapping
Repetitive practice
Extended screen time



More Opportunities For...

Active engagement and inquiry
Hands-on problem-solving and exploration
Meaningful conversations and collaboration
Critical thinking and reasoning
Movement, creativity, and interaction

HCPS Guidance for Intentional Technology Use in Elementary Classrooms

HCPS recognizes that technology can be a valuable instructional tool when used purposefully and in developmentally appropriate ways. In elementary classrooms, instructional technology should support learning while maintaining opportunities for meaningful interaction, hands-on learning, collaboration, movement, inquiry, and active engagement. As part of this commitment, HCPS Elementary Education has reviewed required and recommended educational technology usage in K–5 classrooms to better align instructional practices with current research on learning and child development. The following guidance reflects a balanced approach that prioritizes intentional technology use alongside the interactive, language-rich, and multi-sensory experiences most critical during the elementary years while supporting the gradual development of digital fluency.

Recommended Instructional Technology Usage in Elementary Classrooms

Resource	Recommended Minutes per Week	K	1	2	3	4	5
i-Ready Reading	30-45 min.				✓	✓	✓
i-Ready Math	30-45 min.				✓	✓	✓
Legends of Learning	30 min.				✓	✓	✓
Imagine Learning*	30-45 min.				✓	✓	✓

**Select students only. See program guidelines.*

Balanced & Intentional Technology Use Across Grades K–12

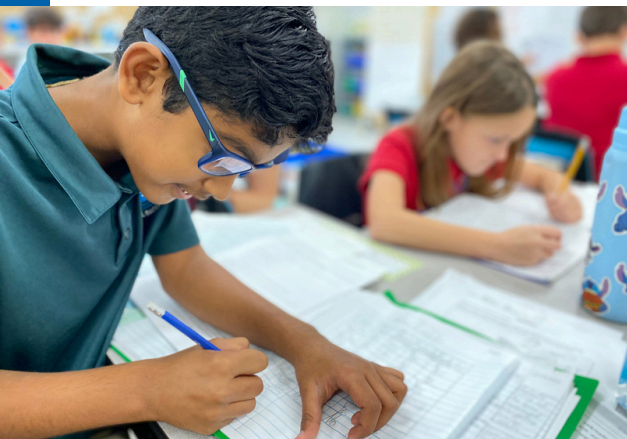
Student developmental and instructional needs evolve across grade bands. As a result, balanced and intentional technology use should support learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate, instructionally purposeful, and aligned to student growth and future readiness.



Elementary (K–2): Foundational Learning & Balance

In the primary grades, instructional technology use should be limited and intentional while preserving opportunities for language development, movement, collaboration, inquiry, and hands-on learning. Young learners benefit most from multi-sensory experiences that support foundational skill development.

Technology may also support targeted instruction, progress monitoring, and familiarity with digital tools and online assessment environments when used purposefully and in developmentally appropriate ways.



Elementary (3–5): Technology Integration & Digital Readiness

In grades 3–5, technology increasingly supports collaboration, inquiry, organization, differentiated instruction, and independent learning. Instructional technology should continue to be used intentionally while preserving opportunities for movement, hands-on learning, and meaningful peer interaction.

Students also continue building digital fluency and confidence navigating online platforms and computer-based assessments that support academic success and future readiness.



Middle School (6–8): Independence & Collaboration

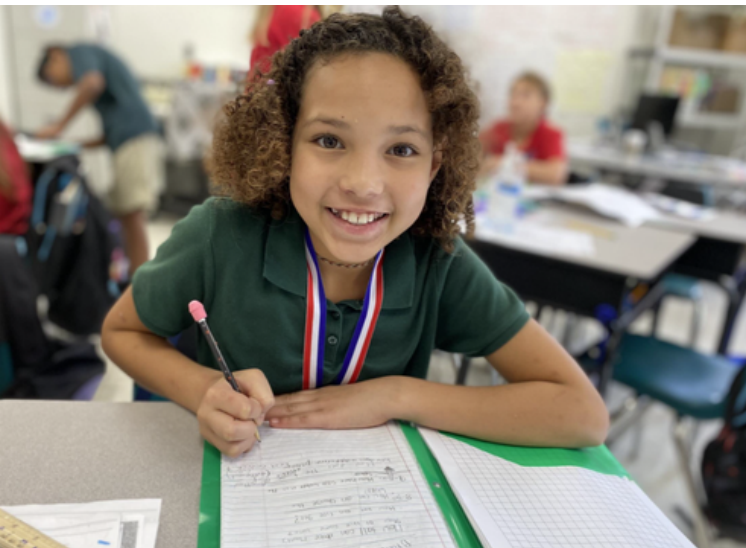
As students become more independent learners, technology should be used intentionally to support critical thinking, organization, collaboration, student discourse, and problem-solving. Balanced instructional experiences should continue to support active engagement, communication, and meaningful peer interaction.

Students should also continue developing digital fluency and confidence navigating online platforms and assessments that support academic success and future readiness.



High School (9–12): Future Readiness & Digital Fluency

In high school, technology increasingly reflects the digital demands students will encounter in college, careers, and everyday life. Instructional technology should be used intentionally to promote critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, and meaningful, authentic learning experiences that support future readiness.



Family & Community Partnership

Schools and families share responsibility for helping children develop healthy and balanced technology habits. Outside of school, students benefit from routines that prioritize conversation, reading, movement, creativity, sleep, and meaningful face-to-face interaction.

Families can support balanced technology use by:

- encouraging reading and conversation,
- creating opportunities for outdoor play and hands-on experiences,
- supporting healthy sleep habits,
- and modeling balanced, intentional technology use.

By working together, schools and families can help students develop strong academic foundations and healthy technology habits.



Supporting Balanced Learning Environments

HCPS remains committed to balanced, developmentally appropriate technology use that supports meaningful learning experiences, healthy development, and future readiness across K–12 classrooms.

This guidance reflects a balanced approach that values technology as a meaningful instructional tool while prioritizing active, collaborative, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences.



References & Resources

- **Education Week**
Research on screen time and reading comprehension
- **JAMA Network Open**
Longitudinal studies on screen time and academic outcomes
- **PubMed Central (PMC)**
Research on childhood development and screen time
- **American Academy of Pediatrics**
Guidance on media use and child development
- **Eastern Washington University**
Research related to screen time and school-aged children
- **Curriculum Associates**
Research on responsible, teacher-directed instructional technology use and balanced screen time practices
- **Balanced Screen Time Initiative**
Resources and guidance for creating balanced, developmentally appropriate technology practices in schools
- **Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)**
Research and national perspectives on balanced conversations around K–12 screen time and instructional technology