

Herington *Railers*



Unified School District #487
19 North Broadway
Herington, Kansas 67449-2430
Telephone: (785) 258-2263 * FAX: (785) 258-2982

Dr. Rachael Webb, Superintendent of Schools

Dear Herington USD 487 Families, Staff, and Community Members,

As we prepare to welcome our Railers back for the 2026–2027 school year, I want to share an important update regarding student technology, digital safety, and new state compliance mandates.

This spring, the Kansas Legislature passed **Senate Substitute for House Bill 2299 (HB 2299)**, a bipartisan law establishing a statewide "bell-to-bell" requirement restricting student personal electronic devices during the school day, and implementing explicit guidelines for digital communication between school employees and students.

For families of **Herington High School** students, this framework will feel very familiar, as HHS successfully implemented a phone-free environment this past year. Our high school students and staff have already demonstrated how a focused digital environment improves classroom engagement. **The major shift for this upcoming school year is that under the new state law, these identical "bell-to-bell" guidelines will now expand district-wide to include both Herington Middle School and Herington Elementary School.**

The Herington USD 487 Board of Education is currently updating our local policies to ensure full compliance across all three buildings before the state's upcoming statutory deadline. We want to outline exactly what these changes will look like in our classrooms, our hallways, and for your family.

1. Student Personal Devices: "Bell-to-Bell" Mandate

Under HB 2299, all Kansas schools must prohibit student use or physical access to personal electronic communication devices during the entire duration of the school day.

- **The Scope:** From the morning tardy bell to the final dismissal bell, all personal devices must remain completely turned off (or silenced) and stored securely out of reach.
- **Lunch & Passing Periods Are Included:** Unlike past building policies at the middle and elementary levels which may have allowed students to check screens during breaks, the new state law explicitly bans access **during passing periods and lunch** across all grades.

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Herington U.S.D. #487 does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, handicap, or age in admission to, or treatment or employment in, its programs or activities. Any questions regarding the district's compliance with Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, ADA (including information about the existence and location of services, activities and facilities that are accessible to and usable by disabled persons) may be directed to the Superintendent of Schools, who can be reached at (785) 258-2263, 19 N. Broadway, Herington, KS 67449, or to the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

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- **What Devices Are Restricted?** The law defines these as any personal wireless communication device capable of voice, text, or video communication. This includes **cell phones, smartwatches, tablets, wireless earbuds/headphones, and personal laptops.**
 - **School-Issued Technology:** This mandate does *not* apply to district-provided technology. Our students will continue to utilize school-issued Chromebooks for daily classroom instruction, digital assignments, and structured learning activities.

Staying Connected with Your Child

We fully understand that maintaining a secure line of communication with your child is an absolute priority.

- **Reaching Your Student:** If you need to get an urgent message to your child during the school day, please contact your building's main office directly. Our secretarial staff will ensure your child receives the message immediately or is brought to the office to speak with you.
- **Students Reaching Parents:** Students will always have access to designated school landlines or office phones during passing periods or lunch with staff approval if they need to call home.
- **Campus Emergencies:** In an urgent facility or safety scenario, the district will communicate directly and rapidly with parents via our official emergency notification platforms. School safety experts and law enforcement heavily support the uniform "bell-to-bell" model because widespread student cell phone use during an emergency frequently causes digital gridlock, spreads misinformation, and can block vital lines of communication for first responders.

Legally Allowed Exceptions

The state law outlines narrow, specific exceptions where a personal device may be permitted as a documented last resort:

- When explicitly required by a student's **Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan.**
- When approved by a licensed physician as a **medical necessity** (e.g., continuous blood

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glucose monitoring).

Building principals will coordinate directly with families who meet these criteria to set up necessary medical or academic accommodations.

2. Staff-to-Student Digital Communication Boundaries

HB 2299 also introduces strict protections regarding how school employees interact with students via digital platforms.

- **Social Media Prohibition:** School district employees are strictly prohibited from using personal social media accounts or personal text messaging to communicate privately with current students for school-related or official purposes. Staff members are also prohibited from requiring students to use social media for any classroom assignment or extracurricular activity.
- **Official Channels Only:** All official digital communication between staff, students, and families must occur exclusively through district-approved, contractually controlled systems where user accounts are continually managed and archived by the administration (such as district email and our official school communication app).

Creating a Focused Environment

While adapting to a phone-free school day will represent a shift in routine for our younger students, the results we have already witnessed at the high school level and the research driving this legislative action are compelling. Minimizing personal digital distractions directly correlates with increased classroom focus, reduced peer-to-peer cyberbullying, lower social media-induced anxiety, and significantly higher face-to-face social engagement among peers.

Our singular goal at USD 487 is to cultivate a safe, distraction-free environment where all of our students can lock into their education, build authentic relationships, and thrive.

We will share building-specific student handbook updates and exact device storage protocols as we approach enrollment. Thank you for your continued partnership, flexibility, and shared

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commitment to the success and well-being of our Railer students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rachael L. Webb

Superintendent of Schools

Herington USD 487

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