Implementation Guidance for Maine's "Bell to Bell" Policy

Introduction

The implementation of bell-to-bell restrictions on student use of personal electronic devices during the school day represents a significant shift in some school environments across Maine. While the policy is designed to reduce distractions and support student engagement and mental health, it also creates an important opportunity to more clearly define the role of technology in learning, strengthen equitable access to digital tools, and reinforce instructional practices that leverage technology in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways.

The Maine Department of Education continues to emphasize that technology, when purposefully integrated, is a powerful tool for learning, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving. This guidance document is intended to support school administrative units (SAUs) as they implement personal electronic device policies by providing recommendations related to:

- Instructional use of school-managed technology
- Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) considerations
- Equity and access to digital learning tools
- Restorative and educational approaches to policy implementation and discipline

This document is not a policy, but rather a guidance framework to support thoughtful implementation aligned with Maine's commitment to student-centered, future-ready learning.

Intentional and Instructional Use of Technology

Even within a bell-to-bell restriction on personal devices, technology remains an essential component of modern teaching and learning. School-managed devices and approved instructional technologies should be used to enhance the learning experience, deepen understanding, and support diverse learning needs.

SAUs are encouraged to:

- Prioritize the use of SAU-managed devices for instructional purposes, ensuring equitable access to learning tools across all students.
- Clearly define when and how technology is used within instructional time, ensuring alignment with learning objectives rather than use for convenience or substitution.
- Support educators in designing learning experiences where technology is used for creation, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, not passive consumption.
- Provide professional learning opportunities that help educators integrate digital tools effectively within curriculum design, project-based learning, and competency-based education models.

The presence of a personal electronic device restriction should not be interpreted as a reduction in technology-rich learning environments. Instead, it should reinforce the distinction between personal device use and purposeful instructional technology use.

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Considerations

Some SAUs may choose to implement BYOD programs to support instructional flexibility or expand access to digital tools. In the context of a bell-to-bell personal device restriction, BYOD programs require careful design to ensure clarity, equity, and instructional alignment.

If a BYOD model is used, SAUs should consider the following principles:

- Clear Definition of Purpose
    - BYOD devices should be explicitly designated for instructional use under teacher direction.
    - Personal devices used under BYOD must be clearly distinguishable from prohibited personal use during the school day.
- Structured Access
    - Device use should occur only during defined instructional periods and under educator supervision.
    - Expectations for when devices are active, stored, or restricted should be clearly communicated to students and families.
- Equity of Access
    - BYOD should not replace SAU responsibility to provide equitable access to learning technology.
    - Schools must ensure that students without personal devices are not disadvantaged or excluded from learning experiences.
- Network and Safety Considerations
    - SAUs should maintain appropriate filtering, monitoring, and cybersecurity protections for any devices accessing school networks.
    - Clear agreements outlining acceptable use must be established for students and families participating in BYOD programs.

BYOD programs should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are supporting instructional goals and not unintentionally reinforcing inequities or inconsistencies in classroom practice.

Equity, Access, and Supporting All Learners

Technology policy implementation must remain grounded in equity. Restricting personal device use during the school day should not reduce access to the tools and supports students need to learn effectively.

SAUs should ensure:

- Students with individualized education programs (IEPs), Section 504 plans, or individualized health plans (IHPs) continue to have appropriate access to assistive or medical technologies.
- Emergent multilingual learners have access to approved translation or language support tools when necessary for instructional participation.
- Classroom practices intentionally integrate accessible digital tools that support diverse learning needs, including text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and other assistive technologies.

Equity also includes ensuring that all students have opportunities to develop digital literacy skills, computational thinking, and responsible technology use through structured learning experiences.

Restorative Practices for Implementation and Discipline

Effective implementation of a bell-to-bell device policy depends not only on clear expectations but also on consistent, relationship-centered approaches to supporting student behavior. SAUs are encouraged to adopt restorative practices as the foundation for responding to policy violations.

Restorative approaches focus on helping students understand the impact of their actions, repair harm when appropriate, and re-engage positively in the learning environment.

Recommended practices include:

- Teaching Expectations Explicitly
    - Schools should proactively teach students what appropriate device storage and use looks like, including modeling routines at the start of the school year and throughout transitions.
- Progressive Responses
    - Responses to policy violations should prioritize instruction and reflection before punitive action. Examples include reminders, re-teaching expectations, and structured reflection.
- Restorative Conversations
    - When repeated or significant violations occur, students should participate in guided conversations that explore:
        - What happened?
        - What were you thinking or feeling at the time?
        - What are you thinking or feeling now?
        - Who has been affected by what happened and in what way?
        - What do you think needs to be done to make things right?
- Family Engagement

    - Schools should engage families early and collaboratively when patterns of non-compliance emerge, focusing on shared solutions rather than escalation.

- Re-Entry and Repair
    - When devices are confiscated or restricted, re-entry into normal routines should include a clear pathway for restoring trust and expectations.

Discipline under this policy should remain educational in nature wherever possible and should align with existing SAU codes of conduct and student support systems.

Implementation Considerations

Successful implementation requires coordination across leadership, educators, students, and families.

SAUs are encouraged to:

- Develop clear, consistent procedures for device storage and retrieval.
- Remind families of alternate methods of communication between their children at school and home, particularly in the event of emergencies or urgent matters.
- Communicate expectations through multiple channels, including student handbooks, family communications, and student orientation sessions.
- Provide staff training on both enforcement procedures and restorative responses.
- Regularly review implementation data to identify unintended impacts or areas for refinement.

Conclusion

The shift toward limiting personal device use during the school day creates an opportunity to refocus attention on high-quality instruction, meaningful engagement, and intentional technology integration. When paired with strong instructional design, equitable access to learning tools, and restorative approaches to student behavior, this policy environment can support both academic success and student well-being.

The Maine Department of Education remains committed to supporting schools in navigating this transition in ways that center students, strengthen instructional practice, and prepare all learners for a digitally connected world.