

Personal Mobile Device and Social Media Use in Schools

Background information:

To help foster a focused and safe learning environment the Government of Alberta introduced new standards in June of 2024 that limit the use of personal mobile devices and social media in schools. The order will take effect on September 1, 2024 and school divisions are expected to have policies, procedures or processes that align with the order by January 1, 2025 at the latest.

The Ministerial Order was the result of feedback the government received regarding the use of cellphones in schools. The survey received 68,000 responses with the overwhelming majority of responses indicating concerns with cellphone use in schools. These province wide survey results are consistent with the feedback Lethbridge School Division received from stakeholders regarding concerns with cellphone use in schools.

Purpose:

The Ministerial Order, division administrative procedure and school protocols aim to enhance student learning and well-being by reducing distractions and promoting a healthier school environment.

Lethbridge School Division Procedures and Processes Overview:

Lethbridge School Division has developed an administrative procedure document that aligns with the Ministerial Order. The outlined procedures are designed to help guide the work of schools and staff in relation to the use of personal mobile devices and social media in schools. Below are a few highlights of the procedure.

For more detailed information you can view the procedure by clicking on the following link: [PROCEDURE](#), and read the Frequently Asked Questions section at the end of this document.

Section 1 Restrictions on Student Personal Mobile Devices in Schools Highlights:

- Elementary school: Kindergarten to Grade 5 - Personal mobile device use is not permitted during the entirety of the school day, this includes instructional time and non-instructional time.
- Middle school: Grade 6 to Grade 8 - Personal mobile device use is not permitted during instructional time. During non-instructional time, the use of personal mobile devices is discouraged and will be limited. Middle schools may choose not to allow the use of personal mobile devices during non-instructional time. If allowed, usage must not exceed 30 minutes total per school day and must comply with all responsible use, school, Division and statutory requirements.
- High school: Grade 9 to Grade 12 - Personal mobile device use is not permitted during instructional time. The use of personal mobile devices during non-instructional time is permitted subject to responsible use, and in compliance with all school, Division and statutory requirements.
- Schools will communicate with their communities about the protocols and processes in place if parents/guardian need to contact students when personal mobile devices are not permitted and how personal mobile devices will be stored when not permitted for use in school.
 - Parents/guardians/caregivers can contact their children during the school day by reaching out to their school office. To find the contact information for your school, visit the Lethbridge School Division's [SCHOOL DIRECTORY](#) page.
- Staff, schools and/or Lethbridge School Division are not responsible for lost, stolen or damaged personal mobile devices that are stored in schools.
- Limited use of personal mobile devices will be permitted for health or medical reasons, for specific educational purposes or where a Principal has granted an exception per Section 3 of the procedure.

Personal Mobile Device and Social Media Use in Schools

Section 2 Social Media Highlights:

- Students are not permitted to access certain social media on school networks.
- Social media platforms and applications such as Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram will not be accessed on Division networks.
- Some platforms such as YouTube, Pinterest and Microsoft Teams may have limited access on Division networks for educational or extra curricular purposes.
- The Division reserves the right to determine which platforms, applications and mediums are considered social media for the purposes of this procedure and restrict or limit access to them on Division networks.

Section 3, 4, 5, 6 Highlights:

- Section 3 outlines provisions for limited use of personal mobile devices for health or medical reasons, specific educational purposes or where a Principal has granted an exception.
- Section 4 outlines roles and responsibilities for Lethbridge School Division, schools, staff, students and parents/guardians, caregivers.
- Section 5 outlines response to non-compliance with the procedure.
 - Students who do not comply with the procedure may face disciplinary consequences.
 - Consequences may include, but are not limited to, a verbal reminder, confiscation of personal mobile device, restrictions on use of Division network and referral to administration.
 - Non-compliance may result in further disciplinary processes such as suspension from school or other appropriate disciplinary measures.
 - Schools will inform parents if a personal mobile device is confiscated, or if a disciplinary consequence is assigned beyond a verbal reminder.
- Section 6 outlines communication and notification processes.

What We Need from Stakeholders:

Patience and partnership. We need your patience as we implement these new procedures. Some of our schools have already implemented similar processes, so the transition will be relatively smooth. For others, it will take time to get everything in place. Please be patient and kind when interacting with staff members as we work through this. Schools will communicate with their communities about how this procedure will be implemented at their site by the end of September.

We also need parents/guardians/caregivers and students to partner with us on implementing the procedure. Since personal mobile devices are brought from home, parents/guardians and students play a crucial role in minimizing the negative impact of these devices. We ask that you become familiar with the processes schools have in place and do your best to support them. We also ask that parents/guardians and caregivers limit attempts to contact their child/student via personal mobile devices during the school day.

The goal is to lessen the negative impact personal mobile devices and social media have on student learning and well-being. If we all work together, we are much more likely to achieve this goal.



Frequently Asked **QUESTIONS**

Why is the Division implementing a personal mobile device and social media procedure?

- The purpose of the Ministerial Order, the division administrative procedure and school protocols and processes is to reduce the negative impact of personal mobile device use and social media in schools. By working together, we hope to limit distractions that take away from student learning and decrease interactions that negatively impact student wellness.

Why are the rules different for different grades (e.g. elementary, middle school and high school)?

- We believe that one of the best approaches to responsible use of technology is a gradual release of responsibility that is age appropriate. As students progress through various levels of school, they will have increasing opportunities to use personal mobile devices. This approach is consistent with many existing processes schools already have in place.

Why don't you have the same rules for every school? Allowing different schools to have different rules is confusing.

- In some cases, the procedure is directive and requires all schools to follow the same rules. In other cases, the procedure allows for flexibility. We have over 12,000 students in 24 schools, with schools ranging in size from just over 100 students to over 1500 students. This diversity requires flexibility in how each school enacts the procedure. For example, some schools store cellphones in lockers, while others do not use lockers, so different solutions are required. Schools will communicate the details of their processes by the end of September.

What is a personal mobile device?

- Any personal electronic device capable of communicating or accessing the internet. This includes but is not limited to cellphones, tablets, laptops, and smartwatches. It may also include devices capable of communicating with a personal mobile device such as headphones, earbuds or smart speakers. Division-owned devices such as tablets and laptops are considered separate from this procedure. These devices may be used under the supervision of a teacher or with approval from school administration for specific learning activities structured to enhance student learning outcomes.

Can students bring personal mobile devices to school?

- Yes. However, we recommend that students do not bring personal mobile devices to school, unless a student has a specific health, medical or learning need that requires one. If a student chooses to bring a personal mobile device to school, they do so at their own risk and are responsible for its use. Lethbridge School Division assumes no responsibility for the safety, security, loss, repair or replacement of personal mobile devices.

Will stakeholders (students, staff, parents/guardians/caregivers, community members) be able to provide input on the procedure once it is implemented?

- Yes. Ideally we would have been able to gather feedback prior to implementing the procedure. However, we felt it was best to have an initial procedure completed for the start of the school year when the Ministerial Order came into force, rather than wait to enact a new procedure part way through the school year. Later in the fall (October to November) we will ask for feedback on the procedure through our website and we will also host an event where stakeholders can attend and provide feedback and learn more about technology in schools and digital wellness. We will use feedback along with input from schools to update the procedure prior to January 1, 2025. Additionally, schools will engage with students and their school councils to get feedback on the procedure and school processes that support it.

Frequently Asked QUESTIONS

How will the Division handle social media access?

- It is important to understand, restricting access to social media on Division networks will not eliminate the use of social media by students as they can still access these platforms using their own data plan. There will be little to no access to any social media platforms through our guest network. If a student logs into a Division-owned device and is using our regular network, they may have limited access to certain social media platforms that are used for educational purposes such as Microsoft Teams. The Division reserves the right to determine what constitutes social media and restrict access to these platforms on our networks. We closely monitor many social media platforms and restrict access to them on our networks. However, this does not mean students cannot access them outside of our network. We will continue to monitor and update our practices related to restricting social media as we implement the procedure.

What procedures will be put in place for parents/guardians/caregivers to reach their children at school, without the use of cellphones?

- Schools will communicate how this will occur. For the most part you can contact the school office, much like we did before cellphone ownership was so widespread. If there are specific, special circumstances where a student may need access to a personal mobile device, you can contact your school directly to discuss these needs. In emergency situations schools follow specific protocols that do not rely on the use of personal mobile devices. The school and/or division will coordinate communication in these situations.

What responsibility will school staff members have in terms of modelling this procedure in their schools?

- Staff are expected to model responsible use of personal mobile devices that are consistent with this procedure. However, it is important to understand that at times, staff may need to use mobile devices in ways that are inconsistent with this procedure as part of fulfilling their professional duties. In other words, staff will strive to adhere to the procedure, but there will be times when their job responsibilities require exceptions.

What can parents/guardians/caregivers do to help with implementing this procedure?

- Parents/guardians/caregivers can support the implementation of this procedure by familiarizing themselves with the new rules and discussing them with their children. Encourage your children to follow the guidelines and explain the benefits of minimizing distractions and promoting a healthier school environment. Limit attempts to contact your child/student via personal mobile devices during the school day. Be patient with your school and staff as they implement these new rules and guidelines. Also, please remember, this procedure will not eliminate all the negative aspects of personal mobile device and social media use in schools. It is important that parents/guardians, caregivers promote responsible use outside of school hours and support the processes schools have in place. We cannot do this alone.

What can students do to help with this procedure?

- Students can help by understanding and following the new rules regarding personal mobile devices and social media use. Store your device as directed by your school and keep it off or on silent during school hours. Be mindful of the reasons behind these rules and how they contribute to a better learning environment. If you have questions, talk to staff members. Your support and responsible behaviour will make a significant difference in creating a focused and positive school atmosphere.

Where can I find a copy of the procedure?

- To find the procedure, please click on the following link: [PROCEDURE](#).



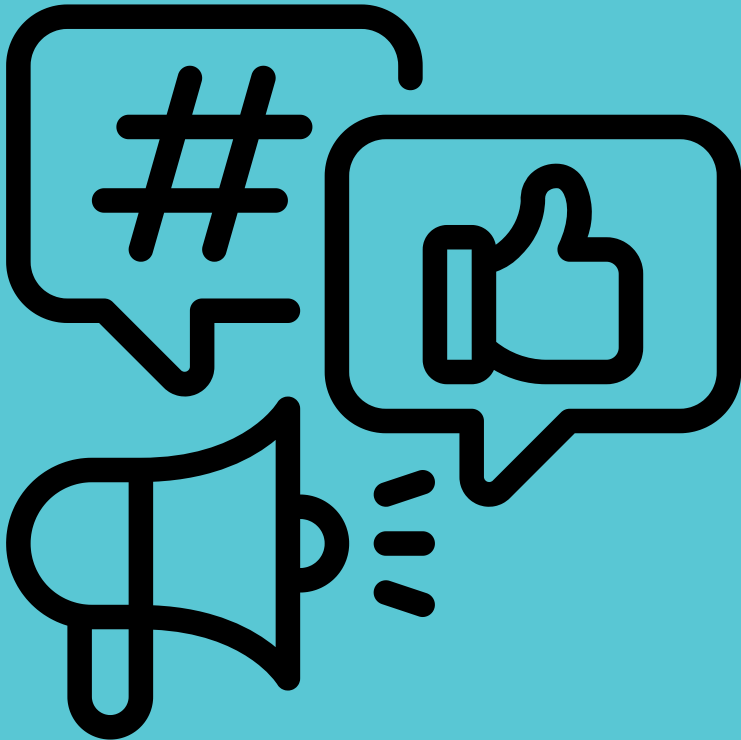
Frequently Asked **QUESTIONS**

More information:

To learn more about the Government of Alberta's cellphone use in schools engagement process, along with links to the Ministerial Order, establishing the Standards for the Use of Personal Mobile Devices and Social Media in Schools, along with the Limiting distractions in Alberta's classrooms media release, click here: [MINISTERIAL ORDER](#).

To view the Division's Use of Personal Mobile Devices and Social Media in Schools procedure, click here: [PROCEDURE](#).

For details about Division-wide opportunities to learn more about responsible use of technology, visit the Division's [DIGITAL WELLNESS](#) page.



Lethbridge
SCHOOL DIVISION