

January 12, 2026

CLEAR THE CLASSROOM – NEW JERSEY ENACTS STATEWIDE LIMITS ON STUDENT INTERNET-ENABLED DEVICES

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On January 8, 2026, Governor Phil Murphy signed legislation which requires New Jersey boards of education to develop policies that restrict student use of “internet-enabled devices” in K-12 schools, with implementation beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. The act is intended to create more focused learning environments.

The act defines an “internet-enabled device” broadly to include smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, and other devices capable of connecting to the internet and enabling access to online content, including social media applications. The definition excludes non-internet-enabled devices, as well as internet-enabled-devices that are provided by public schools when used for educational purposes.

The act directs the New Jersey Commissioner of Education (“Commissioner”) to issue statewide guidelines to assist boards of education in developing local policies. These guidelines must be issued no later than (90) days after the act’s effective date.

At a minimum, the guidelines must be age-appropriate and grade-level differentiated, and they must prohibit non-academic use of internet-enabled devices on school grounds during the school day. They must also be consistent with State and federal law, including accommodations required by an Individualized Education Program, a Section 504 plan, or a student health plan. The guidelines must address student use of cell phones in emergencies or in response to perceived threats of danger.

Additionally, the guidelines must authorize student use of internet-enabled devices in specific circumstances, including where authorized by an administrator for a necessary specified purpose when no reasonable alternative exists, where necessary for prescribed care supported by health care documentation, for translation services, on a case-by-case basis for a student caregiver who is routinely responsible for the care or well-being of a family member with approval of the administration, and circumstances in which device use is required by law. The guidelines must also address devices limited to text or voice only, storage options such as locked pouches and lockers, network-based restrictions to prevent access to social media platforms, and protocols for communicating local policy requirements to students, families, and teaching staff members. The

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Commissioner must consult with education stakeholders and develop guidelines that promote student learning and well-being.

Each board of education must adopt a policy covering student use of internet-enabled devices during regular school hours, on school buses, and at school-sanctioned events when students are under the direct supervision of teaching staff members or board employees. The policy is required to address device use during emergencies or perceived threats of danger and must be consistent with the statewide guidelines. Boards may adopt policies that are more stringent than the guidelines, and school leadership retains discretion to make reasonable accommodations for educational purposes.

The act takes effect immediately, but applies beginning with the first full school year following enactment, which is the 2026-2027 school year. The attorneys at Schenck Price are prepared to assist with compliance and implementation.

For more information on this new legislation or related issues, please contact Marc Zitomer at MHZ@spsk.com or 973-540-7329.

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