

Smart Devices Policy

Smartphones and personal smart devices (ex: smart phones, smart watches) may not be used by students during school hours (8:00am-3:30pm). We understand that many students will bring phones to school for travel emergencies and after school responsibilities and activities; our expectation is that we will not see them and students will not use them during the school day.

1. Upon arrival, students will place their device(s) into a slot box location (phone locker).
2. Each student will be assigned a slot.
3. The device(s) must be turned in when the student arrives at school. This is one way our school administration will take attendance and track tardies.
4. The device(s) will be picked up at the end of the school day or when the student leaves school.

The slot box/phone locker is mobile and will be moved to a secure location in the front office for the duration of the school day. If students check out of school earlier, their phones will be accessible by request in the front office.

If a student's smartphone or personal smart device is visible during school hours, the device will be brought to the office and the following actions will be taken:

First Offense: Office personnel will notify a parent/guardian and will require the parent/guardian to pick up the device from the school office. The student will receive a demerit.

Second Offense: Office personnel will notify a parent/guardian and will require the parent/guardian to pick up the device from the school office. The student will receive a detention.

Third Offense: Office personnel will notify a parent/guardian and will require the parent/guardian to pick up the device from the school office. The student will receive a suspension (either in-school or out of school).

The school will grant exceptions to this policy when there is documentation from a doctor or educational professional which indicates the student needs access to the phone for specific health related reasons during certain portions of the day. We will work with the students and families in these situations.

Any student who uses an electronic device to take photos in a restroom or locker room will be suspended.

Draft Smart Devices Policy Rationale

The mission of Ankeny Christian Academy (ACA) is “Equipping students to be Christ-centered disciples to engage the world with the Gospel.” In support of this mission, ACA has adopted the core values of Academic Excellence, Christ-Centered Discipleship, and Authentic Relationships. The hope and prayer of ACA’s leadership is that everything we do as a school is consistent with its mission and core values. The unfortunate reality is that sin makes it difficult to do this well. The Apostle Paul challenged the believers at Rome (and challenges us today as well), “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2).

As the leadership of ACA has evaluated school culture in recent years, we have become convinced that the presence of smart devices in the hands of our students during school hours is interfering with the ability of our school to consistently and effectively achieve our mission and core values. ACA is not arguing that smart devices are in and of themselves inherently harmful or sinful, but they are extremely powerful and addictive, and they do create significant challenges within the context of a school day. In fact, the hesitation and fear often expressed by students in having their smart devices removed for 7.5 hours out of a 24 hour day shows that these devices are not purely a helpful tool of communication anymore, they have become a central part of our lives. In light of this, our school leadership has carefully studied various options in regard to student access to smart devices during school hours, talked to leaders of other Iowa Christian schools about their policies, and reviewed the recent state legislation, signed into law by Governor Kim Reynolds, which bans smart device use in Iowa schools during instructional time. Based on this work, we have determined that beginning at the start of the 2025-2026 school year, ACA will be “phone/smart devices” free during school hours. This decision was not made quickly or without serious thought, but was made primarily with a desire to improve our overall school culture and help us be more effective in meeting our mission and core values (see below).

Academic Excellence

The desire of ACA is to help guide students to the peak of their potential academically. Unfortunately, the presence of smart devices during school hours too often diverts our students’ attention from classroom instruction and leads to lower levels of engagement. Exposure to cell phones, gaming, and social media during the day takes away our students’ focus from their learning and in-person interactions, lessens their ability to engage for long periods of time, and interrupts the brain processes which lead to long-term retention.

Even when student smart devices are stored in their pockets, backpacks, or lockers, they are constantly tempted to find reasons to access these devices throughout the day, even during times when they know they are not supposed to use them. Many of the disciplinary situations this year in the high school, for example, have involved students attempting to use their cell

phones at points during the day when they are not supposed to and we are finding that students feel almost irresistibly drawn to their devices.

This addictive component and the lack of focus it creates has led to lower academic performance from our students, which our teachers are seeing on a daily basis. When students should be organizing their materials at the start or end of class, during passing periods and before and after the school day, they are distracted by their phones. More positively, there are increasing numbers of examples of schools that have gone “phone free” which have seen tremendous gains in student engagement. ACA believes that a phone-free environment will help our students develop self-control, time management, and the ability to stay present. The alternative is an environment where students develop ever decreasing attention spans and have a harder time completing educational tasks such as homework, reading, and writing.

Christ-Centered Discipleship

The desire of ACA is to point all of our students to their primary identity in Jesus Christ. However, smart devices and social media use during school hours often promotes finding identities in negative things, which studies have shown lead to significant increases in anxiety, depression, self-harm, and a host of other mental health challenges.

Connected to the above, the ACA leadership highly recommends the book *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt in which he clearly demonstrates a significant uptick in mental health disorders over the past 10-15 years among young people as the use of smart devices became common. Of particular note is his advice to avoid smartphone use until the age of 14, social media use until the age of 16, and, most significant to our lives at ACA, he strongly advocates that schools ban the use of smart devices during school hours.

If our goal as a school is to consistently point students to Jesus Christ, not only for their own benefit, but also for the benefit of those around them, we strongly believe eliminating smart devices during school hours will greatly assist in this effort.

Authentic Relationships

The desire of ACA is to cultivate strong relationships between all the people who interact with one another during the school day. Without smart devices, students are more likely to engage with one another face to face. The alternative is to have students spend their time “elsewhere,” disconnected from the Christian community around them, and guided by an online community that has been created for them through algorithms. Ironically, excessive use of social media has actually made students more lonely and more likely to engage in negative behaviors.

We believe that limiting phone access will help curb inappropriate use of cell phones and social media during the day. This past year, we dealt with some serious situations involving students

using their phones during the day in inappropriate ways. For example, there were times where students took pictures of other students in settings such as bathrooms and locker rooms, and then shared these photos with other students via text message or through posting on social media sites.

In addition, many of our most serious issues with unkind, bullying, and harassing behavior between students were the result of student text message conversations, many of which took place outside of school hours when students were under the supervision of their parents, but some of which took place during the school day as well.

We also noticed students struggling to connect with other students during the day when so many of their peers were on their phones. Furthermore, students are tempted to “retreat” into their phones throughout the day instead of interacting with the people around them.

It is also our hope that teachers will be able to spend less time managing phone-related disruptions, leading to a more focused and respectful learning environment. Our teachers should be given every opportunity to teach well, without the constant disruption and temptation that smart devices bring into the classroom and other parts of the school day.

A Limited Analogy

“Doing school” with students in the presence of smart devices has come to feel as ridiculous as conducting athletic practices/workouts where a vast spread of desserts and soda is made available to athletes at the edge of the field/court or right in the middle of the weight room.

In this analogy, throughout the practice or workout, student-athletes are given frequent opportunities to sneak away to the dessert table and indulge. The coach would obviously love for the student-athletes to muster enough willpower and self-control to avoid the desserts, especially when they inevitably minimize any progress being made in terms of physical conditioning, but yet, the dessert table sits.

The thought of doing anything like this in the context of athletics is ludicrous for any team that seeks to develop positive habits for success. In a similar way, there are habits of mind and heart that ACA desires for our students to acquire in school whose development is hijacked daily by the noise, interruption, and mediocrity proliferated by smart devices.

Parent Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Don't we want to provide students with opportunities to learn how to exercise self-control with their phones during the day, especially as they prepare for life outside of ACA?

Yes. Let's assume that students sleep for 8 hours each night. This still leaves students nearly 9 hours each day during the week, in addition to weekends and breaks during the school year, to learn how to use their phones in preparation for life in college or the workplace. ACA is hopeful that a break from phones during the school day will enable students to experience some freedom from phone dependence, equipping them optimally for life after high school.

2. Why not allow students to have their phones, but ask them to keep them in their lockers, backpacks, or vehicles?

Much of the research on young people and smart devices highlights the reality that when students have access to their phones during the school day, even intermittently, their levels of stress and anxiety remain high and they tend to spend more time on them between classes, in the bathroom, or during other less structured times during the school day.

We also know that the "fear of missing out" is lessened in a phone free environment because students are aware that all of their school peers are without their devices during the day as well.

Finally, and most importantly, a phone-free environment allows teachers/coaches/administrators to build stronger relationships with students. The presence of cell phones in student backpacks or lockers creates friction, countless interactions between students and adults during the day in which the first comment made is a request to either "put the phone away" or a confiscation of a student's phone occurs. This is tiring and discouraging for adults and students alike. Our teachers desire to mentor students with encouragement and authenticity. It will help tremendously if we can remove the cell phone as a stumbling block in these interactions.

3. What if parents need to communicate with their son or daughter during the school day?

We understand that kids having cell phones and a direct line to parents is a convenience we have all gotten used to and is hard to match. This transition will be just that, a transition that will take time. However, we do recognize that sometimes things do come up which need to be communicated. If those situations arise, parents are free to email their children at any point in the day using their school email, as all of our secondary students have school issued chromebooks which they may access during the day. Parents may also call the school office at any time and the message will be relayed to the student. Finally, students may make calls home to parents using one of the phones in our front office.

4. Have you considered the impact of this policy in the event of a crisis on campus?

Certainly. The feedback from law enforcement is very consistent in this regard and it's that students with cell phones make emergency response harder because there is conflicting information going out. ACA has emergency response plans that do not require student cell phone use and we need students listening to the adults in the building and not distracted by their phones in these situations. Communication with necessary information will be sent out to parents through official school communication methods in the event of an emergency on campus.

5. Some students need their phones for 504 Plans or medical situations. How will these situations be handled?

The school will grant exceptions when there is documentation from a doctor or educational professional which indicates the student needs access to the phone for specific reasons during certain portions of the day. We will work with the students and families in these situations and ask that they [complete the medical exemption form.](#)

6. Is ACA adopting this policy in response to the recent law passed by the Iowa legislature regarding personal electronic devices in schools?

We are thankful for the leadership of the Iowa legislature and Governor Kim Reynolds in working to pass legislation to address the challenges of smart devices in the hands of students at various points in the school day. We agree with this legislation and believe it will bear very positive fruit in Iowa schools. However, even if this legislation did not exist, ACA would still be proposing the same smart devices policy for the upcoming year.

7. Are smart watches part of this policy as well as smart phones?

Yes. Smart watches allow students to access many of the same features as smart phones and will not be permitted to be worn or used during the school day. Smart watches should be turned in along with cell phones.

8. May students simply leave their smart phones at home instead of turning them in at the start of the school day?

While we understand the thought process behind this question, the reality is that for many of our students, this will lead to a temptation to keep their phone somewhere accessible at school during the day (ex: in their locker, backpack, pocket, etc) while claiming they "left it at home." The primary purpose of this policy is to take the temptation to use their smart devices away from students during school hours. [If your child does not have a phone, we ask that you complete the exemption form.](#)

9. May my child have their phone after school during practices, games, van rides to athletic events, etc.?"

Yes, the policy applies to students when they arrive at school and during our academic day from 8:00am-3:30pm. When the school day ends at 3:30pm, students will be able to access their phones. If students need to leave early for an athletic event, they may get their phones as they leave.

10. The implementation of this policy seems like a lot of work and not everyone will be in agreement. Are you sure it's worth all the effort?

Absolutely. We believe that a phone-free environment will be a blessing for our school community and will help us more effectively meet our mission and core values. It will especially be a blessing for our students, freeing them from the distraction of their phones, and allowing them to be fully present during the school day. The first month or so will certainly be an adjustment period, but we believe in the long run this policy will become a very positive part of our school culture. We know that parents invest a great deal in their children's education and we want to make sure that we do everything we can to make this investment worth it.

Next Steps:

1. We ask that families discuss this new policy at home this summer. It is important that students and parents understand these changes to campus life and that we are all committed to upholding and fully supporting them when we begin in the fall.
2. We ask for a spirit of unity and humility as we undertake this initiative as a school community. (Ps. 133:1; Eph. 4:1-3)
3. We ask for your continued prayers for ACA as we seek to honor Christ in all that we do.
4. [Please complete this form](#) if your child has a medical exemption that they will need their phone for or if your child does not have a phone.