

## **Personal Digital Devices Research and Resources**

Prior to amending *Procedure 145 – Use of Personal Communication Devices*, the Delta School District considered available research, including the information below.

### **Reducing Screen Time at School**

A recent academic paper (Smale et al., 2021)<sup>1</sup> looking at the potential benefits and harms of cell phone use in classrooms to provide policy recommendations concluded that “removing cell phones from classrooms is likely to reduce students’ temptation to check their devices, play games, text, and surf the Internet, consequently enhancing their ability to focus and thus improving their performance due to greater intake and memory of academic material.” (p.51)

According to the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey results (Smith et al., 2024)<sup>2</sup>, during their last school day prior to responding to the survey, top reasons for which students reported using their phones included: to scroll social media (74%), connect with family and friends (65%), game (not esports) (26%), game (esports) (18%), and only 11% of students reported using their phones for none of these activities.

There is a growing field of research into the impacts of cell phones and social media on mental health and academic performance, however there is still limited in-depth or longitudinal studies and more research is needed to confirm causality versus correlation (Smale et al., 2021<sup>1</sup>; Abi-Jaoude, et al., 2020<sup>3</sup>; Vuorre et al., 2021<sup>4</sup>; Shannon, et al., 2022<sup>5</sup>). Social media use in particular has been linked to emotional and coping challenges, including eroded self-worth, fear of missing out, distraction, stress and anxiety, and exposure to cyber-bullying (Vuorre et al., 2021<sup>4</sup>; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020<sup>3</sup>; Shannon et al., 2022<sup>5</sup>).

To promote physical and mental health and support healthy relationships, HealthLinkBC (2023)<sup>6</sup> recommends a maximum of 2 hours of screen time per day for children aged 5-17. According to a recent report (Saunders & Colley, 2024)<sup>7</sup> based on the Canadian Community Health Survey, average screen time increased between 2018 and 2021. In 2018, 42.5% of youth between age 12-17 reported meeting the recommended 2 hours or less of screen time on school days and 21% on non-school days, compared to 29.8% and 12.2% in 2021. Increased screen time takes away from time spent in direct connection with others, physical activity, and learning activities, and delays sleep.

### **Digital Literacy**

As set out in the *School Act*<sup>8</sup>, “the purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.” Digital literacy is instrumental to meeting this purpose. Digital literacy can include both the basic skills needed to operate devices and programs, as well as the thinking skills needed to access,

evaluate, and utilize digital information. Jobs across all industries increasingly need foundational to advanced computer skills (BergsonShilcock, 2020)<sup>9</sup>. Digital literacy further promotes critical thinking related to internet safety, media, and online participation which benefit personal agency, holistic health, and political engagement and democracy (Cortesi et al., 2020)<sup>10</sup>.

### **Equity, Accessibility and Accommodations**

Many B.C. students face barriers due to factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, care status, disabilities, diverse abilities, immigration status or primary language.

Students who face barriers are likely to experience greater benefits from access to technology and internet to support their unique needs. Cell phones can support equity through access to supports and services, connections and relationships, applications for learning, and more (UNESCO, 2023<sup>11</sup>; McCreary Centre Society, 2018<sup>12</sup>; Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2021<sup>13</sup>). Cell phones can also support a sense of safety and promote social connection (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2021<sup>13</sup>).

The UNESCO Technology in Education report (2023)<sup>11</sup> identifies that, “People with disabilities face some of the most significant barriers in accessing quality education. Technology provides multiple means of representing information, expressing knowledge and engaging in learning, which can support people with disabilities, providing fair and optimized access to the curriculum, while developing their independence, agency and social inclusion” (p. 37). They further identify that “Some applications and technology-assisted learning initiatives support language learning” (p. 40).

### **Access to the Internet**

According to the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey, 97% of youth in B.C. had access to the internet in some capacity, and among these youth, 31% identified as accessing internet at school (Smith et al., 2023, p. 41)<sup>2</sup>. While highspeed internet or cellular services are available to most B.C. residents, many face barriers for access due to affordability (Ministry of Citizens' Services, 2022, pp. 26, 42)<sup>14</sup>. Students without internet access at home or cellular data may have access internet while at school or in other wifi-enabled locations outside of their houses.

*BC Youth's Access to Technology* fact sheet (McCreary Centre Society, 2018)<sup>12</sup>, based on 2018 Adolescent Health Survey data, identifies that a lack of internet access can create barriers to access health and mental health information, reduce feelings of connection and negatively impact school and employment skills (p. 1). They further note that those without internet were less likely to plan to graduate secondary school or pursue postsecondary education and reported poorer mental health and wellbeing, with higher levels of school absences, self-harm, and suicidality (p. 3). School connectedness was seen to be “protective for youth who lacked Internet access. For example, those who felt like a part of

their school were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent ..., to feel happy ..., and to plan to continue their education beyond high school.” (p. 6)

## References

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- <sup>8</sup> *School Act*, RSBC 1996, c.412. Retrieved from [https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96412\\_00](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96412_00)
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## **Resources for Parents/Caregivers**

### Digital literacy training

- [MediaSmarts](#): Non-profit organization that develops digital media literacy programs and resources with BC specific resources and curriculum charts for Grades K-12. Additional resources for parents include blogs, games, tips sheets, guides, workshops and tutorials, and videos.
- [Expect respect and a safe education \(erase\)](#): Online safety information, actions and resources to support K-12 students, parents, families, and educators in learning how to use technology responsibly, and stay safe from online harms.
  - erase Training sessions were designed to support families and caregivers navigate the digital world.
- [TelusWise](#) free digital literacy education program that offers informative workshops and resources to help people of all ages have a positive experience as digital citizens.
- Canadian Paediatric Society - [Digital media: Promoting healthy screen use in school-aged children and adolescents](#)
- Canadian Paediatric Society - [Screen time and digital media: Advice for parents of school-aged children and teens](#)
- Canadian Paediatric Society - [Social media: What parents should know](#)

### Assistive Technology

- [Understood.org - What is assistive technology?](#)