

Dear Clinton Parents and Guardians,

At the August 19th school board meeting, the board unanimously approved an updated cell phone policy, first discussed by the board in May. This policy will go into effect for the 2025–2026 school year and will be included in our Parent-Student Handbook.

In August 2024, Governor Gianforte encouraged schools across Montana to adopt “cell phone free” policies. After careful discussion and input, we believe this approach will have a positive impact on student learning, social development, and overall well-being at Clinton School. Below are several key reasons behind this decision:

1. Focused Learning Environment

Research and the experiences of our teachers show that cell phones are a major distraction to learning in the classroom. Students are often tempted to check messages, scroll through social media, take photos, or play games during instructional time. When phones are set aside, students are better able to fully engage in lessons without the constant pull of notifications or distractions. This allows them to retain information more effectively and helps ensure that classrooms remain centered on meaningful learning.

2. Strengthening Connections

A phone-free school encourages students to interact directly with one another, which builds stronger friendships and improves communication skills. Face-to-face conversations, group projects, and collaborative lessons foster a stronger sense of community and belonging. In addition, these in-person interactions help students practice and strengthen social skills that will benefit them well beyond their time at Clinton School.

3. Lowering Stress and Anxiety

Constant access to social media creates pressure for students to keep up with peers, respond immediately to messages, or maintain a certain online image. Studies show that frequent notifications and digital interactions often increase stress and anxiety among young people. By removing phones during the school day, students receive a much-needed break from these pressures. This helps them feel calmer, more confident, and more present in the classroom.

4. Building Responsibility and Independence

Without relying on phones for quick answers or instant communication, students learn to navigate challenges and solve problems on their own. This shift encourages the development of important life skills such as self-control, resilience, and responsibility.

These qualities prepare students to become more independent and better equipped to handle both school and life outside of it.

5. Protecting Safety and Privacy

Phones can create opportunities for inappropriate sharing of photos, videos, or personal information and can also contribute to instances of cyberbullying. A phone-free policy significantly reduces these risks, helping ensure a safer and more respectful school environment. It also reinforces the importance of protecting students' privacy and overall well-being.

6. Supporting Teachers and Classroom Management

This policy is also intended to support our teachers. Managing cell phone use, and misuse, has become a growing challenge that often takes away from valuable instructional time. By removing this distraction, teachers can focus more fully on teaching. In addition, the policy creates consistency across grade levels, leading to smoother classroom routines, fewer conflicts, and stronger learning environments for everyone.

We understand that cell phones are an important part of modern life, and students will continue to have access to their devices before and after school. However, during the school day, we ask for your support in keeping classrooms phone-free so all students can benefit from an environment focused on learning and connection.

The new policy is:

TELEPHONES & ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The possession and use of cellular phones, pagers, and other electronic signaling devices on school grounds, at school-sponsored activities, or while otherwise under the supervision and control of District employees is a privilege. To ensure the privacy and safety of all students Clinton School strictly prohibits the use of cellphones, photography, video recording, and any form of social media activity in the bathrooms and locker rooms. This policy is in place to protect the personal space and dignity of every individual and to maintain a respectful and secure environment within our school. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action in accordance with school regulations. In addition, students may not use cell phones or text message during the school day from 8:05 am to 3:15 pm. For off campus events, during the school day, such as field trips and athletic events students will be able to have their cell phones. Teachers will have a lock box to utilize during instructional portions of field trips or if students are using their cell phone inappropriately. If a parent/guardian requires their

child to bring a cell phone for after school activities, the phones must remain off during the school day. In the event of an emergency during the school day, students will be allowed to use a school phone. Students will receive escalating consequences each time they fail to follow this rule. Parents/guardians will be asked to pick up their child's cell phone from the principal if their child fails to follow the school rule.

Students are not allowed to bring personal electronic equipment to school, including but not limited to handheld video games and personal music devices and amp accessories. Laser pens are prohibited for use by students. If a student brings these items to school, they will be confiscated, the student will receive disciplinary consequences, and the item will be kept in the principal's office until a parent/guardian arrives at school to retrieve it. The school will not be held responsible for students' lost or stolen electronic devices.

Unauthorized possession or use of these devices is grounds for confiscation. Repeated unauthorized use will result in disciplinary action. Depending on the nature of the unauthorized use, the student's parents and/or law enforcement may be contacted and the student's cell phone may be searched.

See board policy 3630.

For more information on the policy and discipline, please see our Parent-Student Handbook.

Thank you for your partnership as we work together to create the best learning environment possible for our students.

Sincerely,

Clinton School Administration