

Greece high schools ban cellphones in class

Meghan Finnerty

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Mobile devices can't be used during high school classes anymore in the Greece school district.

The change levels the playing field in access to technology, unifies permitted use across the district and cuts down on distractions.

The new policy that includes smartwatches, tablets and phones is expected to start in September at all four high schools.

The school is providing electronic devices to support learning so students don't need to use their own, said district spokeswoman Laurel Heiden. The change would also cut down on distractions from personal devices.

Marc Fleming, principal of Greece Olympia, said technology is important to equip students. Teachers are integrating technology tools in their classrooms.

"We want to ensure that all students have access to those learning platforms. We can't rely on cellphones for that because not every kid has a cellphone" or a compatible smart device, he said.

Every student in the district will have access to a Chromebook device by November.

The provided laptops won't have loaded social media applications.

The school board voted to approve the code of conduct, which included the mobile device policy change, on July 24.

"If you're not interested in the content and want to go into your social media apps or listen to your music or just chat with a friend, obviously a cellphone is going to allow you to do that in the context of the classroom," said Fleming.

"It's distracting for the students. It's distracting for the teacher. It's distracting for the other students in the classroom that are trying to acquire their learning," Fleming said.

Students in grades 9-12 will be expected to have cellphones silenced and out of sight during instructional periods, according to the district.

Mobile device usage is already forbidden in bathrooms and locker rooms.

Greece schools worked on a stoplight system before. Some classes were green — ok to use; yellow — at the teachers discretion; or red — no phone zones.

The cellphone policy was brought before the Code of Conduct committee. "We wanted to standardize it more across our high schools," and they used Olympia as a model, said Assistant Superintendent Valerie Paine.

Olympia already had all classrooms as red zones with specific consequences, he said. It worked for them. Now the whole district has a standard.

The new policy also addresses consistency, where there was confusion or challenges before, throughout the buildings and the schools, Fleming said.

“Students in grades K-8 would continue to be able to access personal devices before and after school only,” according to Heiden. High school students will still be able to use their devices during passing time, study halls, lunch periods as well as before and after school. Cellphones can still be on their person.

MEFINNERTY@Gannett.com



The Greece Central School District Board of Education voted to prohibit use of cellular devices on school grounds effective at the start of the 2018-'19 school year. FILE PHOTO