

Atlanta Public Schools Policy Draft

Student Screen Time and Instructional Materials Policy

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish research-informed guidelines for student screen time during the school day while ensuring that instructional practices promote academic achievement, cognitive development, and student well-being. This policy also prioritizes access to high-quality physical instructional materials, with digital tools serving as a supplement rather than a replacement.

II. Definitions

Balanced Instruction

A structured approach to teaching and learning that intentionally integrates multiple instructional methods, including:

- Direct teacher-led instruction
- Guided practice and modeling
- Independent student work
- Collaborative learning
- Hands-on and experiential activities

Balanced instruction ensures that technology is used as a **tool to enhance learning**, not as the primary mode of instruction, and that students engage in both digital and non-digital learning experiences throughout the school day.

Balanced Literacy

An evidence-informed approach to literacy instruction that combines:

- Explicit, systematic phonics and foundational skills instruction
- Vocabulary and language development
- Reading comprehension strategies
- Writing instruction across genres
- Opportunities for independent and guided reading

Balanced literacy prioritizes **direct instruction in foundational reading skills**, particularly in early grades, while also developing students' ability to engage with complex texts, think critically, and express ideas effectively. Instruction should include significant engagement with **print-based texts** to support comprehension, retention, and fluency.

III. Guiding Principles

1. **Balanced Instruction**

Students benefit from a balance of digital and non-digital learning experiences, including direct instruction, discussion, hands-on learning, reading, and writing.

2. **Developmentally Appropriate Use**

Screen time must align with students' developmental stages, with younger students requiring significantly reduced exposure.

3. **Cognitive and Academic Impact**

Research indicates excessive screen exposure may negatively impact:

- Attention span and focus
- Literacy development
- Fine motor skill development
- Sleep and overall well-being

4. **Instructional Intentionality**

Technology must be used with clear instructional purpose, not as a default delivery method.

IV. Daily Screen Time Limits (Instructional Use Only)

The following maximum screen time limits apply to **Chromebooks, tablets, and similar devices during the school day**:

- **Grades K–2:**
Maximum of **60 minutes per school day**
- **Grades 3–5:**
Maximum of **90 minutes per school day**
- **Grades 6–8:**
Maximum of **120 minutes per school day**
- **Grades 9–12:**
Maximum of **150 minutes per school day**

Additional Requirements:

- Screen time must be **chunked into intervals** (no more than 30 consecutive minutes for K–5; 45 minutes for 6–12 without a break).

- Each instructional block must include **non-screen engagement** (discussion, writing, collaborative work, or hands-on activity).

V. Instructional Material Priority

1. Physical Textbooks as Primary Resource

- Atlanta Public Schools shall prioritize the **procurement and classroom use of physical textbooks**, particularly in core content areas (Math, Science, ELA, Social Studies).
- Physical materials support:
 - Deeper reading comprehension
 - Annotation and retention
 - Reduced cognitive fatigue

2. Digital Access as a Supplement

- Digital versions of textbooks shall be made available for:
 - Accessibility needs
 - Homework and extended learning
 - Emergency or remote learning situations

3. Procurement Guidelines

- All future curriculum adoptions must include:
 - A **physical textbook option** as a standard offering
 - A **total cost of ownership analysis** (devices, software, maintenance vs. textbooks)
 - Evidence of effectiveness in improving student outcomes

VI. Exceptions and Flexibility

The following are allowable exceptions to screen time limits:

1. Standardized Testing

- Screen use required for district or state assessments is permitted.
- Where feasible, the district will **explore and offer paper-based testing options**, particularly for younger students.

2. Specialized Courses

- Courses such as Computer Science, Digital Media, and Career Technical Education may exceed limits when necessary.

3. Students with Disabilities

- Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans may require adjusted screen usage.

4. Teacher-Directed Instruction

- Temporary extensions may occur when technology is essential to meet a specific learning objective.

VII. Implementation Guidelines

1. Professional Development

- Teachers will receive training on:
 - Effective balanced instruction practices
 - Evidence-based literacy strategies
 - Reducing passive screen use
 - Increasing student engagement without over-reliance on devices

2. School-Level Monitoring

- Principals will ensure adherence through:
 - Instructional walkthroughs
 - Lesson plan alignment
 - Feedback cycles

3. Technology Use Audits

- The district will conduct periodic reviews of:
 - Average daily screen time
 - Device usage patterns
 - Academic impact

VIII. Accountability and Evaluation

- The district will track and report:
 - Student literacy outcomes
 - Engagement metrics
 - Teacher feedback
 - Student wellness indicators
- This policy will be reviewed annually and adjusted based on:
 - Emerging research
 - Student performance data
 - Community feedback

IX. Effective Date

This policy shall take effect at the beginning of the **2026–2027 school year**.