

# Atlanta Public Schools Policy Draft (C&I Feedback)

## Student Screen Time and Instructional Materials Policy

### I. Purpose and Beliefs

Atlanta Public Schools believes that while students must be prepared to thrive in a digital, interconnected, and rapidly evolving world, technology should not replace the role of the teacher or the need for strong, explicit instruction. The district is committed to instruction that is primarily teacher-led, where the majority of explicit teaching, modeling, and guided practice occurs through direct interaction with educators.

Within this instructional foundation, Atlanta Public Schools values a balanced approach to teaching and learning in which students engage in both technology-rich and low-tech learning experiences that develop critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication, and responsible digital citizenship.

The district believes in high screen value rather than screen time alone. Technology is used intentionally to support, not supplant, high-quality instruction. It should deepen learning, expand access, and enhance opportunities for creation and collaboration, while remaining secondary to teacher-led instruction and student discourse. Atlanta Public Schools discourages passive digital consumption and prioritizes active, engaging, and meaningful instructional experiences grounded in strong teaching practices, student discourse, hands-on learning, and access to physical instructional materials.

Atlanta Public Schools recognizes that digital devices are important instructional tools in advancing meaningful teaching and learning when used purposefully and in balance with non-digital methods. When appropriately integrated, technology can enhance students' ability to interpret and construct multimodal texts aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence, engage in authentic problem-solving and research, and prepare for digital assessments and technology-rich environments.

Our commitment is not simply to provide access, but to ensure that

technology is used with intention, impact, and appropriate restraint. Educators are encouraged to design purposeful, student-centered learning experiences using frameworks such as the Technology Integration Matrix (TIM), ensuring that all technology integration is aligned to instructional outcomes and responsive to student needs.

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
- Purposeful use of digital tools and resources to enhance learning

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.

### Literacy Instruction **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

Literacy instruction ~~Balanced literacy~~ prioritizes **direct, teacher-led 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. APS encourages the use of paper pen assignments. Additionally, Instruction should include significant engagement with **print-based texts** to support comprehension, retention, and fluency and writing development.

### Screen Value

Screen Value is a framework for evaluating how effectively digital devices are used for learning. Unlike "screen time," which measures how long students are on devices, Screen Value focuses on the quality and purpose of that use. It classifies technology use based on whether an activity promotes active, higher-order cognitive processing (High Screen Value) or fosters passive, low-engagement consumption (Low Screen Value).

### Screen Time

Any period during which a student is actively or passively engaged with a digital device as part of the instructional day.

- Active screen use includes creating, problem-solving, collaborating, researching, and demonstrating understanding.
- Passive screen use includes consuming content with limited interaction or engagement.

### III.- Technology Use Expectations (Instructional Use Only) Guiding Principles

Screen time during the instructional day must be purposeful, time-bound, and aligned to learning objectives, emphasizing active use over passive consumption. While teachers should always prioritize instructional quality and student engagement, age-appropriate boundaries remain important for student well-being. Therefore, the following screen time recommendations apply to Chromebooks, tablets, and similar devices during the school day:

## Guidance

### ~~Elementary~~ Guidance

Grade Band	Daily Technology Guidance	Instructional Guidance
PK–2	Up to approximately 1 hour of purposeful instructional use, primarily teacher-guided.	Hands-on, play-based, language-rich, and teacher-led instruction with minimal independent screen use.
3–5	Up to approximately 2 hours of distributed and purposeful instructional use.	Blend teacher instruction with purposeful technology integration while avoiding screen-heavy rotations.
6-12	Prioritize instructional screen value and purpose rather than prescribed daily limits. Aim for technology to support no more than 1/2 of instructional activities, when appropriate, while avoiding prolonged passive or isolated digital engagement.	Balance with teacher-led instruction, discussion, writing, collaboration, and non-digital learning tasks.  <b>Technology may be integrated to support:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Research and analysis</li><li>● Collaboration and communication</li><li>● Creation and presentation</li><li>● Intervention and supplemental learning</li><li>● Access to digital resources and assessment</li></ul>

#### ~~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; and no more than the length of the instructional course 45 minutes for 6–12 without a break).
- Schools should monitor overreliance on passive or isolated digital learning experiences and ensure eEach instructional block must include **non-screen engagement** (discussion, writing, collaborative work, or hands-on activity).
- K–1 Devices: Students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 will not be assigned individual one-to-one devices and will not be required to take devices home daily.
- While secondary instruction may appropriately include greater technology integration, digital activities should generally comprise only a portion of the instructional experience and should be balanced with teacher-led instruction, discussion, writing, collaboration, and non-digital learning tasks.
- Prohibit elementary and middle school student device use during passing periods, lunch, and recess with limited exceptions for teacher-approved schoolwork
- Prohibit and/or blocking the use of non-instructional gaming platforms (e.g., Roblox and Fortnite) on District provided devices and networks and continue to block social media platforms
- Allow parents to opt their children out of using district issued

devices at home

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#### **V. IV. 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
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#### **V. Intervention and Supplemental Learning**

In early grades (P-5), interventions should not be delivered primarily or exclusively through software programs and must include explicit teacher-led instruction, guided practice, progress monitoring, and opportunities for student interaction.

Technology-based intervention programs should supplement, not replace, direct instruction and evidence-based instructional practices.

#### **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

- Students enrolled in virtually classes that include, but not limited to, Atlanta Virtual Academy and Georgia Virtual Academy and in courses such as Computer Science, Digital Media, and Career Technical Education may exceed limits when necessary.
- ~~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.

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The Board authorizes the Superintendent to develop and implement administrative regulations necessary to carry out this policy. This policy will be reviewed annually and adjusted based on:

- Emerging research
- Student performance data
- Community feedback

## VII. Effective Date

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

Move below to regulation

## ~~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.