



To: Parents and Guardians

From: Office of the Superintendent

Date: 4/7/2026

Subject: Prioritizing Student Wellbeing: Technology as a Tool

Dear Families,

As we navigate an increasingly digital world, SOMSD remains committed to ensuring that technology serves as a purposeful tool for learning rather than a distraction from development. Our primary focus is—and always will be— the **mental health and social-emotional well-being** of our students.

Recent data and feedback from our educators suggest that "always-on" connectivity can impact attention spans, social interactions, and overall student anxiety. To address this, we are implementing a series of strategic shifts to our technology usage.

Key Updates

We are enthusiastic to introduce a 'balanced-use' approach for the 2026-2027 school year. By ensuring students have meaningful time away from screens, we can better protect instructional quality and foster a healthier daily learning environment for every child.

Area	Change
Device Access	We are transitioning away from the 1:1 device model at the elementary level . Devices will now be managed via classroom carts to ensure intentional, teacher-led integration. We are currently evaluating a similar shift for our middle schools.
Social Time	Chromebook use is now prohibited during lunch and recess (Pre K-8) to encourage face-to-face peer interaction.



Area	Change
Smartphone Use	Prohibited for grades PreK-9. This ban will extend to 10th and 11th grades in the 2026-2027 school year.
Content Limits	To ensure a focused learning environment, we are streamlining digital access. YouTube will no longer be available for grades PreK-5, and internet usage for all PreK-8 students will be tailored to include only those sites essential for their curriculum.
System Controls	We are introducing a new Parental Control feature for students in grades 6-12. Since Chromebooks for grades K-5 will now remain at school, these controls will specifically support our older students who take their devices home
Cursive Handwriting	Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, students in grades three through five will learn how to read and write in cursive.

What we have learned collectively

Our 2024-5 community book club wrapped up a transformative deep dive into Jonathan Haidt’s **The Anxious Generation**, which served as a sobering wake-up call for all of us. Through our discussions, we grappled with the shift from a "play-based" to a "phone-based" childhood, realizing how the rapid influx of social media and constant connectivity has restructured the mental landscape of our younger generations. We walked away with a collective commitment to fostering more offline "free play" and establishing firmer digital boundaries to combat the rising tide of sleep deprivation and social fragmentation.



Transitioning to Our Next Read

While Haidt's work highlighted the *why* behind the current mental health crisis, we are now shifting our lens to the *how* of reclaiming our cognitive clarity. Our next selection is **Stolen Focus** by Johann Hari.

- The Goal: To understand the systemic forces (beyond just personal willpower) that are depleting our ability to pay attention.
- The Focus: Moving from individual "digital detoxes" to a broader understanding of how to win back our minds from an environment designed to distract us.

We are excited to see how Hari's insights on "deep work" and flow states complement the lessons we've learned about protecting the next generation's mental well-being.

Future Initiatives & Oversight

Our work in this area is evolving. We are currently:

- **Exploring Screentime Limits:** Assessing appropriate daily maximums for digital instruction across all grade levels (PreK-12).
- **AI Oversight:** Establishing a **District AI Committee** to evaluate the ethical, academic, and psychological implications of Artificial Intelligence in the classroom.

Why Now?

The goal of these changes is to reclaim the "human" element of education. By reducing screen saturation, we aim to improve student focus, reduce cyber-bullying opportunities, and support the developmental need for unstructured, screen-free play and socialization.

We recognize that technology is a permanent fixture in modern life, but it must be used with discipline. We appreciate your partnership as we refine these boundaries to better support your child's health and academic success.

In partnership,

Jason Bing
Superintendent