WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Future Ready Learning with Purposeful Technology

A Teacher's Guide to Balanced, High-Quality Instructional Technology Use

Every Student Future Ready

Balance • Quality • Digital Citizenship

2025–2026 School Year

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to be a quick-reference resource, not a binder to collect dust.

You do not need to read it cover to cover. Find your grade band, scan the tables, and start there. The research is in the appendix for anyone who wants to dig deeper.

If you need...	Go to...
A snapshot of acceptable technology use for your grade band	Grade-Band Guidelines
Examples of what high-quality tech use looks like	What Quality Looks Like
A list of practices to avoid	Unacceptable Uses
Digital citizenship talking points for students	Digital Citizenship
Practical next steps you can take this week	Making It Work
How to respond when a parent or family member has concerns	Responding to Parent Concerns
Advice on device management	Device Management: Your Authority as a Teacher
The research behind these guidelines, including the debates	Appendix: Research Base

A Note on Students with IEPs, 504 Plans, and Specialized Needs

The guidelines in this document apply to general education settings. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans may require increased or different technology use as part of their legally mandated accommodations. Examples include technology-assisted communication (augmentative and alternative communication devices), text-to-speech and speech-to-text tools for students with learning disabilities, assistive technology specified in a student's IEP for access to the curriculum, sensory or behavioral supports prescribed in the IEP, and visual or auditory supports for students with sensory impairments. If a student's IEP or 504 plan specifies technology use that differs from these guidelines, the IEP or 504 plan takes precedence. Always consult with your building's child study team or the student's case manager if you have questions about a specific student's needs.

Why This Matters

Our District's Commitment

WPS Vision

Wichita Public Schools will be the premier district of choice and inspire each student and staff member to thrive and become future ready within the greater community.

WPS Mission

Wichita Public Schools prepares each student to achieve readiness for life, college and career through an innovative and impactful educational experience.

The **Every Student Future Ready** strategic plan calls for innovative and impactful educational experiences. That means technology should amplify great teaching, not replace it. It should deepen thinking, not just keep students occupied.

This guide exists because we believe in getting it right, not just getting it digital. Our three goals for instructional technology are straightforward:

Balance	Quality	Digital Citizenship
Technology supplements and enhances instruction; it does not dominate the school day. Students also need hands-on learning, direct instruction, peer interaction, movement, and creative time.	When students use technology, the experience should involve active learning: creating, collaborating, problem-solving, and thinking critically, not passive consumption.	Students learn to be responsible, ethical, and healthy in their digital lives, building habits that serve them well beyond the classroom.

We Know This Is a Debate

Technology in schools is not a settled question. Parents, researchers, policymakers, and educators hold a range of views, and some of those views are deeply critical. Books like Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation* have raised important questions about screen exposure and youth mental health. Sweden reversed its national push for early-childhood tablets. Parents across the country have organized to push back on what they see as excessive and unstructured screen time in classrooms.

We take these concerns seriously, and we built this guide because of them, not in spite of them.

The research is not one-sided (see the Appendix for a full treatment of both supportive and cautionary evidence). What the evidence does tell us clearly is this: *how* technology is used matters far more than *whether* it is used. Passive, unstructured screen time is harmful. Active, intentional, teacher-guided technology use supports learning. These guidelines exist to maximize the latter and eliminate the former.

The Research in a Nutshell

This section is a brief introduction to the research principles behind our guidelines. It is not a comprehensive review. For a deeper look at the evidence, including the studies that challenge these positions, see the Appendix: Research Base at the end of this document.

- **Quality over quantity.** The American Academy of Pediatrics now emphasizes the quality of digital interactions rather than rigid time limits for school-age children. Active, purposeful use supports learning; passive scrolling does not. This is why our guidelines focus on what students do with technology, not just how long they use it.
- **Active beats passive.** The 2024 National Education Technology Plan distinguishes active technology use (creating, coding, collaborating, designing) from passive use (clicking through videos and quizzes without thinking). Active use supports deeper learning. This distinction drives every acceptable-use recommendation in our grade-band tables.
- **Standards-aligned technology works—when implemented well.** Research mapped to the ISTE Standards for Students shows measurable learning gains across all seven student standards when technology is integrated thoughtfully. The key phrase is "when implemented well." Technology without good teaching does not produce results, which is why the teacher's role is central to every section of this guide.
- **Balance matters for well-being.** Technology should not crowd out physical activity, face-to-face social interaction, creative play, or sleep. Setting intentional boundaries protects both learning outcomes and student health. This is why every grade band includes daily time recommendations and non-negotiable screen-free expectations.
- **Digital citizenship is a skill, not an add-on.** Students need explicit instruction in responsible digital behavior, online safety, media literacy, healthy digital habits, and the ethical use of AI. These skills must be woven into everyday instruction, not taught once and forgotten.

Bottom Line

The goal is not less technology or more technology. The goal is better technology use, intentional, active, and balanced, so that every student is future ready. Where the research raises legitimate concerns, our guidelines address them directly.

Grade-Band Technology Guidelines

The following guidelines reflect the current WPS device environment, research on developmentally appropriate technology use, and our commitment to balance. Use these as your go-to reference for what is acceptable at your grade level.

Kindergarten: Minimal Technology

Device Environment

Kindergarten classrooms do not have assigned student devices. Technology use is limited and teacher-directed.

Why These Limits?

Research on early childhood development consistently shows that children ages 5–6 learn best through physical play, direct social interaction, and sensory exploration. The AAP and multiple developmental studies caution against screen-based instruction replacing these foundational experiences. Our kindergarten guidelines reflect the most conservative position in this document.

Guideline	What This Looks Like
Daily tech use	Minimal to none. Priority is hands-on play, social interaction, and physical movement.
Teacher-directed whole group	Short interactive lessons using the classroom projector or interactive display (5–10 minutes maximum).
Acceptable uses	Teacher-led virtual field trips, shared reading on screen, interactive songs or movement videos, brief whole-group digital modeling.
Digital citizenship	Begin conversations about being kind online, taking care of devices, and balancing screen and non-screen activities.
Key principle	Learning at this age is primarily physical, social, and sensory. Technology should be a brief supplement, never the primary mode of instruction.

Managing Shared Devices

These are school-issued devices, and you are responsible for ensuring they are used safely and appropriately. If a student is misusing a shared device (for example, accessing content that is not part of the assigned task, being unkind to peers through the device, or refusing to follow directions), you are empowered to remove the device from that student for the remainder of the activity or class.

Best practice: Log brief device-related incidents in the Student Contact Log in Synergy (not the Notes section). This creates a record of Level 1 behaviors. Consistent documentation is required by the Student Code of Conduct if a pattern of behavior needs to escalate to Level 2.

If the behavior is more serious or repeated, contact your building administrator or submit an incident referral in Synergy.

Grades 1–2: Building Foundations (Shared iPads)

Device Environment

Shared iPad carts. Students rotate through technology as one of several learning options or activities.

Why These Limits?

At ages 6–8, children are developing early reading, writing, and math fluency. Research supports short, positive impacts of focused digital sessions as an option for learning and applying, but sustained screen time at this age can displace the hands-on practice and teacher interaction these learners need most. The 30–45 minute daily maximum reflects AAP guidance and is spread across multiple subjects in short segments, not a single block.

Guideline	What This Looks Like
Recommended daily screen time	No more than 30–45 minutes total across all subjects, broken into shorter segments (10–15 minutes per session).
Acceptable uses	District-provided targeted skill apps, teacher-assigned creative activities, digital storytelling with voice recording, interactive simulations.
Teacher role	Actively circulate, monitor, and connect tech activities to learning goals. Never set-and-forget.
Digital citizenship	Teach basic device care, appropriate app use, asking before clicking, and beginning media balance awareness.
Key principle	Technology is an option for students to learn or demonstrate understanding. Most learning should still be hands-on, collaborative, and teacher-led.

Managing Shared Devices

These are school-issued devices, and you are responsible for ensuring they are used safely and appropriately. If a student is misusing a shared device (for example, accessing content that is not part of the assigned task, being unkind to peers through the device, or refusing to follow directions), you are empowered to remove the device from that student for the remainder of the activity or class.

Best practice: Log brief device-related incidents in the Student Contact Log in Synergy (not the Notes section). This creates a record of Level 1 behaviors. Consistent documentation is required by the Student Code of Conduct if a pattern of behavior needs to escalate to Level 2.

If the behavior is more serious or repeated, contact your building administrator or submit an incident referral in Synergy.

Grades 3–5: Expanding Skills (Shared iPads)

Device Environment

Shared iPad carts. Increased access, but devices are still shared and should be used with clear instructional purpose.

Why These Limits?

By grades 3–5, students can engage in more sustained digital tasks, research, multimedia creation, collaborative writing, that genuinely extend what is possible on paper. The 45–90 minute range is distributed across multiple subjects with breaks between sessions. The ceiling exists because research shows diminishing returns beyond this point and because students at this age still benefit significantly from non-digital collaboration, handwriting practice, and physical activity.

Guideline	What This Looks Like
Recommended daily screen time	45–90 minutes total, distributed across subjects with clear instructional purpose. Sessions of 15–25 minutes.
Acceptable uses	Research projects with guided sources, multimedia creation (slides, video, audio), collaborative documents, standards-aligned adaptive software, coding activities, virtual simulations.
Teacher role	Frame the task with clear objectives, model expectations, monitor actively, and debrief the learning, not just the product.
Digital citizenship	Introduce responsible searching, evaluating online sources, respecting others' work, password safety, understanding digital footprints, and introduction what AI is, but no independent AI interactions.
Key principle	Students should begin transitioning from consumers to creators. If a task could be done equally well with pencil and paper, ask whether the technology is truly adding value.

Managing Shared Devices

These are school-issued devices, and you are responsible for ensuring they are used safely and appropriately. If a student is misusing a shared device (for example, accessing content that is not part of the assigned task, being unkind to peers through the device, or refusing to follow directions), you are empowered to remove the device from that student for the remainder of the activity or class.

Best practice: Log brief device-related incidents in the Student Contact Log in Synergy (not the Notes section). This creates a record of Level 1 behaviors. Consistent documentation is required by the Student Code of Conduct if a pattern of behavior needs to escalate to Level 2.

If the behavior is more serious or repeated, contact your building administrator or submit an incident referral in Synergy.

Grades 6–8: Developing Independence (1:1 Laptops)

Device Environment

1:1 laptops. Students carry their device throughout the day, but devices stay in the building and do not go home.

Why These Limits?

Middle school students have 1:1 access, which increases both opportunity and risk. Research on adolescent self-regulation shows that explicit structure is essential at this age, students are still developing the executive function skills needed to manage open access responsibly. The "screens down" requirements and daily non-tech activities are directly informed by studies showing that even the presence of an open device reduces attention for nearby students (Sana, Weston, & Cepeda, 2013).

Guideline	What This Looks Like
Daily tech integration	Varies by lesson and subject. Not every lesson needs technology. Aim for intentional, high-quality use rather than constant device time.
Acceptable uses	Collaborative writing and peer editing, research with source evaluation, data collection and analysis, multimedia projects, coding and computational thinking, simulations, digital portfolios.
Screens-down expectations	Establish clear "screens down" or "lids at 45" routines for direct instruction, class discussion, and collaborative group work that does not require a device.
Teacher role	Design tasks where technology enables something not possible without it. Circulate and redirect off-task behavior. Use district provided device monitoring tools for appropriate guidance. Build in non-tech activities daily.
Digital citizenship	Teach media literacy, cyberbullying prevention, digital footprint awareness, AI literacy, privacy and data management, healthy screen habits, and respectful online communication.
Key principle	Having a device does not mean using it all day. Middle school students are developing self-regulation skills; explicit structure and expectations are essential.

Managing Student Devices

These are school-issued devices, and you are empowered to take them when student safety or appropriate use is at risk. You do not need permission to act. These are not personal devices.

Short-term removal (one class period): If a student is off-task, accessing inappropriate content, or misusing the device, you may take the device for the remainder of that class period. Log this in the Student Contact Log in Synergy (not the Notes section). This documents Level 1 behaviors and is required by the Student Code of Conduct to establish patterns that may need to escalate to Level 2.

Extended removal: If the behavior is more serious (for example, accessing harmful content, cyberbullying, repeated defiance, or any safety concern), take the device and contact your building administrator or submit an incident referral in Synergy. The administrator will determine next steps.

Remind students regularly: These laptops belong to the school. Using them is a privilege that comes with the responsibility to follow classroom and district expectations.

Grades 9–12: Future-Ready Application (1:1 Laptops)

Device Environment

1:1 laptops. Students carry their devices throughout the day and take them home in the evening.

Why This Approach?

High school students are preparing for college and career environments where digital literacy is a baseline expectation. The shift from structured limits to guided autonomy reflects developmental research on adolescent decision-making, while maintaining teacher-facilitated expectations for when technology is and is not the right tool.

Guideline	What This Looks Like
Daily tech integration	Fluid and subject-dependent. Some days may be heavily tech-integrated; others should be intentionally low-tech. Balance across the week matters.
Acceptable uses	Advanced research and synthesis, collaborative platforms for group projects, creative production (podcasts, videos, websites, design), coding and data science, career exploration tools, digital portfolios, college and scholarship applications.
Screens-down expectations	Continue to build in non-tech learning: Socratic seminars, lab work, hands-on projects, presentations, collaborative discussion, and problem-solving.
Teacher role	Facilitate student ownership of learning through technology. Help students decide when tech is the right tool and when it is not. Use district provided device monitoring tools for appropriate guidance. Model professional digital practices.
Digital citizenship	Focus on digital identity and reputation, academic integrity in a digital world, effective and ethical use of AI tools, information literacy, and preparing for digital expectations in college and careers.
Key principle	The goal is self-directed, responsible technology use. Students should leave WPS prepared to navigate digital environments independently and ethically.

Managing Student Devices

These are school-issued devices, and you are empowered to take them when student safety or appropriate use is at risk. You do not need permission to act.

Short-term removal (one class period): If a student is off-task, accessing inappropriate content, or misusing the device, take the device for that class period. Log this in the Student Contact Log in Synergy (not the Notes section). This documents Level 1 behaviors and is required by the Student Code of Conduct for establishing patterns that may escalate to Level 2.

Extended removal: For more serious infractions (accessing harmful content, cyberbullying, academic dishonesty involving the device, repeated defiance, or any safety concern), take the device and contact your building administrator or submit an incident referral in Synergy.

Even though 9–12 students take devices home, in-school use remains under your authority. Set clear expectations on the first day and enforce them consistently.

What High-Quality Technology Use Looks Like

Not all screen time is equal. The difference between productive and unproductive technology use often comes down to whether students are **actively thinking** or **passively receiving**. Use the framework below to evaluate and plan your technology integration.

Active vs. Passive Use

Active Use (Goal)	Transitional Use (With Purpose)	Passive Use (Minimize)
Students are creating, designing, or building something new	Adaptive practice software tied to specific skill gaps	Watching videos without a task or follow-up
Students are collaborating with peers in real time	Teacher-assigned videos with structured reflection or note-taking	Clicking through slides or modules with no interaction
Students are solving real problems using digital tools	Digital assessments and formative checks	Extended time on drill-and-practice apps with no teacher monitoring
Students are coding, analyzing data, or running simulations	Reading digital texts with annotation tools	Using devices as a time filler or reward
Students are researching, evaluating, and combining information from multiple sources		Free browsing without learning purpose

The Quick-Check Questions

Before assigning a technology-based task, ask yourself these five questions:

Five Questions for Quality Tech Use

1. **What is the learning objective?** (If you cannot name it clearly, the tech task may not be necessary.)
2. **Does the technology add value that a non-digital approach cannot?** (If pencil and paper work just as well, choose that.)
3. **Are students thinking or just clicking?** (Active engagement should be the standard.)
4. **How will I monitor and support students during this task?** (Plan your circulation, use of district provided device monitoring tools, and check-in strategy.)
5. **What will students do before and after the tech portion?** (Technology should be part of a larger instructional sequence, not the whole lesson.)

Examples by Grade Band

Grade Band	High-Quality Example	Why It Works
Kinder-garten	**Virtual Field Trip** The teacher shows a 5-minute virtual zoo tour on the projector. Students watch together, then turn and talk with a partner about their favorite animal before drawing it.	Brief, teacher-directed whole-group experience. The follow-up drawing and discussion ensure the video is a springboard for thinking, not passive watching.
	Interactive Movement Video The class follows an interactive counting song on the big screen that requires students to stand, clap, and move. The teacher pauses to ask questions.	Technology is active and physical. The teacher controls pacing and adds instructional value. Session is under 10 minutes.
Grades 1–2	**Voice-Recorded Retelling** After a read-aloud, students open Seesaw and record a 30-second voice retelling of the story, adding their own drawing.	Students produce in their own voice—creating, not consuming. The teacher reviews recordings to check comprehension. Short session within a rotation.
	Word Sort on iPad During a word study learning opportunity, students use a teacher-assigned drag-and-drop activity to sort words by vowel pattern, then check answers with a partner.	Short, focused practice. The partner check builds collaboration. Technology adds interactivity that paper flashcards cannot.
	Shared Digital Story In pairs, students use Book Creator to write and illustrate a two-page story about a class science topic, each adding one page.	Combines literacy and science. Students collaborate, write, and create—not click through. Clear product at the end.
Grades 3–5	**Multimedia Research Journal** Students research an animal habitat, then build a multipage Seesaw journal with typed facts, hand-drawn diagrams (photographed and uploaded), and a recorded narration.	Combines research, writing, drawing, and speaking. Teacher sees evidence of thinking in multiple formats. Students create—they do not click through.
	Collaborative Data Project In pairs, students survey classmates about a real question (favorite recess activity, hours of sleep), enter data into a shared Excel spreadsheet, create a chart, and present one finding.	Real-world data students care about. Technology enables chart creation and sharing that would be impractical on paper. Structured with a clear product.
	Digital Citizenship Stations Students engage with different learning opportunities, where they read a scenario about sharing a classmate's photo without permission, discuss with their group, and record their decision in Seesaw.	Embeds digital citizenship into hands-on, discussion-based learning. Technology documents the conversation but does not replace it.

Grades 6–8	**Source Evaluation Challenge** Students receive three online articles about the same event, one reliable, one biased, one satirical. Using a checklist in OneNote, they evaluate each and write a paragraph defending which source they would cite.	Builds media literacy with real critical thinking. Students must justify reasoning in writing, not just pick an answer.
	Peer Review in Word Students draft a persuasive essay in Word, swap devices with a partner, and use the Comments feature to leave two pieces of praise and one revision suggestion. Authors respond before submitting through Canvas.	Mirrors professional writing workflows. Comments teach constructive feedback. Technology enables a revision cycle that would take days on paper.
	Data Story in Excel Students collect survey data from their grade level, organize it in Excel, build two chart types, and write a one-page analysis. They present findings to the class with screens down for the audience.	Combines data literacy, writing, and presentation. The screens-down audience models balance—tech when it adds value, off when it does not.
Grades 9–12	**Collaborative Policy Brief** In groups of three, students research a local issue using vetted sources, co-author a two-page brief in Word via Teams, and share it with a community partner through Canvas.	Authentic audience, real-world issue, and collaborative writing with individual accountability. Teams co-authoring mirrors professional workflows.
	Podcast Production Students interview a community member or professional, record and edit a 5-minute podcast, then write a reflection connecting the interview to course content.	Interviewing, editing, and storytelling—skills that transfer across careers. The reflection ties creative product back to academics. No passive consumption.
	AI Literacy Debate Students are given a workplace scenario where AI could be used. Half argue for, half against, citing real sources. After the debate, each writes a position paper on when AI use is appropriate.	Addresses a pressing digital citizenship topic directly. Students engage with AI critically. The position paper requires independent thinking.

Unacceptable Technology Uses

The following practices do not align with our commitment to quality instructional technology. These are not listed to criticize, many emerged from good intentions during rapid technology adoption, but to help us collectively reset expectations. These are informed by both research and by concerns raised by parents and community members nationwide.

Unacceptable Practice	Why It's a Problem	What to Do Instead
Using devices as a reward or free-time activity with no learning purpose.	Reinforces technology as entertainment, not a learning tool. Contributes to passive screen time. This is one of the most common concerns raised by parents nationally.	Offer non-screen rewards (extra recess, choice seating, read-aloud time). If using tech for enrichment, assign a creative or exploratory task.
Assigning videos or digital content with no structured task, discussion, or follow-up.	Passive consumption does not produce learning. Students disengage quickly without accountability.	Pair any video or digital content with a note-catcher, reflection prompt, built-in questions, or discussion protocol.
Extended, unmonitored use of adaptive software as the primary mode of instruction.	Software cannot replace teaching. Without teacher monitoring, students may be off-task, frustrated, or practicing skills they have already mastered.	Use adaptive software for short, targeted sessions (10–20 minutes). Review data regularly. Supplement with teacher-led instruction.
Allowing personal earbuds or headphones for non-instructional content during class.	Signals that disengagement is acceptable. Creates classroom management challenges and equity issues.	Establish a clear headphone policy tied to specific instructional tasks only.
Using technology to calm or manage behavior (for example, giving a device to a dysregulated student).	Research shows this does not build coping skills and can reinforce reliance on screens for emotional regulation. (Note: IEP/504 plans may include technology-based supports, this applies to general education.)	Use SEL strategies, sensory tools, calm-down spaces, or other non-digital approaches.
Keeping devices open during direct instruction, discussions, or collaborative work that does not require them.	Open devices are a distraction. Research shows even the presence of an open device reduces attention for nearby students.	Build "screens down" and "lids at 45" routines as standard classroom practice.
Assigning digital busywork (for example, typing spelling words five times, or digital worksheets that replicate paper).	If the technology does not change the task in a meaningful way, it is not adding value, it is adding screen time.	Ask: Does the tech enable something new? If not, use the non-digital version.

Digital Citizenship Across Grade Bands

Digital citizenship is not a one-time lesson or a separate curriculum. It is an ongoing conversation woven into everyday instruction. When students use technology, they are practicing digital citizenship. Our role is to make that practice intentional.

WPS Digital Citizenship Pillars

1. **Be Safe:** Protect yourself and your information online.
2. **Be Responsible:** Use technology ethically, honestly, and with purpose.
3. **Be Kind:** Treat others with respect and empathy in digital spaces.
4. **Be Balanced:** Develop healthy habits around when and how much to use technology.

Grade Band	Key Focus Areas	Classroom Integration Ideas
K–2	Device care and respect, asking adults before clicking, being kind online, recognizing when to take a break from screens.	Use Common Sense Education K–2 lessons. Create a class "Device Agreement" together. Practice "ask first" routines. Discuss media balance using age-appropriate language.
3–5	Password safety, evaluating online sources, respecting others' creative work, understanding digital footprints, introduction to what AI is (not independent AI use), media balance.	Integrate source evaluation into research projects. Discuss: "Would you say this in person?" before posting. Create digital citizenship anchor charts. Use Common Sense 3–5 curriculum.
6–8	Cyberbullying prevention, privacy and data management, AI literacy, media literacy, healthy screen habits, academic integrity in digital work.	Analyze real-world examples of misinformation. Discuss digital footprint scenarios. Build screen-break routines. Address AI use and academic honesty directly. Use Common Sense 6–8 curriculum.
9–12	Digital identity and reputation, ethical AI use, information literacy, professional digital communication, preparing for college and career digital expectations.	Connect digital citizenship to college applications, career readiness, and civic engagement. Discuss real consequences of digital choices. Model professional communication.

Making It Work: Practical Next Steps

This guide is not asking you to overhaul your practice overnight. It is asking you to be intentional. Here are manageable starting points.

Start Small: Three Things You Can Do This Week

1. **Audit one lesson.** Pick a lesson where you currently use technology. Run it through the Five Quick-Check Questions on page 10. Adjust if needed.
2. **Establish a "screens down" routine.** If you do not have one, introduce a consistent signal for when devices should be closed. Practice it until it becomes automatic.
3. **Have one digital citizenship conversation.** The next time students use devices, pause for 60 seconds to connect the activity to one of the four pillars: Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Kind, or Be Balanced.

Over the Semester

- Review your grade-band guidelines and identify one area where your practice could better align.
- Try at least one new active technology use from the examples in the Quality section.
- Talk with your grade-level or department team about technology balance and share what is working.

Remember

This is not one more thing. This is about doing the things we already do with more intention. When technology is used well, it saves time, deepens learning, and prepares students for the future. That is the promise of Every Student Future Ready.

Responding to Parent and Family Concerns

Parents and family members are right to ask hard questions about technology in schools. These concerns come from a place of caring about their children, and they deserve honest, thoughtful answers. As a teacher, you are the most trusted voice in this conversation. This section gives you practical language for the most common concerns you may hear at conferences, open houses, or in everyday communication.

Before You Respond

1. **Listen first**. Acknowledge the concern before offering your perspective.
2. **Be specific**. Share what technology use actually looks like in your classroom, not in general, but today.
3. **Be honest about limits**. If you are still refining your approach, say so. Parents respect transparency.
4. **Avoid jargon**. Say "skill-building app" instead of "adaptive software." Say "students create projects" instead of "students engage in active technology integration."
5. **Follow up**. A brief email or note after a difficult conversation goes a long way.

Common Concerns and Suggested Responses

What a Parent Might Say	How You Might Respond
"My child spends too much time on screens at school."	"I understand that concern, and I share your belief that balance matters. In my classroom, technology is not used all day. I build in hands-on activities, discussion, and movement every day. When we do use devices, students are [give a specific example from your class]. I'd be happy to walk you through what a typical day looks like."
"I've read that screens are harmful to children's brains."	"That's a fair concern, and I've read some of that research too. What the studies show is that the type of screen use matters a lot. Passive screen time, scrolling or watching without purpose, is very different from what we do here, where students are creating, collaborating, and problem-solving. I also make sure we have plenty of non-screen learning time every day."
"Studies show kids learn better on paper."	"There is some truth to that, especially for reading and note-taking. That's actually part of our approach, if a task works just as well with pencil and paper, we use pencil and paper. We only use technology when it adds something we cannot do otherwise, like collaborating in real time, creating multimedia projects, or accessing resources we would not have on paper."
"It feels like schools are just using technology as a babysitter."	"I understand why that worry exists, there have been real examples nationally of technology being misused in classrooms. In our district, we have clear guidelines about what's not acceptable: no using devices as rewards, no unmonitored video time, no tech as a behavior management tool. Every time I use technology, I have a specific learning goal. If you ever have a concern about what you're hearing from your child, please reach out to me directly."
"What about the effects on mental health?"	"This is an area where the research is still evolving, and I take it seriously. The biggest mental health concerns in the research are tied to social media and unsupervised entertainment, not structured classroom instruction. We also

	teach digital citizenship, including healthy screen habits and knowing when to step away, as part of our regular instruction."
“Why does my child need AI in school? They’re too young for that.”	"I hear you. We are not asking young students to use AI tools. What we are doing is starting age-appropriate conversations about what AI is and how it works, so that as students get older, they can use these tools thoughtfully rather than being caught off guard. Think of it like teaching internet safety before giving a child full internet access."
“Why can’t you just teach the way things used to be done?”	"A lot of what we do is traditional, direct instruction, hands-on projects, class discussion, and collaborative work are at the heart of every day. Technology does not replace those things. But your child will enter a world where digital skills are a basic expectation, and part of preparing them for that is teaching them to use technology responsibly and skillfully, not shielding them from it."

If a Concern Goes Beyond Your Classroom

Some parent concerns may involve district-level policy, device management, app selection, or data privacy. If a question is beyond the scope of your classroom, connect the family with your instructional coach, building administrator, or the WPS Information Service and Technology team member. You do not need to have all the answers, you just need to make sure families feel heard and know where to go next.

Appendix: Research Base

This section is for those who want to explore the evidence behind the guidelines. It is not required reading for day-to-day use. The guidelines in this document are grounded in the following sources and findings.

Screen Time and Quality of Use

Source	Key Finding
American Academy of Pediatrics (2025). Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents.	The AAP recommends focusing on the quality of digital interactions rather than strict time limits for school-age children. High-quality content and prioritizing healthy activities (sleep, play, physical activity) are the most important considerations.
AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health (2024).	The relationship between screen time and health outcomes is complex and depends on developmental stage, content quality, context, and individual factors. The AAP uses a "5 C's" framework: Child, Content, Calm, Crowding Out, and Communication.
U.S. Department of Education (2024). National Education Technology Plan.	Distinguishes active technology use (creating, coding, collaborating) from passive use (watching, clicking through). Calls for all students to have access to active, high-quality technology-enabled learning.
JAMA Pediatrics (2022). Screen Time Among Children Aged 3–18.	Children's screen time increased by 52% globally since the pandemic, making intentional school-based technology practices more important than ever.

ISTE Standards and Learning Outcomes

Source	Key Finding
Crompton & Burke (2024). The Nexus of ISTE Standards and Academic Progress. TechTrends.	A scoping review found evidence that all seven ISTE Standards for Students are linked to learning gains when implemented with thoughtful technology integration.
Crompton & Burke (2023). ISTE Standards for Educators Leading to Learning Gains.	All practices within the ISTE Standards for Educators led to measurable student learning gains, including collaboration, data-driven instruction, and student-driven learning.

Digital Citizenship

Source	Key Finding
Common Sense Education (2025). Digital Literacy and Citizenship Curriculum.	A free, research-backed K–12 curriculum with over 140 lessons covering healthy habits, privacy, cyberbullying, media literacy, and AI literacy.
AAP Center of Excellence (2024). Screen Time at School.	Recommends that schools set clear expectations for device use, block age-inappropriate content, avoid using technology to calm

	children's emotions, and ensure screen use does not displace hands-on learning.

What the Critics Say: Cautionary and Contradicting Research

Intellectual honesty requires acknowledging that the research on educational technology is not one-sided. Below are key findings from researchers who urge caution. We include them not to undermine the guidelines, but because understanding the full picture makes our practices stronger.

Criticism or Finding	Source	How Our Guidelines Address This
Reading on paper may produce better comprehension than reading on screens, particularly for longer texts.	Multiple meta-analyses (Delgado et al., 2018; Clinton, 2019; Kong et al., 2018). OECD (2015).	Our guidelines state: if a task works equally well with pencil and paper, use the non-digital version. Technology should add value, not replace effective analog practices.
The presence of open devices reduces attention—not just for the user, but for nearby students.	Sana, Weston, & Cepeda (2013). Ravizza, Uitvlugt, & Fenn (2017).	"Screens down" and "lids at 45" routines are a core expectation, not optional.
National EdTech spending has not produced measurable achievement gains.	U.S. Dept. of Education (2024). OECD (2015). Various policy analyses.	We agree. Simply having technology does not improve learning. This guide exists to move from "having devices" to "using devices with purpose."
IQ scores and cognitive measures have declined in Gen Z, potentially linked to increased screen exposure.	Bratsberg & Rogeberg (2018). Various OECD PISA analyses.	This research is correlational and includes all screen time (entertainment, social media, gaming). It reinforces why our emphasis on balance and limiting passive screen time is critical.
AI overreliance weakens critical thinking and independent problem-solving.	APA (2025). Pew Research (2024). Emerging studies on AI and academic integrity.	Our digital citizenship standards include AI literacy at every secondary grade band. We teach when and how to use AI as a tool, not a replacement for thinking.
Early childhood screen exposure is linked to attention difficulties and reduced play.	Madigan et al. (2019). JAMA Pediatrics. Scienceline (2026).	Kindergarten has zero assigned devices. K–2 guidelines prioritize hands-on play, movement, and social interaction.
Excessive screen time is associated with anxiety, depression, and social isolation in adolescents.	Twenge & Campbell (2018). CDC (2025). Haidt (2024), The Anxious Generation.	Most research targets recreational and social media use, not structured educational technology. Our commitment to balance, screen-free activities, and digital citizenship directly addresses this.

Sweden reversed its national push for early-childhood tablets, citing lack of evidence for learning benefits.	Swedish government (2023) policy reversal. International media coverage.	Our K guidelines already align with this position: minimal technology, teacher-directed only, no individual device use.

The Honest Takeaway

The research on educational technology is not settled. It is evolving, and reasonable experts disagree. What is clear is that how technology is used matters far more than whether it is used. Passive, unmonitored, purposeless screen time is harmful. Active, intentional, teacher-guided technology use supports learning. These guidelines are designed to maximize the latter and eliminate the former. We will continue to update this guide as new evidence emerges.

Recommended Further Reading

4. ISTE Standards for Students Practical Guide: portal.ct.gov (free PDF with age-band articulations for ages 4–7, 8–11, and 12–14)
5. Common Sense Education Digital Citizenship Curriculum: commonsense.org/education
6. 2024 National Education Technology Plan: tech.ed.gov
7. AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health: aap.org
8. Haidt, J. (2024). The Anxious Generation. Penguin Press.
9. Blended and Personalized Learning Practices at Work – Digital Use: practices.learningaccelerator.org

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