



RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL NEW YORK CITY

Media Best Practice Guidelines

1. Statement
2. Grade Level Expectations
3. Community Expectations
4. Electronic Technology in the Classroom and the Curriculum

Statement

The School endeavors to provide students with the capacity to engage in the world through their own imagination, thoughts and deeds. Each stage of development, from early childhood to the adolescent years, is supported and nurtured through an intentional curriculum and a child-centered pedagogy. The active relationships among the students and their teachers, peers, and environment support the students to participate deeply in their own learning through meaningful interactions and critical thinking. We understand that electronic media in all forms, regardless of content replace direct human contact and sensory experience with a mechanically synthesized world of images.

We recognize that computer literacy is a necessity in today's world. However, it is clear that students learn to best use electronic media as resources and tools when they are introduced after the child has developed a rich experiential foundation. At an appropriate developmental age, media can become a supplement to – not a substitute for- the richness of direct human experience. Therefore, facility with a computer and skill with the internet enter into learning experiences when students can begin to make responsible use of the machines as tools within the general curriculum. Computer literacy is a necessity and an ongoing opportunity but not a subject area separate from what one uses a computer to do.

The following guidelines offer practical recommendations for minimizing students' time spent relating the world through screen-based devices.

Grade Level Expectations

Early Childhood

Children, especially in the early years, learn about the world thorough direct experiences and human relationships. The gift of a screen-free childhood from birth to approximately age 7 is strongly encouraged.

Elementary

Grades 1 -3

Screen time is a rare exception; it is not part of a daily or even weekly rhythm (e.g.: weekly movie)

Screen time is not part of social experiences during play dates or birthday parties

Grades 4 - 5:

Screen time is limited and not viewed on school days (including Sunday evening)
Parent/adult supervision is always practiced in conjunction with limited screen time use
Screen time is not part of social experiences during play dates or birthday parties

Grade 6:

Screen time is limited to no more than one hour total per day on weekdays, and NOT before school
Television and movies are excluded from weekday uses
On weekends, screen time should be limited to no more than 2 hours total
Student should not have a social media account/ profile

If necessary, access to a cell phone should be limited to when it is actually needed

The device should not be a smartphone with access to the internet
Students should use a flip phone as a communication tool, not as entertainment
The home environment, in particular a student's bedroom, should be device-free

Grades 7 - 8:

Student cell phones are collected each morning upon entering the building, and returned at dismissal
Screen time should be limited to no more than 1 ½ hours total per day on weekdays. This should NOT be before school or during the school day
Television and movies are excluded from weekday uses
On weekends, screen time should be limited to no more than 2 ½ hours total
Please see above for cell phone usage; social media accounts must be monitored by parents and are subject to the School's Respectful Engagement Guidelines

High School: Grade 9 – Grade 12

Student cell phones are collected each morning upon entering the building, and returned at dismissal

Grades 9-10:

Screen time divides into school-directed and student-directed. School-directed screen time that does not require internet searches or feature moving images is regarded as less intensive (e.g. typed papers or mathematical programs). The total screen time per day, including intensive and less intensive uses, including in and out of school, should be 4 hours or less, and intensive screen time should be less than 2 hours. There is no longer a distinction between television or movies or games or videos or apps; the screen time suggestions ask students to limit their intensive use of their devices. Moreover, when the school directs intensive uses (e.g. viewing a video clip), student-directed intensive uses diminish.

Grades 11-12:

For the oldest students the distinction between school-directed and student-directed device or media use necessarily diminishes, and screen-time parameters may vary more widely according to the nature of the work. Recommendations for device use are more of an average across the student body; for some, school work may require as many as 6 hours of screen time per day during certain phases (not more than 2 hours of which are intensive), and students continue to practice at limiting their own intensive uses beyond this.

Community Expectations

The school recognizes that electronic forms of communication are normal in everyday life, and so it makes a common practice of emailing information to families that may range from routine updates to pressing news. Additionally, teachers and advisers frequently communicate with families through email—about ongoing events, class-related updates, dates for meetings, or changes in plans.

Classroom teaching and learning is the central cultural activity at the school. To allow the best circumstances for teachers and students to work together, the school cautions against a high frequency of electronic exchanges between teachers and families. There may be times when daily contacts or updates are in order, but in most circumstances a telephone conversation or a person-to-person meeting is a better way to address student progress, questions about curricula, or any other interests or concerns that ask for a deliberate exchange.

A trickier area involves electronic communication between students and teachers. Rather than advance a blanket policy of permissions and prohibitions for teacher-student electronic exchanges, the school encourages the following best practice: by the twelfth grade, it may be normal in certain courses or certain circumstances for teachers and students to exchange information electronically, whereas before the ninth grade any such practice would be exceptional. (Please see the following section.) The school discourages students from texting teachers and from pursuing regular email exchanges with teachers, and it asks that families redirect students away from evening email requests toward a next-day conversation with a teacher or adviser.

Electronic Technology in the Classroom and in the Curriculum

Families can expect that internet technology and electronic devices have no place in the classroom or the curriculum in the early childhood or the beginning grades of elementary school. This does not imply that the curriculum or coursework is indifferent to technological developments; instead, the emphasis on unmediated connections between teachers and students in classrooms is for the sake of moral and intellectual development that a responsible use of electronic technology requires. Families can also expect that by twelfth grade electronic devices and forms of communication are ordinary parts of school life, sometimes on a regular basis (as in a computer programming course) and sometimes in specialized circumstances (as in the creation of an artwork portfolio). The school does not introduce internet technology as an end in itself, nor does it offer instruction in the form of games, apps, or online courses; instead, teachers help students to develop facility with many kinds of tools and arts, so that eventual participation in the digital world is active and controlled rather than passive and addictive. The school recognizes that screen-based approaches to education are changing the nature of childhood experience more quickly than the consequences are considered. Therefore, even as curricula and instruction include electronic media, the school is mindful that these techniques and tools should never interfere with direct connections among teachers and students. We are grateful to each family in our community for their conscious contemplation and integration of these media best practices in their household.

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