

IMPORTANT PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE POLICY ON CELL PHONES IN SCHOOLS

For at least the past three school years, the Board of Education has utilized a permissive *possession-but-nonuse-during-school-hours* approach to cell phones in the public schools of Aiken County. The rule was that a student could have the cell phone in his/her physical possession as long as it was not activated and not being utilized or displayed in any manner. Generally, students could have them in book bags, pocketbooks, and even clothing pockets. However, the devices had to be kept out of sight and turned “off.” Even leaving a phone “on” and with an audible tone for incoming calls could become a violation if someone tried to call in on the cell phone and it could be heard. This was a “passive violation” and required certain disciplinary action. Any intentional display or activation/manipulation of the cell phone was considered an “active violation” and could lead to more serious levels of discipline. [These rules applied to middle and high schools. Generally, elementary students were not to bring these devices to school unless prior permissions or arrangements with the school authorities were made.]

Due to the proliferation of cell phones, the frequency of disciplinary infractions related to both the inadvertent and the intentional violations of the Code of Conduct rules, and with the increasing sophistication of these devices leading to the increasingly serious nature of some offenses [such as cheating, violations of privacy with unauthorized photographs, and similar issues], the Disciplinary Committee of the Board and the majority of middle and secondary level principals recommended much greater restrictions on the possession of phones at school and more serious consequences for the violations of these restrictions.

The changes may be summarized as follows:

- Absolutely no “personal possession” of a cell phone during school hours.
- Phones must be left in vehicles or stored in a student’s locker or other place designated by building administration
- Disciplinary consequences are:
 - first offense; In-school suspension (1 day)
 - second offense; In-school suspension (3 days)
 - third offense; out of school suspension and loss of privilege
 - fourth offense; **Expulsion**

These changes received First Reading at the Board meeting on June 9, 2009, and will be considered for Final Approval on June 30, 2009. Anyone desiring comments may e-mail Ms. Tammie Newman, Public Information Officer, tnewman@aiken.k12.sc.us , or may write to Ms. Tammie Newman (“cell phone comments”), 1000 Brookhaven Drive, Aiken, S.C. 29803.