

# BERGEN COUNTY HEADS OF SCHOOL JOINT STATEMENT ON DEVICE USAGE Sept. 3, 2019 The First Day of School

We stand together in a unified communal approach to address the significant challenge of technology and social media usage among our children. The research is unequivocal. Children's social media habits are linked to higher levels of aggression, anxiety, addiction, ADD and developmental delays. Social media conversations among our children bring out the worst in our community, are aggressive, are lacking in empathy and concern for others, and are often very inappropriate.

The following research based recommendations and best practices are designed to draw new lines on device usage and help our children navigate their online world in a healthy, safe fashion. Based on current research as well as a growing desire among our parents to address this issue, we are creating new norms and an improved social media culture for our parents and students regarding device usage.

*Below are the 4 primary recommendations that we are sharing and disseminating:*

## • **What Age to Give Your Child Their Own Smartphone or Similar Digital Device? – Not Before 6th Grade!**

While we recognize different approaches to this issue, we feel strongly that there should be a publicly recognized "minimum age" for our children to be given the responsibility to have their own web-enabled devices. We strongly recommend that families do their best to delay giving their children their own devices even longer than the minimum threshold described here, but we do feel strongly about advocating for a minimum age threshold of the sixth grade. For those who delay giving a child a device even longer, we applaud you.

Should a parent decide a younger child absolutely requires a mobile device for safety purposes, the device purchased should allow for calling and basic texting only and not have full internet access.

## • **Once Your Child Has A Phone – What Parents MUST Do! A Few MUST-DOs. The Need to Institute and Implement Real, Meaningful Controls and Restrictions.**

Once your child has a full web-enabled device, Responsible parents will:

- Adopt and use parental control apps. Basic parental controls are built into almost every device or come with the basic operating software.
- Regularly monitor children's usage through filters and active oversight of children's activities and group chats.
- Use apps that easily enable monitoring, managing and limiting device activity.
- Adhere to recommended age requirements for the existing social media platforms that you allow children to use.
- Continue to discuss issues surrounding social media usage with your children.

## • **Preventing Overuse & The Need to Make Our Children Disconnect:**

Overuse of digital devices places children at risk for a number of complications including poorer school performance, sleep problems, and lack of physical movement and exercise. We ask and request that elementary school-aged children's devices must be shut down or inaccessible for a half hour to an hour before bedtime. Additionally, we must have device-free spaces in our homes, especially in one's bedroom. Children must understand that devices have no place at social gatherings where face to face interaction is expected. This includes playdates, sleepovers and parties.

## • **Last But Not Least – A Call For Changing Parent Behavior and Parent Modeling For Our Kids:**

Without question, our children model what they see their parents do and device usage is no exception. We are calling today for parents to serve as "media mentors" for younger children by serving as role models and guides. Parents must also limit their own device time, not in an excessive fashion, but at designated times such as meal times, carpools and family activities. For some families, creating a personalized family media plan can also demonstrate a shared commitment to healthy digital behavior and will have a positive impact on children. Research indicates that parents who are immersed in their devices are often short with their children or unaware of what is going on around them.

Each of us, as school leaders and parents ourselves, are deeply committed to the growth and success of our children. We believe there is a need to aim higher and push harder both within and without the walls of our schools when it comes to our personal devices. All that we wrote above is largely an appeal to you, our parents and school community, to help us "move the needle" on how all of us view and treat the devices we carry today.

We ask and urge you to carefully review the attached background and explanatory document which provides brief research points, relevant links, additional details and specific recommendations.

Join us in this community-wide effort and stay tuned for events and other initiatives led by each of us and our schools to advance and further this mission.

Yours,

**Rabbi Daniel Alter – Head of School – The Moriah School**  
**Rabbi Chaim Hagler – Head of School – Yeshivat Noam**  
**Rabbi Jonathan Knapp – Head of School – Yavneh Academy**  
**Rabbi Daniel Price – Head of School – RYNJ**  
**Rabbi Tomer Ronen – Head of School – Yeshivat He'Atid**  
**Rabbi Saul Zucker – Head of School – Ben Porat Yosef**

To learn more or ask questions, email: [headsofschoolnj@gmail.com](mailto:headsofschoolnj@gmail.com)

