education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

KZN PROVINCIAL GUIDELINE ON THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES BY LEARNERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Background

1. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education is concerned about the unregulated use of electronic devices by learners in public schools in the province.

2. These electronic devices are sometimes used inside the classrooms during contact time, around school premises, during educational excursions as well as after school hours.

3. There is a need for public schools to regulate the use of electronic devices by learners in public schools.

4. The Department acknowledges that electronic devices may be a vital communication tool in the modern day lives of the learners but, if not properly regulated, may become a distraction in their acquisition of knowledge.

5. Cellular phones, in particular, are prevalent among young people, having a far reaching footprint, even in the most rural areas of this province.

6. The Department must be proactive in ensuring that schools are empowered to manage both the advantages and disadvantages of the use of electronic devices.

7. These guidelines are intended to assist public schools to continue to provide quality education in a technologically safe and positive environment.

8. School Governing Bodies (SGBs) have a responsibility to put in place policies regulating the use of electronic devices by learners in public schools.

9. The guidelines seek to provide a framework to be considered in the development of such policies by SGBs.

10. The list of electronic devices referred to in the guidelines is not exhaustive and schools may add on to it.

11. Electronic devices may have educational value and advantage in the life of the current generation of learners.

12. However, there must be a degree of management and control of the use of these electronic devices in a school environment.

13. Cognitive and behavioural scientists have found that electronic devices can erode the ability of learners to concentrate during teaching and learning.

14. Deviations from the policy on electronic devices must be dealt with in the Code of Conduct for learners.

Definitions

Code of conduct for Learners means the set of rules that determine the conduct expected of learners at school and during school activities which includes due processes should there be a breach of the code;

Educator means any person as defined in the South African Schools Act (SASA);

Electronic device means any device that emits an audible signal, vibrates, displays any message or video image or is otherwise capable of sending, receiving, emitting, photographing, recording, storing or displaying any type of audio or visual communication, files or data or device or accessory to such a device that allows access to the internet such as Bluetooth devices

Parent means a person as defined in the SASA

School Activity means any official educational, cultural, recreational or social activity of the school within or outside the school premises

School Governing Body means a governing body as contemplated in section 16 (1) of the SASA

School Management Team means a team comprising the principal, deputy principal and departmental head, in a substantive or acting capacity, responsible to manage the day to day running of the school including curriculum management;

Staff member means a member of staff who is not an educator, who is employed in terms of the Public Service Act or by the School Governing Body

Legislative framework

15. The following legislative prescripts have a bearing on the development of a policy on the use of electronic devices by learners in public schools:

Acts

- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No 108 of 1996
- South African School Act, No 84 of 1996,
- Children's Act, No 38 of 2005,
- Sexual Offences Act, 32of 2007
- Education Laws Amendment Act, 31 of 2007
- Provincial Gazette No 1385 of 22 June 2015

Policies
- National School safety Framework, 2015
- Bill of Responsibilities for the Youth of South Africa, 2008
- Guidelines on e-Safety in Schools: Educating towards Responsible, Accountable and Ethical Use of ICT in Education

Purpose of the Guidelines

16. The Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Devices by Learners in Public Schools is aimed at providing School Governing Bodies with a framework to consider when developing policies to regulate the use of electronic devices by learners in public schools.

17. It is aimed at ensuring that the use of electronic devices does not interfere with the learning, safety and wellbeing of learners.

18. The guidelines will highlight the roles and responsibilities of learners, teachers and parents in the implementation of the policy on electronic devices.

Types of electronic devices

19. There are different types of electronic devices that may be used by learners for specific purposes.

20. The following are some of the electronic devices which learners may bring to school and need to be regulated:
    - Cellular phones
    - Smart Cellular Phones
    - Head Phones
    - Camera phones
    - Ear phones
    - Audio Players (MP3 Players)
    - Video and audio recording devices
    - Digital recording devices
    - Scanning devices
    - Personal digital Assistants (PDAs)
    - iPods
    - iPads
    - Radios
    - Pagers
    - Camera devices
    - Play Stations or hand-held computer
    - Smart watches
    - Lap Tops
    - Tablets
    - e-Readers
    - Net-books

Advantages of the use of electronic devices by learners

21. In today's technological world there is no escaping the use of electronic devices especially cellular phone or smart or cellular phones and some electronic devices may be a great educational tool.

22. Learners can download information for school related projects from the internet or capture images for inclusion in assignments.

23. More and more educators these days are incorporating modern technology and they may require learners to use their own smartphones at home to engage and excite them about learning.

24. The use of electronic devices may connect learners and educators to a vast platform of information, ideas and effective combinations of pedagogy and technology because technology has the capacity to empower learners and prepare them fully for tertiary education.

25. Some educators may request learners to use free online programs at home to download articles which they do not want to print to save on printing paper.

26. Some may request learners to look up definitions of words they do not know or explore apps for assignments and projects.

27. At times the use of technology is appropriate and helpful to conduct research and will be encouraged by the educator when it is appropriate. This must be in line with the school's policy on the use of electronic devices.

28. Some schools acknowledge that there are instances in the interest of safety, for a specific purpose or under circumstances deemed utterly necessary by a parent of a learner concerned, when a cellular phone may be required to be brought to school.

Disadvantages of the use of electronic devices
In the classroom

29. The use of electronic devices can easily be the downfall of the learner's attention span and academic performance because learners will not concentrate during the lesson whilst:
   - chatting,
   - sending and receiving messages
   - accessing social networks,
   - accessing any obscene, threatening or otherwise inappropriate material via any form of electronic communication.

30. Electronic devices may cause a breakdown in the discipline during teaching and learning.

31. Learners can violate the assessment policy by passing answers to each other during tests and examinations.

32. Electronic devices can also be used to illegally search for answers to difficult questions during tests and examinations.

33. Learners may download inappropriate images e.g. pornographic material or audio clips and distribute them to other learners.

34. Sometimes learners also take unauthorised images of educators or other learners during contact time.

35. Some of these electronic devices may be used for online harassing and cyber-bullying of other learners or educators and sexting and any invasion of privacy of another person by taking a photo of another learner.

36. Learners have a potential of developing habitual use or addictive behaviour out of some of these electronic devices by spending a significant amount of their valuable time on them.

37. The likely consequence of this is the deterioration of the quality of schoolwork and the time taken on these devices during school hours can be costly to the academic performance of the learner.

38. The use of electronic devices may have unnecessary financial implications for parents when they have to release confiscated devices or replace stolen or damaged devices.

On the school premises and during excursions

39. Learners may take inappropriate images and audio clips and distribute them to other learners within or outside the school.

40. Theft of electronic devices can take place during breaks or during school hours e.g. during sporting activities.

41. Some electronic devices store personal information and images which if stolen by dangerous people, they put a learner at risk of having their personal information and images used adversely and without their knowledge and can be a target of human trafficking and abductions.

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42. Electronic devices stolen by learners from other learners may compromise discipline when they fight over their stolen property and these can also be sold to other learners.

43. The possession of electronic devices by learners within the school premises may compromise the safety of learners, members of staff and other valuable resources within the school which may be targeted by criminals.

Outside the school premises

44. Learners who are in possession of electronic devices are easy prey to the criminal element on their way to and from school and they can end up being hurt.

45. Some of these criminal elements may use some of these electronic devices to enter into chat rooms to make inappropriate contact with learners through cyber stalking for purposes among others, of sexual activities and exploitation.

46. Learners stand the risk of being drawn into hate or cult websites which might eventually lead to suicidal tendencies.

Management of the use of electronic devices in public schools

47. One of the functions of a School governing Body is to establish a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to the improvement and maintenance of the quality of the learning process.

48. It is therefore the responsibility of the SGB to determine a policy for the use of electronic devices in the public school.

49. In so doing, the SGB must take into consideration the contextual factors prevailing at the school and the advancement of modern technology which will not deprive learners of their right to education.

50. The SGB must develop this policy after consultation with the various role-players within the schooling environment.

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51. The School Management Team will play a vital role in the management and control of the use of electronic devices within the confines of the school policy.

Authorised use or of electronic devices

51. It is the responsibility of a parent to monitor the use of electronic devices by the children both in the home and outside and to ensure that the child adheres to the school policy on the use of electronic devices.

52. In some compelling circumstances, devices like cellular phones may be brought to school by learners.

53. The school must regulate how such devices will be handled by educators and staff at the school.

54. A school may request a parent to inform them in writing of the compelling circumstances for the carrying to the device to school.

55. The device may be handed over to the appropriate member of staff until it is necessary to use it within the confines of the school policy.

56. A register must be kept for all electronic devices received by the school and retrieved by their rightful owners.

57. Electronic devices may be handed in at the office with an instruction that they must be switched off as they enter the school premises and be switched on outside the school premises.

58. Whenever the educator suggests the use of electronic devices for learning purposes at home, it is the responsibility of the educator to direct learners to age-appropriate content and websites.

59. The school must clearly state in its policy who will be held liable for theft or damage to any personal electronic device that has been brought to school by any learner.

Unauthorised use of electronic devices

60. A Governing Body of a public school may, after consultation with all relevant stakeholders, resolve that the carrying of electronic devices by learners is strictly prohibited.

61. A policy on the use of electronic devices in a public school must be adopted by the SGB and such policy must clearly stipulate the following:

- processes to be followed should a learner come to school with an unauthorised electronic device.
- if according to the policy, the unauthorised device is confiscated, it must be stated how the device will be secured and for how long.
- if a device has been confiscated from a learner who is not the owner, who will it be released to
- how is the parent going to be informed about the possession of the unauthorised electronic device by the learner
- the terms and conditions under which the confiscated unauthorised electronic device will be released and to whom
- the relevant sanctions as contained in the Code of Conduct for learners in cases of breach of the policy on the use of electronic devices
- who is held responsible for the theft and damage to the unauthorised electronic device which has been brought to school by a learner
- how the policy will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders

Electronic Media Communication Platforms

62. Schools sometimes create various electronic media platforms to communicate with internal and external stakeholders for various purposes bearing the school details and logo.

63 Schools may create these electronic media platforms to communicate important information and announcements to parents, teachers and learners.

64 some of these platforms may be used by the school for marketing purposes to inform the external stakeholders about the vision, mission and achievements by the school as well as its legacy.

65 It is the responsibility of the school to safeguard access to the electronic media platform and to monitor the content that is displayed in the platform to protect the image and integrity of the school.

Implications of the use of electronic devices on the Code of Conduct for Learners

66. If a public school has put restriction in place on the use of electronic devices by learners, there must be appropriate sanctions related to the breach of the policy on the use of electronic devices.

67. The sanctions referred to above must be included in the Code of Conduct for learners.

68. When developing the Code of Conduct for Learners, the SGB must take into consideration the various levels of misconduct and the provisions of Clause 4(1)(b) as stipulated in the Provincial Gazette No 1385 which was published on 22 June 2015 on the Determination of Serious Misconduct by Learners in Public Schools.

Conclusion

69. The Department acknowledges the efforts by parents to make the lives of learners easier by providing them with technological devices.

70. It is the responsibility of the home and school to protect learners from the negative consequences that may arise from the use of the electronic devices in the best interests of the learners.

71. The development and implementation of these guidelines will hopefully translate into well managed use of electronic devices based on the school policies relevant to each schooling environment.

72. It is anticipated that these guidelines will reduce the challenges that schools face at the abuse of modern technology by learners and create a regulatory framework for public schools to effectively incorporate technology in education.

73. These guidelines are intended to transform schools into safe environments which are conducive to effective teaching and learning.

The End……..