Recommendations for Student Technology Use in Lower Merion School District

Pencils Over Pixels is a grassroots group of parents, students, and educators. Our guiding principle is: *empower the educator, protect the student*. We support the intentional and responsible use of technology but are concerned that our students have become dependent on screens and apps for learning.

There is mounting evidence which shows that our children's focus, attention, and ability to learn are being hampered by excessive screen time, gamified apps, and Education Technology (EdTech) products.

Parents, students, and teachers from our organization have spoken at board meetings, submitted public comments, and made their concerns clear. The next step is to listen. The board should work with community partners to implement common sense solutions. Prioritizing the protection of our children and the reduction of screens in our classrooms is of the utmost importance.

We advocate for a teacher-led, hands-on model of education centered on books, paper, pencils, discussion, direct instruction, and human connection. Technology should be used intentionally and only when it's effective, safe, legal, and necessary. We recognize that the implementation of some of our recommendations below may vary by grade level and/or developmental stage – therefore, we should collaborate to determine solutions that are age-appropriate and also meet the needs of our neurodiverse and special needs populations.

We respectfully ask LMSD to consider the following requests:

1. We request **full transparency** about all aspects of the technology used in our schools. This includes apps, websites, platforms, vendors, contracts, expenses, privacy agreements, and data practices. Parents must know what programs their children are using, how much time they spend on screens, what data is collected, who has access to the data, and which companies receive the data.

    - We request the immediate public release of all vendor contracts and aggregate screen use data by grade and school.

    - We urge the board to form an independent committee of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and board members to assess the effectiveness of tech-use policies and recommend changes on an ongoing basis.

2. We request a **bell-to-bell ban on personal devices.** This includes personal cell phones, tablets, smartwatches, and similar devices that should not be accessible to students for the entire school day. This will foster learning, solidify students' focus, and enhance authentic

socialization. Numerous legislative bodies around the nation are proposing policies like this one; let LMSD lead the way.

3. We request **stronger content filtering** to protect students from unsafe, inappropriate, and distracting content. LMSD should adopt an "approved-only" model, where students can access only authorized educational sites. This would replace the current model of selecting which websites to block, out of the millions that exist. We believe an "approved-only" approach is safer and more efficient. There should also be a way for students to request access to websites related to research with a streamlined approval process in place. Next, generative AI, YouTube, social media, as well as streaming services, shopping, gambling/gaming, and messaging tools should not be available to students unless specifically authorized by a teacher for a clear educational purpose.

4. We request an **emphasis on teacher-led instruction**, rather than EdTech delivery, for core subjects (math, reading, writing, science, social studies, and history). This means the primary mode of instruction will be delivered through paper-based materials and face-to-face interaction between LMSD's extraordinary teachers and their students. EdTech includes gamified apps, automated instruction, dashboards, adaptive platforms and personal screen-based work which diminish the impact of teacher-led instruction. Technology can be used to support a student's learning but should not be the primary source. We also support teaching the intentional use of basic and advanced technology, as well as related concepts. These include typing, test-taking training, media literacy, coding, AI, robotics, privacy, cybersecurity, safe searching, digital citizenship, and learning about the digital world. Teaching of these topics should occur only in controlled settings such as computer labs or with computer carts and shareable devices. Finally, we support children who need special accommodations. Therefore, children requiring these must receive full support under IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA, including all assistive technology they need to learn and participate fully.

5. We request that the district requires parents to **opt-in and collect explicit and revocable parental consent** prior to issuing a personal 1:1 electronic device or enrolling any student in a digital learning program. Under FTC COPPA guidelines, explicit parental consent should be required for each individual app that collects student data shared with third parties. For those families that decline to opt-in, the district should provide comparable instruction with books, paper, and face-to-face learning. No digital homework and no digital technology-dependent core instruction should be required. No student should be penalized, stigmatized, isolated, or denied access to learning because a family declines to opt-in.

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