

Policy**Towns County Schools Internet Acceptable Use Guideline****Descriptor Code: IFBG**

It is the policy of the Towns County Board of Education that employees and students should be furnished educational opportunities and resources to have access to Internet-based instructional programs and administrative services. The primary purpose and mission of the Towns County Board of Education is to prepare every student to thrive, adapt, and lead in an ever-changing world. Technology plays a role in this mission by providing quality programs, information and learning activities along with support and services to improve student learning and enhance instructional and administrative effectiveness. The instructional use of interactive computer and web-based technology will prepare students for the future. Technology includes computer hardware, software, local and wide area networks and access to the Internet. Due to the complex nature of these systems and the magnitude of information available via the Internet, the Towns County Board of Education has adopted procedures regarding acceptable use to ensure that the technology users share in the technology resources in an effective, efficient, ethical and lawful manner. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that students are not granted access to anything other than educational and instructional materials and resources.

The Towns County Board of Education is committed to: (a) preventing user access over its computer network to, or transmission of, inappropriate material via Internet, electronic mail, or other forms of direct electronic communications; (b) preventing unauthorized access and other unlawful online activity; (c) preventing unauthorized online disclosure, use, or dissemination of personal identification information of minors; and (d) complying with the Children's Internet Protection Act [Pub. L. No. 106-554 and 47 USC 254(h)]. Each user must follow the Towns County School System Internet Acceptable Use Procedures [Procedures IFBG-R(1)], found in the Towns County Board of Education Code of Student Conduct and Discipline and the School System website.

Towns County Schools will adhere to the requirements of GA SB351 also known as the "Protecting Georgia's Children on Social Media Act of 2024," which is designed to enhance student safety and digital citizenship in Georgia's public schools. Key provisions include: - Requiring public schools to adopt acceptable-use policies and technology protection measures to block access to inappropriate online content, with oversight and potential funding withholding from the State Board of Education for noncompliance. - Mandating the Department of Education to develop model programs and training for educating students on safe and responsible social media and internet use. - Requiring local school boards to adopt social media policies that restrict student access to social media platforms through school equipment and technology. - Prohibiting social media platforms from allowing minors to have accounts without parental consent, and requiring platforms to provide certain information to parents upon request. - Creating a civil remedy for damages against commercial entities that distribute material harmful to minors without performing age verification. The bill seeks to proactively address online safety concerns and promote digital citizenship among Georgia's students.

Procedures have been adopted to address Internet safety, which include:

- (a) Access by minors to inappropriate matter on the Internet and World Wide Web
- (b) Safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, instant messaging, chat rooms and other forms of direct electronic communications
- (c) Unauthorized access, including so-called “hacking,” and other unlawful activities by minors online
- (d) Unauthorized disclosure, use and dissemination of personal information of minors
- (e) Restricting minors’ access to materials harmful to them

The Superintendent is authorized to designate certain persons in the School System who will be allowed to disable the blocking or filtering measure placed on the computer system during the use by an adult to enable access for bona fide research or other lawful purposes.

Procedures
Internet Acceptable Use
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Internet Acceptable Use Procedures

The Internet Acceptable Use Procedures apply to all students, faculty, staff, employees and visitors (both adults and minors) of the Towns County School System. All users of the TCSS network and/or other electronic informational services must maintain strict compliance with all applicable ethical and legal rules and regulations regarding access. The school system reserves the right to monitor, access, and disclose the contents of any user's files, activities, or communications.

Availability of Access:

The Internet will be available to users for instructional and administrative purposes. The electronic information available to users does not imply endorsement by the Towns County Board of Education.

Applicability of Procedures and Consequences:

The use of the network is a privilege, not a right, and misuse will result in disciplinary actions, including restriction and/or cancellation of those privileges.

These procedures apply to, and the School System will take appropriate measures, including disciplinary measures, in response to:

- (1) Students and school employees who intentionally violate this acceptable use policy, whether or not such student or school employee was, at the time of such violation, on school property, on a school bus or other school vehicle, at a school related function, or elsewhere;
- (2) Any person who is not a student or school employee who violates the acceptable use policy and procedures, whether or not such person was, at the time of such violation, on school property, on a school bus or other school vehicle, at a school related function, or elsewhere.

Security:

Users must maintain appropriate passwords to obtain access to the network. Login information, user names, and passwords are confidential and it is the responsibility of the user to safeguard that information. Passwords should be at least 8 characters a secure password should contain a number and a capital letter. No user should login with another user's information.

While the Internet is an extremely valuable tool for educational research, information is accessible that may not be appropriate according to community, school, or family standards. The Towns County Board of Education provides an Internet filtering system which blocks access to a large percentage of inappropriate sites. Specifically, as required by the Children's Internet Protection Act, visual depictions of material deemed obscene or child pornography, or any material deemed to be harmful to minors will be blocked by the web filtering system.

Internet Safety and School System Responsibilities:

Internet safety is a great concern of the Towns County Board of Education. It shall be the responsibility of all educators of the Towns County School System, including administrators, instructional supervisors, principals, teachers, media specialists, technology specialists, guidance counselors, instructional paraprofessionals and any other personnel having access to the online computer network for

instructional purposes, to supervise and monitor usage of the online computer network and access to the Internet in accordance with this policy and the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), as much as is practical.

The School System and the Superintendent, or designee, shall take such steps as are necessary and appropriate to implement and enforce the acceptable use policy, which shall include, but shall not be limited to: providing for the adoption, use and routine upgrading of technology protection measures which meet or exceed compliance standards and specifications established by the Georgia Department of Education.

The School System shall provide reasonable opportunities and procedures for parents/guardians of current students to confer and collaborate with school administrators and teachers regarding appropriate internet access for such students.

The School System shall provide, upon written request of a parent/guardian a copy of the Acceptable Use Policy and the Procedures in effect to enforce such policy. Please note that the Acceptable Use Policy and Procedures are found online at <https://www.towns.k12.ga.us/>

A series of age-appropriate Internet Safety and digital citizenship¹ courses such as Parent Pro-Tech will be taught to all students in the Towns County School System to provide education on appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms, safety and privacy, as well as cyberbullying awareness and response. School personnel have the discretion to provide such other training or to implement such other curricula, provided that such training or curricula meet the requirements of CIPA, as may be amended from time to time. Any suggested topics or proposed curricula are intended as a guideline and in no way replace or diminish the professional judgment and discretion of the administrators or school personnel implementing this policy.

The following will be considered inappropriate uses of the Towns County School System Technology Network, which list is not exhaustive and includes but is not limited to:

1. Posting, publishing, sending or creating materials or communications that are defamatory, abusive, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, threatening, racially offensive, or illegal, or engage in any other type of behavior that constitutes bullying or harassment of any kind, or is in violation of the Code of Ethics for Educators, the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline, State law or federal law
NOTE: Students who engage in such activity off-campus and create a material disruption of school operations shall be subject to penalties for bullying and harassment contained in the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline as well as criminal charges, if applicable.
2. Electronically capturing the image of others without express permission.
3. Utilizing content produced by artificial intelligence (AI) platforms such as Chat GPT, Google Bard, or Bing Co-Pilot to compromise the security of the Towns County School System's systems or services, or to infringe upon the privacy rights and safety of others, or to misrepresent the integrity and authenticity of academic assignments.
4. Misrepresenting content (e.g., text, images) generated by AI platforms such as Chat GPT, Google Bard, or Bing Co-Pilot as student's own work or using an AI program to generate content for an

¹ "Digital citizenship" means being an active member in a society full of technology, knowing what is considered appropriate technology use, and behaving responsibly with electronic resources.

assignment when outside resources are not permitted for the assignment, or, when permitted for an assignment, are not properly cited.

5. Accessing, sending, creating or posting materials or communications that could be inconsistent with the district's educational needs and goals.
6. Using the network for financial gain, advertising or commercial activity.
7. Transmitting any material in violation of any United States or State law or regulation.
8. Engaging in malicious activities such as sending unsolicited spam emails, conducting phishing or hacking attempts, or seeking, obtaining, or disclosing passwords or information of others.
9. Posting anonymously or forging electronic mail messages or altering, deleting or copying another user's email.
10. Using the school's computer hardware or network for any illegal activity such as copying or downloading copyrighted software, music or images, or violation of copyright laws.
11. Downloading, installing, accessing, or playing any unauthorized program or content (even that created at home) on any school's computer or network.
12. Purposely bringing any hardware on the premises or loading any software that is designed to damage, alter, destroy or provide access to unauthorized data.
13. Attempting to vandalize or disassemble any network or computer component including the attempt to alter network or computer configuration.
14. Gaining access or attempting to access unauthorized or restricted network resources or the data and documents of another person.
15. Sending spam through email.
16. Using the network while access privileges have been suspended.
17. Bypassing or attempting to circumvent network security, virus protection, network filtering, or policies.

Employee Responsibilities:

- Employees must use good judgment and keep all passwords protected. Do not post a list of user names and passwords where they may be seen by students or others. Never email user names and passwords to unknown sources. The Towns County School System Information Technology Department will never ask for passwords by email.
- When leaving a computer, always log off to prevent unauthorized access to files or email.
- Students should always be supervised while using the Internet, computers, handheld devices or electronic resources.

- Email accounts are provided for professional use only. Email accounts should not be used for personal gain or personal business-related activities. Broadcasting of unsolicited messages is prohibited. All employees must request permission from the building administrator before sending any messages to an entire building's staff. Permission has to be granted from the Superintendent or designee to send messages to "All Users" in the system.
- Employees are prohibited from utilizing Towns County School System account profile information, such as usernames, passwords, or email addresses, to register for web applications or services not approved by the School System. An employee profile contains private data, and by law, the Towns County School System must ensure that the vendor it shares information with has adequate policies and procedures to safeguard data privacy and uphold network security.
- If an employee brings a personal computer or handheld device, to use on the TCSS network, it must be virus free and must not contain any unauthorized or inappropriate files. Employees must follow School System procedures for utilizing personal devices.
- Employees may not download any unauthorized software onto Towns County School System computers.
- Employees will use system-supported technology for educational use only and will refrain from accessing inappropriate information, unauthorized sites or content.
- Employees will provide instruction and guidance to students on the parameters and proper uses of an artificial intelligence (AI) program to generate content for any assignment. [For more information, please see *Guiding Principles and Procedures for AI Use in the Towns County School System*.]
- Employees must follow the Code of Ethics for Educators, as well as any other applicable laws or regulations.
- Employees shall act in good faith to enforce the operation of technology protection measures while school computers with Internet access are being used.

Parent Responsibilities:

- Parents should read through the entire Internet Acceptable Use Policy and Procedures and discuss Internet safety and digital citizenship with their child.
- Parents' core responsibilities shift to digital safety and well-being, complementing existing duties like providing basic needs, education, and emotional support. Parent ProTech provides tools and guidance for parents to become better digital parents by setting rules for technology use, personalizing content restrictions and screen time, and engaging in open conversations about online risks to protect children from online threats like bullying and inappropriate content.
- Parents of students shall sign and return to their child's school, a form to give or deny permission for their child to utilize the Towns County School System Technology Network and for their child's picture, video clip or name to be featured on Towns County School System websites.
- Foster open communication by encouraging honest conversations with your child about their online activities, building trust and understanding around technology use and online risks.
- Adapt Technology use policies and content restrictions to fit your child's age and your family's specific needs.

Student Responsibilities:

- Students should not use the Internet for purposes other than instructional assignments related to the curriculum.
- Students will use system-supported technology for educational use only and will refrain from accessing inappropriate information.
- Learn and apply digital citizenship: students can learn about safe and appropriate use of technology, including social media and gaming using Parent ProTech.
- Balance online activities with real-world experiences and prioritize hands-on or offline activities.
- Be mindful of online data do not share sensitive information with AI tools or other online platforms.

- Students are prohibited from utilizing Towns County School System account profile information, such as usernames, passwords, or email addresses, to register for web applications or services not approved by the School System. A student profile contains private data, and by law, the Towns County School System must ensure that the vendor it shares information with has adequate policies and procedures to safeguard data privacy and uphold network security.
- Students must follow teacher directions for Internet related assignments, including whether the use of an approved artificial intelligence (AI) program is permissible for the assignment, and if so, students must properly cite the source of the content. [For more information, please see ***Guiding Principles and Procedures for AI Use in the Towns County School System.***]
- Students must heed prohibitions and Internet Safety rules and should take precautions when using the network.
- Students should participate in any and all training as instructed by school personnel.
- Students will follow all applicable rules related to Internet, computer or digital device use contained within the Student Code of Conduct and Discipline and sign that they have read the policy and procedures of the Towns County School System and agree to abide by the same.

For Internet Safety, Students Are Reminded They Should:

- Never provide last name, address, telephone number, SSN, or school name online to someone they do not know.
- Never respond to and always report any messages that make the student feel uncomfortable or that are from an unknown origin.
- Never send a photo of themselves or anyone else without the permission of a parent.
- Never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met online.
- Never open attachments or files from unknown senders.
- Always report any inappropriate sites observed.

Usage of Cell Phones and Personal Technology Devices

The use of cell phones and personal technology devices (e.g., laptops, tablets) on campus is a privilege that the school grants to students and employees who are willing to assume the responsibilities outlined in the Towns County Acceptable Use Policy and Procedures and all applicable provisions of the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline. All guidelines in the Towns County Board of Education Acceptable Use Policy and Procedures continue to apply when a student or employee brings a personal device for use on campus. For additional information, please see Rule 1(r) and Rule 16 in the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline.

Georgia's Distraction-Free Education Act (HB 340), signed into law in May 2025, prohibits personal electronic device use in public K-8 schools from July 1, 2026, "bell to bell". While high schools aren't included in the statewide mandate, local districts can set their own policies, potentially allowing device use at certain times. Exceptions to the K-8 ban are made for students with IEPs/504 plans, medical needs, or emergencies.

Administrative Review of Concerns

Administrative procedures to enforce the Acceptable Use Policy and Procedures are contained within the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline (as to students) and the Employee Handbook and Code of Ethics for Educators (as to employees).

Complaints regarding possible violations of the Acceptable Use Policy should be initially directed the applicable school site administrator or department supervisor. Whenever possible, complaints should be made in writing, providing sufficient details of the nature of the concern so that school personnel can properly investigate and resolve the complaint. School System personnel will respond in writing within a reasonable time.

The Superintendent is authorized to designate certain persons in the School System who will be allowed to disable the blocking or filtering measure placed on the computer system during the use by an adult to enable access for bona fide research or other lawful purposes.

Complaints regarding operation of the acceptable use policy denying a student or school employee access to material that is not within the prohibitions of the acceptable use policy should be initially directed the applicable school site administrator or department supervisor. Whenever possible, complaints should be made in writing, providing sufficient details of the nature of the concern so that school personnel can properly investigate and resolve the complaint. School System personnel will attempt to expeditiously review and resolve all such claims.

CIPA DEFINITION OF TERMS:

Technology Protection Measure. The term "technology protection measure" means a specific technology that blocks or filters Internet access to visual depictions that are:

1. **OBSCENE**, as that term is defined in section 1460 of title 18, United States Code;
2. **CHILD PORNOGRAPHY**, as that term is defined in section 2256 of title 18, United States Code; or
3. **HARMFUL TO MINORS**. The term "harmful to minors" means any picture, image, graphic image file, or other visual depiction that:
 - a. Taken as a whole and with respect to minors, appeals to prurient interest in nudity, sex, or excretion;
 - b. Depicts, describes, or represents, in a patently offensive way with respect to what is suitable for minors, an actual or simulated sexual act or sexual contact, actual or simulated normal or perverted sexual acts, or a lewd exhibition of the genitals; and
 - c. Taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value as to minors.

Minor: Under Federal law, the term "minor" is defined as "an individual who has not attained the age of 17 years" (pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 254(h)) and "any person under the age of eighteen years" (pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 2256). For purposes of this policy, however, the term "minor" shall apply to any student properly attending a school within the Towns County School System.

Sexual Act; Sexual Contact. The terms "sexual act" and "sexual contact" have the meanings given such terms in 18 U.S.C. § 2246.

Failure to follow the Acceptable Use Policy violates the requirements as set forth by the Official Code of Georgia and the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)