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9 **MODEL POLICY CONCERNING**
10 **INTERNET SAFETY**

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INTRODUCTION

To emphasize the essential role of technologies in the learning experiences of students, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is committed to helping school boards develop and implement internet safety policies and programs. Safeguarding students remains the utmost priority in K-12 education. Due to the ever-changing nature of internet technologies, it is important for all members of the educational community to actively address this imperative. In the learning environment, leaders allow for safe access to the internet, teachers design safe lessons, and students safely use technology.

PURPOSE

- A. The Department developed the “Model Policy Concerning Internet Safety” in response to [§ 22.1-24.1. Internet Safety Advisory Council](#) with input as required by the law from individuals and organizations throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. It represents the knowledge and perspectives of teachers, researchers, law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, as well as local, state, and federal representatives. The purpose of this council is to advance the goal of safe use of media and technology by students and teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in the Commonwealth. This document has been developed for local school boards in the Commonwealth to enable such school boards to better ensure the internet safety of all students and teachers in the local school division. While this document offers recommendations, specific integration details are left to the discretion of local education agencies.

DEVELOPMENT

- A. [Section 22.1-24.1](#) of the Code of Virginia provides that the Superintendent of Public Instruction “shall establish and appoint members of the Internet Safety Advisory Council (the Council) for the purpose of advancing the goal of safe use of media and technology by students and teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in the

50 Commonwealth.” The statute sets out the membership of the Council. This section of
51 Code was added by [Chapter 776](#) during the 2022 General Assembly. [Chapter 111](#) (2023
52 Acts of Assembly) amended this section to add that the Council may collaborate with law
53 enforcement agencies, criminal justice agencies, and other non-governmental
54 organizations with expertise in child online safety issues and human trafficking
55 prevention. The statute is in effect until July 1, 2024.

- 56 B. The duties of the Council include:
- 57 1. Developing recommendations to the Board of Education for adoption, a model policy
58 for local school boards that would enable them to better support the internet safety of
59 all students and teachers.
 - 60 2. Developing recommendations to the Board of Education for adoption, model
61 instructional practices for and instructional content on the safe use of media and
62 technology by students and teachers.
 - 63 3. Designing and posting on the Department's website a page with links to successful
64 instructional practices, curricula, and other teacher resources.
- 65 C. The Council met beginning in September 2023 and concluded in June 2024.

66 **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- 67 A. In an environment of constrained resources, school leaders leverage security investments
68 to focus on the most impactful steps. Schools are responsible for protecting student
69 privacy on school devices and networks by implementing appropriate security measures.
- 70 B. Education is essential in supporting the safety of children. Educators integrate digital
71 wellness skills into the core curriculum teaching students to help students navigate
72 modern technology in a healthy and productive manner including the most common
73 online threats and ways to respond.
- 74 C. Internet safety training at school will impact student behavior on the personal devices for
75 accessing the internet, including mobile phones.
- 76 D. Law enforcement focus on collaboration and information sharing with local school
77 divisions.

- 78 E. Local school boards invest in building teacher capacity through systematic, high quality
79 professional learning opportunities.
- 80 F. While no comprehensive list exists to cover all situations, appropriate safe, legal, and
81 ethical online behavior should include the following:
- 82 a. Protecting your personal information online.
 - 83 b. Using strong, unique passwords for different accounts and enable two-factor
84 authentication whenever possible.
 - 85 c. Avoid clicking on suspicious links or downloading files from untrusted sources.
 - 86 d. Treating others with respect in online interactions.
 - 87 e. Obeying copyright laws.
 - 88 f. Respecting intellectual property rights, defamation laws, and privacy regulations.
 - 89 g. Following community guidelines on social media platforms, forums, and
90 websites.
 - 91 h. Curating reliable sources and fact-checking claims to promote accurate
92 knowledge.
 - 93 i. Reporting illegal content (such as child exploitation or hate speech) to the
94 appropriate authorities.

95 RELATED LAWS

- 96 A. The policy must comply with current federal, state, and local laws relating to internet
97 safety.
- 98 g. Federal Laws:
 - 99 i. [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)
 - 100 ii. [Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act \(COPPA\)](#)
 - 101 iii. [Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment \(PPRA\)](#)
 - 102 iv. [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#)
 - 103 v. Rehabilitation Act: [Section 504](#)
 - 104 vi. [Children Internet Protection Act \(CIPA\)](#)
 - 105 h. Code of Virginia:
 - 106 i. [Acceptable Use Policy](#)

129 b. The VDOE encourages local education agencies to infuse digital access, use, and
130 design practices as well as engage in conversations about digital citizenship and
131 internet safety as a critical component of supporting safety. School boards shall
132 adopt policies to support safety. Leaders shall keep staff and community members
133 apprised of the new policy. Parent resources may be curated by local school board
134 advisory councils which may include resources and assistance programs available
135 for any child or parent who may have encountered online solicitation by sexual
136 predators or other illegal online communications or activities, including the
137 National Center for Missing and Exploited Children’s CyberTipline.

138 II. Definitions:

- 139 a. Digital Citizenship: the responsible, ethical, and safe use of technology and the
140 internet. It involves navigating the digital world with respect, integrity, and
141 empathy towards others. At its core, digital citizenship emphasizes the importance
142 of being mindful of one’s online presence and interactions, just as one would be
143 in the physical world. By promoting digital citizenship, educators and parents
144 help equip children and young adults with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes
145 needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and digital society while
146 fostering a culture of respect, responsibility, and ethical behavior online.
- 147 b. Digital Learning: to empower students as learners by improving their functional
148 literacy as digital citizens capable of constructing knowledge, designing
149 innovative works, thinking computationally, creatively communicating, and
150 collaborating with others locally, regionally, and globally.
- 151 c. Digital Wellness: a holistic approach to managing technology to ensure a healthy
152 and fulfilling life. It involves being mindful of how technology impacts our
153 physical and mental well-being and actively seeking a balance between the
154 benefits and drawbacks of digital engagement. This includes healthy screen time
155 limits, which encourages a balance between screen-based activities and other
156 pursuits that promote activities that support emotional, physical, social, and
157 cognitive development.
- 158 d. Internet Safety: the practice of following actionable guidelines, understanding
159 modern technology, and protecting digital devices so users can defend against the

- 160 malicious parts of the online world. Media Literacy: the ability to access, curate,
161 use, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.
- 162 e. Social Media: websites and other online means of communication that are used by
163 large groups of people to share information and to develop social and professional
164 contacts.
- 165 III. Access to Educational Technology:
- 166 a. Where schools provide technology for student use, schools shall use tools and
167 technologies to monitor, filter, and limit use as part of the training and in accord
168 with the law. For instance, internet filters shall be used to block or filter
169 inappropriate information. This is required by the Children’s Internet Protection
170 Act (CIPA), whereby blocking shall be applied to visual depictions of material
171 deemed obscene, child pornography, or any material deemed harmful to minors.
172 As required by the CIPA, prevention of inappropriate network usage includes: (a)
173 unauthorized access, including so-called ‘hacking,’ and other unlawful activities;
174 and (b) unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal identification
175 information regarding minors.
- 176 b. It shall be the responsibility of all members of the staff to educate, supervise, and
177 monitor appropriate usage of the online computer network and access to the
178 internet in accordance with this policy, the Children’s Internet Protection Act, the
179 Neighborhood Children’s Internet Protection Act, and the Protecting Children in
180 the 21st Century Act.
- 181 c. Local education agencies can prevent students from accessing social media
182 platforms and other non-instructional applications through the use of internet
183 access provided by the school.
- 184 d. After completing an introductory, age-appropriate training, the student will be
185 provided internet access. The training provided will be designed to promote the
186 school’s commitment to:
- 187 i. The standards and acceptable use of internet services as set forth in the
188 acceptable use policy.
- 189 ii. Student safety with regard to digital citizenship.
- 190 iii. Compliance with the E-rate requirements of the CIPA.

191 e. The student will acknowledge receipt and understanding of this training and will
192 follow the provisions of the acceptable use policies. Student acknowledgement
193 should be provided in plain language that is age appropriate for the student.

194 IV. Use of Educational Technology:

195 a. Acceptable Use Policy: Local School Boards update existing acceptable use
196 policies as required by [§ 22.1-70.2](#). that build skills in internet safety, media
197 literacy and digital citizenship through access to the resources available on digital
198 platforms that support inquiry-based education. The policy should be available in
199 formats that are age appropriate, written in plain language, and easily accessible
200 to students, educators, and families.

201 b. Advisory Group: Formal designation of a local school board advisory group,
202 composed of parents, students, community members, educators, administrators,
203 and law enforcement who are responsible for reviewing the code of conduct,
204 acceptable use policy, and community resources to ensure a set of principles,
205 expectations, rules, and communication clarifies the expectations of digital
206 citizenship, media literacy, and internet safety.

207 V. Instructional Design:

208 a. Strategic Planning shall include digital citizenship into the school division's
209 broader goals, especially in the areas of:

- 210 i. The risks of transmitting personal information on the internet and the
211 importance of privacy protection.
- 212 ii. The enforcement of copyright laws on written materials, photographs,
213 music, and videos posted or shared online.
- 214 iii. The importance of establishing open communication with responsible
215 adults about any online communications or activities.
- 216 iv. How to recognize, avoid, and report suspicious, potentially dangerous, or
217 illegal online communications or activities, including (a) potential
218 solicitation by sexual predators, (b) unsolicited or deceptive
219 communications, and (c) harassment and cyberbullying.
- 220 v. Safe and responsible use of social networking websites, including the
221 advantages of social media use, as well as the potential harms including

222 addiction, publication of misinformation, negative effects on mental
223 health, and the permanent nature of content created on social media.

- 224 b. Educators should be mindful when using technology to ensure activities provide
225 empowered learning, creative communication, global collaboration, knowledge
226 constructing, innovative design, computational thinking, and digital citizenship.
227 Emphasize digital wellness by establishing healthy screen time limits,
228 encouraging educator to a balance between screen-based activities and other
229 pursuits, and promote activities that support emotional, physical, social, and
230 cognitive development. Consider factors such as: physical health, sleep
231 disruption, social and emotional development, cognitive development, and
232 academic performance. Create common blended learning spaces in the classroom
233 that support physical, emotional, social and cognitive development to increase
234 engagement, physical movement, and collaboration.
- 235 c. Divisions should provide internet safety and digital citizenship resources to their
236 school community including online courses, in person programs, resource hubs,
237 and digital guides.
- 238 d. School divisions are required to integrate the Digital Learning Integration (DLI)
239 Standards of Learning into a broader, locally designed curriculum. All companion
240 documents, activities performed, and approved technologies used in implementing
241 the DLI should fall within the acceptable use, student conduct, and all other
242 school division policies. Educators are encouraged to document lessons which
243 explicitly integrate the DLI into the curriculum, especially in the content strand of
244 Digital Citizenship
- 245 i. Respect: Treating others with kindness and dignity online, refraining from
246 cyberbullying or harassment, and valuing diverse perspectives.
 - 247 ii. Privacy: Understanding the importance of safeguarding personal
248 information and being cautious about what is shared online to protect
249 oneself and others from potential risks such as identity theft or
250 cyberstalking.
 - 251 iii. Critical Thinking: Developing the ability to evaluate information critically
252 and discern between reliable sources and misinformation or fake news.

- 253 iv. Cybersecurity: Taking measures to protect digital devices and accounts
254 from unauthorized access or cyber threats, such as using strong passwords
255 and being cautious of phishing scams.
- 256 v. Digital Literacy: Acquiring the necessary skills to effectively navigate the
257 digital landscape, including understanding how to use technology tools
258 and platforms responsibly for communication, research, and creative
259 expression.
- 260 vi. Responsible Communication: Communicating online with honesty,
261 integrity, and civility, and considering the potential impact of one's words
262 and actions on others.
- 263 e. Professional development may include working with local law enforcement and
264 recognized educational organizations to inform teachers of the latest
265 developments in the safe and effective use of media and technology with students.
- 266 f. School leaders shall provide teachers a disclosure plan with age-appropriate
267 resources and assistance programs to share with any child or parent who may
268 have encountered online solicitation by sexual predators or other illegal online
269 communications or activities, including the National Center for Missing and
270 Exploited Children's CyberTipline.