

## GLAD YOU ASKED

### THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

Technology saturates our lives. An observation hardly worth pointing out. Except, of course, that as an educational institution, New Covenant Schools must navigate these waters with wisdom. It takes very little effort to find yet another school issuing tablets and Chromebooks, even at the grammar school level. Is this the right path for us?

Let us be clear that New Covenant Schools is not anti-technology. We teach students how to properly prepare papers, power points and excel spreadsheets at various points in the curriculum. We are very intentional about our instruction on internet research – how to sift the wheat from the chaff when it comes to on-line sources. We have very nice touch-screen data collection devices that we utilize in the School of Rhetoric lab sciences. We publish lesson plans, homework, assessments and other resources through the on-line platform RenWeb. All these have proven effective tools in our educational aims.

And therein lies the key – we want our students to utilize technology as a tool, not a lifestyle. The pull of social media on your sons and daughters cannot be underestimated. It is an enormous drag on their time and energy and attention, which students see as necessary to maintaining “membership” or place within the social order. Thus, we significantly restrict student access to the internet and social media during the school day. Our policies are intended to enhance the flesh-and-bone community of students and teachers. So, let’s review our policies.

Our Parent-Student Handbook defines an Electronic Communication Device (ECD) as “any electronic device capable of connecting to the internet or communicating with any other electronic device.” This might include laptops, phones, tablets and smartwatches. One day, in the not so distant future, it might include glasses! The policy is written so that it does not have to be updated every time a new technology is released. The spirit and letter of the

policy is clear – any device that can send or receive texts, emails, voicemails or connect to the internet is contained in this definition.

Here is how such ECDs are handled in the various schools: Grammar and Middle School – The policy is quite simple: Students should not bring any ECDs to school. They should be left at home. School of Rhetoric – The handbook reads, “Students who carry cell phones or other electronic communication devices (ECD’s) must power them off and leave them in their lockers during the day and may not use them during school hours.” And yes, this would include a smartwatch.

Two points of clarification: (1) A laptop would be considered an ECD as well, but computer use is handled under a separate policy, in recognition of the important tool that it is in our context; and (2) sport watches (Fitbits or equivalent) that, for example, track your steps and heart rate, but are otherwise incapable of sending and receiving messages (such as emails or texts) or connecting to the internet do not meet the definition of an ECD and are thus allowable.

We greatly value the whole community’s support of this policy. Please do not send texts to your high school student during the day and expect a response before 3:05 pm. If your student texts you during the day, call them out on it. This should not happen. They can call you from the front office. Should you need to get a message to a student quickly, call the office and it will be delivered for you. This is by no means calculated to infantilize students or imply that their devices are bad. Rather, it is a commitment to requiring students to be present in the moment with their peers and to pay attention to one another. It is refreshing to see our students at lunch and other breaks interacting with each other rather than staring down at their electronic devices. They aren’t missing a thing. They have one another’s friendships to gain. We aim to keep it that way.