

As I've [written about before](#)¹, I believe the central pillar to good education is strong relationships between students, teachers, and content. What has become increasingly clear is that technology has formed a barrier between those three elements, a barrier that cannot be overcome with more or better technology, but which must instead be removed if we want our students to be healthy, to grow, and to connect. With that in mind, Bnei Akiva Schools will have a new technology policy beginning in September 2026; the explanations for the policy are below.

As you will see, there is overwhelming current research on the short- and long-term implications of overuse of technology on our students' academics, imagination, socialization, critical thinking, and mental health. This requires a shift to an approach described by Emily Cherkin as "tech-intentional", which she defines as "using screen-based technologies that enhance, nurture, and support ourselves, our children, and our families in ways that align with our values and resisting, delaying, or limiting any type of screen use that interferes with our healthy mental, physical, cognitive, and emotional development."² With that in mind, Bnei Akiva Schools will have a new technology policy beginning in September 2026; the details for the policy are below, but in short:

Effective September 2026, students at Bnei Akiva Schools will not be allowed to use computers in classrooms unless that technology is central to the learning in that class (e.g. Media Arts, Coding, etc.). Students with IEPs will continue to have their needs met in relevant, healthy, and appropriate ways tailored to their individual learning profiles. Of course, when courses require computers—for example, in-class writing of essays—they will be used alongside Safe Exam Browser technology (like DigiExam).

While the research discussed here shows that the use of screens and unnecessary technology in the classroom is damaging our students in a variety of ways, it is also a particularly Jewish problem. As argued by [Adam Eilath](#), Head of School at the Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School, "Jewish continuity has never depended on efficiency, but on the willingness of each generation to bind itself to texts through practices that demand time and attention. The beit midrash was not designed to be efficient. It was designed to endure."³ We have shifted from *sifrei kodesh* to Sefaria, and this is inherently unhealthy. If our students do not learn to interact in meaningful ways with our tradition's texts, with each other in *chavrutot* and debate, and with their teachers in discussion and conversation, we will not only sacrifice the learning and growth described below,

¹ Parker, Jonathan. "Relational Learning - The Key to Good Education." *Bnei Akiva Schools - Reflections on Education and Learning*, Jan. 2026, bastoronto.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Issue-2-1.pdf.

² Cherkin, Emily. *The Screentime Solution*. Greenleaf Book Group, 2024.

³ Eilath, Adam. "Jews Must Resist Becoming a People of the Screen." *Tikvah Ideas*, Mosaic, 17 Feb. 2026, ideas.tikvah.org/mosaic/observations/hazak-v-amats-jews-must-resist-becoming-a-people-of-the-screen?queryID=10bf77ce60d3c07f0318fef3ba68842d.

but also the fundamental relationships that have allowed Judaism to endure for centuries. If we want our children to remain spiritually- and culturally-connected Jews, it must be in a school without unnecessary screens and technology.

Most are aware of the research Jonathan Haidt presented in [Anxious Generation](#)⁴, research that shows social media use led to decreased socialization, decreased physical activity and sleep, and increased anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide. It is for this reason that students in grades 9 and 10 must submit their phones to the Main Office before school begins, and students in grades 11 and 12 are not allowed to use their phones in school. However, we are also aware that the addictive and harmful elements of cellphones are all accessible to students on their laptops and tablets as well. There is little more-potent evidence to this than [the recent California jury finding Meta and YouTube liable for intentionally addicting a young woman](#).⁵ No matter how many internet filters and parental-control apps we employ, addicted students will always find a way to access these harmful elements of technology, and the surest way to avoid this—and the negative outcomes associated—is to remove screens and technology that are not necessary for education.

Aside from the spiritual, cultural, and mental-health concerns described above, there is also mounting evidence that the preponderance of computers, apps, and “EdTech” in schools is having extremely negative impacts on students’ academic performance and growth. Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath, in both his [testimony](#) before the United States’ Senate⁶ as well as his book [The Digital Delusion](#)⁷, identifies many academic and growth-related challenges from unnecessary technology in the classroom, all based on current and relevant research. In his own words,

Digital platforms are optimized for rapid switching, novelty, and continuous engagement capture. Even when used for academic tasks, they cue the same behavioral patterns students practice during recreational screen use: frequent checking, rapid scrolling, and multitasking. As a result, screens structurally train attentional habits that conflict with sustained learning. This is not a matter of discipline or willpower; it is a function of repeated conditioning.

A few of the conflicts Cooney Horvath identifies:

- Reading on screens (as opposed to paper) yields shallower processing and diminished retention;
- Typing encourages verbatim transcription and therefore superficial learning;
- Overuse and abuse of computers in schools leads to lower scores on reading, math, and science tests;
- Typing does not build the same necessary neural pathways as writing by hand;

⁴ Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Penguin Books, 2025.

⁵ Duffy, Clare. “Meta and YouTube Found Liable in Social Media Addiction Trial | CNN Business.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 25 Mar. 2026, www.cnn.com/2026/03/25/tech/social-media-addiction-trial-jury-decision.

⁶ Cooney Horvath, Jared. “Written Testimony Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath, Phd, Med.” *Written Testimony Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation*, 15 Jan. 2026, www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/A19DF2E8-3C69-4193-A676-430CF0C83DC2.

⁷ Horvath, Jared Cooney, and Sophie Winkleman. *Digital Delusion: How Classroom Technology Harms Our Kids’ Learning--and How to Help Them Thrive Again*. Jared Cooney Horvath, 2026.

- Students primarily use their computers for games, social media, and socializing, so expecting them to suddenly use this tool productively in school is doomed to failure;
- Computers, and their EdTech Apps, are built to hijack the same biological and physiological responses as social media, and undermine students' attention spans, further subverting deep learning and interpersonal interaction;
- Overuse of computers limits meaningful interactions between students and teachers, as well as between students, diminishing empathy and cutting out the relationships central to growth and success in school;
- Screen-based learning locks students into constrained modes of thinking, preventing them from making meaningful independent connections and stymieing application of knowledge.

All of the above flaws are inherent in the overuse and misuse of technology in schools, to say nothing of the problems arising from the abuse of Artificial Intelligence. As explained by Cooney Horvath, "this is the AI worldview made tangible: break information into fragments and train humans to operate at the micro-level. Context, sequencing, and originality vanish..." Specifically, AI in schools may lead to:

- Students not learning the fundamentals needed for meaningful higher-order thinking later;
- Students failing to develop skills needed to independently think about and develop ideas, art, etc.;
- Students lacking personal identity in their work and interests;
- Students avoiding interaction with the real people in their milieux, choosing artificial "friendships" over real conversation and play;
- The continued blurring of lines between what is real and meaningful versus what is artificial and devoid of value.

How does the research come together in the form of policy at Bnei Akiva Schools in 2026 and beyond?

- Students' grades will no longer be constantly viewable online. Students with questions about their marks must speak in person with their teachers to better understand where their marks come from, and how to improve next time. This is meant to promote in-person, growth-oriented interactions between students and teachers, and parents and children. Failed and missing assessments will continue to be reported home. At certain points of the year marks will be made visible online for the purposes of applications, meetings, and planning.
- Students will take notes by hand in notebooks or in binders, not on laptops or tablets. Teachers will be clear before the year begins what supplies are needed for their classes. Students with IEPs that necessitate notes in other formats will be accommodated accordingly, specific to their needs (see below for examples).
- Google Classroom will continue to be used so that students who are away can access work, and so that students can see the organization of the course and classwork.
- There will be training at the start of the year as to how to take notes and effectively organize and maintain files, and this same training will be shared with all teachers in advance to set expectations and norms. This training will include making sure notes are organized and legible.

- The school will move away from “EdTech” apps and programs and into “Technological Education”, teaching students how to best use technology to advance their learning without sacrificing mental and physical health and academic rigor and growth. Examples of EdTech apps in this regard include Quizlett, Kahoot!, and Blooket.
- As part of the school’s Strategic Plan we will be identifying shared themes, skills, and content across all courses by grade, which will allow us to clarify which concepts are taught, in which context, and when. This will lead to a consolidated approach whereby students are taught how to best use analog tools to maximize success, and where it is appropriate to use technology and in what way to better their learning.
- Students *may* require assistive technology as part of their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), such as the need for text-to-speech software and Google Extensions. These students will be allowed to use laptops without internet access on an as-needed basis, as determined by the school.
- Students whose IEPs mandate an extra set of notes will of course be provided with them, but will continue to practice note-taking on their own in their notebooks.
- In classes where computers are needed, such as Coding or MakerLab, students will sign and review a Classroom Contract regarding computer use before the course begins, and may lose the privilege of using a computer should the contract be broken.
- Courses with in-class writing assignments, such as English, will utilize Safe Exam Browsers like DigiExam to make sure students can type their work without the distraction of apps or misuse of AI.
- Teachers and students will work collaboratively to make sure AI is understood and used responsibly as a tool to improve learning.
- Students will be allowed to use laptops during non-class time, and the school will maintain its array of clubs, sports, and activities to encourage students to use their free time in positive, healthy, interpersonal interaction.
- This shift will also necessarily change the pace of some classes, as more time is spent in interpersonal interaction, discussion, and writing by hand. This shift in pacing comes along with an exciting new plan for enrichment, support, and Judaic Studies coursework and programming meant to increase individual growth and engagement.
- In light of the shift away from technology and to make sure students’ growth and learning is improved, teachers will spend a significant amount of their professional development time learning new ways to engage and motivate students, as well as encouraging creativity and innovation.

Circling back to where we began, the goals of this change are to increase positive relationships between students, teachers, and content; to improve learning outcomes; and to undo the mental-health, academic, and interpersonal damage that has been caused by excessive adoption of unnecessary technology. The school’s Mission Statement stands on growing intellectually, socially, emotionally and religiously, and developing methodological tools needed to become self-reliant in classical Jewish texts and giving students a broad-based secular grounding in the classical world disciplines—none of which can happen effectively in the current technology-environment.

If you have any questions or comments, I am of course happy to meet by phone, online, or in person at your convenience. We look forward to partnering with you in this significant and meaningful endeavor.

All the best,

Jonathan Parker

Supporting Student Needs Under the New Technology Policy

Bnei Akiva Schools recognize that student needs vary. The Student Support Department is committed to supporting the unique needs of every student, including continued access to documented accommodations and assistive technology.

Executive Functioning

(managing attention, thoughts, emotions, and actions)

- Hardcopy assignment calendars and planners
- Materials posted on Google Classroom
- Hardcopy duplicate notes



Fine Motor or Graphomotor Skills

(forming letters & numbers when handwriting)

- Speech-to-text
- Scribing support



Listening Comprehension

(hearing, processing, and understanding spoken language)

- Captioned media when available
- Instructions posted on Google Classroom
- Hardcopy duplicate notes



Oral & Reading Comprehension

(understanding spoken language; extracting and interpreting meaning)

- Instructions and exemplars on Google Classroom
- Hardcopies of instructions and exemplars
- Hardcopy duplicate notes



Reading Ability

(decoding words, understanding meaning, and extracting context)

- Text-to-speech devices
- Visual word highlighting
- Hardcopy options with enlarged print



Written Expression

(translating thoughts into organized, written text)

- Drafting and revising hardcopy checklists
- Hardcopy graphic organizers
- Teacher conferencing or scribing
- Speech-to text devices





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