RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Educational Technology and Information Services
90 East Ridge Road, Ridgefield, Connecticut 06877
Phone: (203) 894-5550 Fax (203) 431-2810

Middle School Technology Guide

Ridgefield Public Schools | 2026–27 Academic Year

Technology decisions in Ridgefield's middle schools begin with the same question that guides all of our work: does this serve the student's learning? At the middle school level, that question carries additional weight. Students in grades 6 through 8 are developing academic habits, building independence, and forming their relationship with learning itself. Technology used thoughtlessly at this stage does not simply fill time. It can displace the productive struggle and perseverance the learning process requires. Technology will be used when it supports learning in ways that other approaches cannot.

This Year's Direction

Middle school students spend more time on devices than their elementary counterparts, and that is expected. The curriculum requires it. More time on a device is not itself a concern. The question we are asking is whether that time is purposeful.

Two frameworks guide every technology decision at the middle school level this year. The first is Creation versus Consumption: is the student receiving, or producing? A polished document assembled without real thinking is not evidence of learning. What matters is what originated in the student's mind. The second is the Triple E Framework, developed by education researchers. Before a tool enters a Ridgefield middle school classroom, teachers ask three questions: Does it engage students with the learning goal? Does it enhance the experience in a way another approach could not? Does it extend learning into something authentic beyond the classroom? A tool that cannot clear at least one of those bars does not belong in the lesson.

This year also brings a greater focus on digital citizenship. Students in grades 6 through 8 are navigating an information environment that requires real skills: evaluating sources, understanding how algorithms shape what they see, and making responsible decisions in digital spaces. That instruction is woven into the academic work across content areas, not treated as a separate unit.

Our commitment to families this year: **Listen. Align. Trust.**

What This Means in Middle School Classrooms

Ridgefield's middle school classrooms are places where teachers teach, students discuss, argue, write by hand, read physical texts, and do the kind of sustained thinking that preparation for high school requires. Technology does not replace those experiences.

Adolescents are at a critical point in their cognitive development. The ability to hold a complex

idea in working memory, revise it when confronted with evidence, and communicate it precisely does not develop through passive interaction with a screen. It develops through practice. That practice happens in class discussions, in the drafts that come before the final draft, in the notes a student takes by hand during a lecture, in the reading they cannot skip by searching for a summary. These experiences are protected in our middle schools, and technology is not deployed in ways that shortcut them.

Student well-being shapes our technology decisions at the middle school level as deliberately as it does at the elementary level. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to the behavioral design of consumer technology. Social notification systems, recommendation algorithms, and engagement loops are engineered to compete for attention. School is a protected environment. RPS devices are not social platforms, and they are not configured to be. The learning environment your child enters each day is designed to support sustained focus, not fragment it.

Digital citizenship at the middle school level goes beyond safety rules. Students are learning to navigate an information environment that includes misinformation, algorithmic filtering, digital permanence, and data privacy. These are not abstract lessons. They are practical skills students will need before they leave our schools. That curriculum is embedded in the work of grades 6 through 8, not relegated to a single assembly or unit.

Technology should support adolescent development, not compete with it. That is the organizing principle. The work ahead is building a district that earns that standard, year by year.

Your Questions, Answered

How much time does my child spend on a device at school?

More than in elementary school, and for different reasons. The middle school curriculum requires more independent writing, research, and project-based work than earlier grades, and much of that happens in Google Workspace. Device time varies significantly by class, teacher, and unit. In 2025-26, we implemented systematic Chromebook login tracking at the elementary level for the first time. Extending that same data infrastructure to the middle school is a priority for 2026-27. We will share what we learn with families as that data becomes available.

Are AI tools being used in middle school classrooms?

Yes, in one specific and intentional context. In the Innovation Lab, students work directly with large language models to understand how they function: how they are trained, what they can and cannot do, and why their outputs are not the same as human thinking. The goal is not to use AI as a shortcut. It is to understand the tool well enough to think critically about it.

Outside of that context, consumer AI tools are not part of the RPS-approved tool catalog and are filtered on school networks. Students have access to personal devices and home internet outside of school, which is why our approach is educational, not purely restrictive. Blocking alone does not build the judgment students need. Understanding how these tools work, what they do to their own thinking when misused, and when using them crosses a line does.

How does RPS define academic integrity in an age of AI?

The standard has not changed: the work submitted must represent the student's own thinking. What has changed is the need to teach that standard explicitly in the context of tools that can produce the appearance of thinking without requiring it. Students learn what constitutes authentic work, what constitutes a violation, and why the distinction matters for their own development, not only for the grade they receive. The student handbook outlines specific AI use policies, and classroom teachers teach them at the start of each school year.

Will my child be expected to do homework on a device?

Some homework will involve a Chromebook, Google Docs, or other approved tools. Assignments that require a device are communicated in advance through Google Classroom so families can plan accordingly. Students without reliable internet access at home should contact their school counselor or the Technology Office. RPS maintains a device loan program and can connect families to Connecticut's internet assistance programs.

How does the school manage device distraction?

RPS devices are managed through GoGuardian, which allows teachers to monitor activity, restrict browsing to specific sites during class, and close off-task tabs in real time. Social media platforms are blocked on the school network. Beyond the technical layer, teachers establish clear norms for when devices are open and when they are closed. Research on adolescent attention consistently shows that the presence of a device, even a closed one, reduces sustained focus. Teachers are not required to use technology during every lesson, and many choose to keep devices off the desk during instruction that does not require them.

Are social media platforms accessible on school devices?

No. Social media platforms are blocked on the RPS network and on school-managed devices. Students who access these platforms through personal cellular data during school hours are subject to the student code of conduct.

What tools does my child use, and are they safe?

No tool enters an RPS classroom without completing a three-step review: a **data review** (what does the tool collect, and is it necessary?), a **privacy review** (does the vendor comply with FERPA and the Connecticut Student Data Privacy Act?), and a **curricular review** (does it genuinely advance learning?). Student well-being is evaluated before a tool's features. Under Connecticut law and RPS policy, student data cannot be sold, used for advertising, or used to train AI systems without the district's written consent. Vendors must delete all student data when a contract ends.
The full approved tool catalog is at **ridgefield.app.learnplatform.com**

How are you teaching responsible technology use at the middle school level?

Digital citizenship at the middle school level is embedded in English Language Arts, library and media coursework, and advisory programming. The curriculum addresses online safety, data privacy, the permanence of digital communication, how recommendation algorithms shape what students see, misinformation and source evaluation, and appropriate use of AI tools. These are not standalone

lessons; they are woven into the academic work students are already doing. The skills deepen from Grade 6 through Grade 8 and connect directly to what students will encounter in high school and beyond.

My child has an IEP or 504 with assistive technology. Does any of this change that?

No. Assistive technology, including text-to-speech, speech-to-text, screen magnification, word prediction, and AAC devices, is an accommodation with civil rights standing and is categorically separate from general device use. Device use related to a documented accommodation is not subject to the same norms applied to discretionary technology time. IEP and 504 accommodations continue unchanged.

Can my child opt out of device use?

Opting out of all technology use is not possible. State-mandated assessments are administered on Chromebooks, and technology is integrated into standard middle school curriculum in ways that make a parallel screen-free track instructionally impractical. If you have concerns about how technology is used in a specific class or context, contact your child's teacher, school counselor, or principal directly. Those conversations are taken seriously and inform the work we do.

How do I access my child's data or records?

Assessment reports from diagnostic tools are available in PowerSchool. Parents have the right to review all education records maintained by the district under FERPA. To request a records review or ask about a specific tool, contact the Technology Office at twrye@ridgefieldps.net or your child's teacher. Detailed privacy information for each approved tool is available at www.ridgefield.org/student-data-privacy.

How are you involving families going forward?

We are establishing a Technology Advisory Committee this fall with representation from parents, teachers, administrators, the Board of Education, and students at all grade levels, including the middle school. That group will weigh in on teaching and learning decisions, student data privacy practices, and digital citizenship curriculum. An internal working group will review research and develop recommendations. The process is intentional: listen, study, align, act, communicate. This document reflects that commitment. Learning walks and parent focus groups will follow in the months ahead.

Approved Middle School Tools

Every tool has completed RPS's three-step review covering data, privacy, and curriculum. The full catalog is at ridgefield.app.learnplatform.com

Resources

Resource	Where to Find It
Approved Tool Catalog	ridgefield.app.learnplatform.com

Resource	Where to Find It
RPS Technology Department	www.ridgefield.org/technology
Student Data Privacy	www.ridgefield.org/student-data-privacy
PowerSchool (assessment reports)	Your school's parent portal
IT Helpdesk	helpdesk@ridgefieldps.net | M–F, 7 a.m.–4 p.m.
Director of Educational Technology	twrye@ridgefieldps.net | (203) 894-5550 ext. 1100