



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Office of Facilities Planning, 89 Washington Avenue, Room 1060 Education Building Annex, Albany, NY 12234
Tel. (518) 474-3906
Website: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/facplan/>

To: BOCES District Superintendents
Superintendents of Schools
Charter School Administrators

From: Sara Madison, RA
Coordinator, Office of Facilities Planning

Date: August 4, 2025

Subject: **RFID-Blocking Paint in School Restrooms**

New York's **Distraction-Free Schools law (2025)** mandates "bell-to-bell" restrictions on student internet-enabled devices, including smartphones, tablets and smartwatches, during the school day.¹ By Fall 2025, each school district, charter school and board of cooperative educational services (BOCES) must develop and adopt a local enforcement plan to comply with this law. It has come to the New York State Education Department's attention that some schools have considered **RFID-blocking (radio-frequency shielding) paint** in restrooms as a measure to prevent cell phone use. This type of conductive paint blocks wireless signals, effectively creating a "dead zone" for cell service. It is Office of Facilities Planning's recommendation that these paints **NOT** be used based on the following concerns:

- **First Responder Radio Coverage:** Shielding would likely attenuate fire, police, and EMS radio signals. To ensure vital responder communication, New York fire codes (e.g., Section 510) require 99% coverage in critical areas. Shielding could lead to code violations.
- **Additional Interference:** Shielding could interfere with wireless fire alarm components, PA systems, district radios, or WIFI signals.
- **Loss of 911 and Emergency Access:** Shielded restrooms would block student or staff phones from dialing 911 during emergencies like medical issues or active threats, and from receiving emergency alerts, thereby creating potential life-safety hazards.
- **Windows and Doors:** Any restroom with a window to the exterior will likely negate the effectiveness of this paint. Using EMF blocking shades or shielding paint on the windows has implications regarding emergency lighting required for spaces without natural lighting. Painting of fire rated doors, often present at restroom entrances, may alter the fire rating.
- **Disability Accommodations:** Students who rely on devices for medical monitoring (e.g., glucose or heart-rate tracking) or translation services could lose essential functionality in shielded areas, raising IDEA, ADA and Section 504 compliance issues.
- **Liability Exposure:** Any delay in emergency response due to blocked signals could expose districts to legal liability.
- **Cost:** The paint system adds a considerable cost in supplies including the grounding equipment that is typically required for proper installation.

¹ See Education Law § 2803.



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RFID-blocking paint introduces **significant risks to life safety, emergency communications, and legal compliance** while offering only marginal improvements in enforcing phone bans. Safer alternatives—such as lockable phone pouches, storage lockers, and clear policy enforcement—are recommended for achieving distraction-free environments. Maintaining **uninterrupted emergency communication** should remain a priority in all enforcement strategies.