

# Granville County Public Schools Tech Free Playbook for Educators



**Granville County**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Committed to Excellence and Achievement for All*

Dear Teachers,

We are excited to share with you our **Tech-Free Teaching Guidebook**, a practical resource designed to help us re-engage students through high-impact, low-tech instruction. This guide offers strategies that prioritize reading, writing, speaking, and listening—core skills that anchor deep learning across content areas.

As we implement **Tech-Free Tuesdays and Thursdays**, this guidebook will support you in planning lessons that build student stamina, spark authentic discourse, and reduce screen fatigue. Inside, you'll find sample activities, classroom routines, and planning tools tailored for all grade levels and content areas.

Our goal is not to eliminate technology but to create intentional space for connection, creativity, and critical thinking. I encourage you to explore the guide, try out the strategies, and share your experiences with your colleagues.

Let's continue to model thoughtful teaching and inspire students to lean into learning—in every form.

Happy Teaching and Learning

Granville County Public Schools  
Curriculum & Instruction Department

This playbook is built on interactive, creative, and engaging strategies that promote deep thinking, collaboration, and hands-on learning — **without relying on technology or reverting to packets. These are ideal days for students to engage in project-based learning—collaborating in teams to research, learn, and present information to their peers. They’re also perfect opportunities to model and facilitate effective direct instruction.**

# GCPS No Tech Learning Playbook

The “Why” Behind the Work:

In a world where screens are everywhere, our classrooms need space for students to think, move, and connect without constant digital interference. *Research shows that tech-free learning boosts focus, memory, and real engagement. When students handwrite notes, they retain information better than when typing (Scientific American, 2021).* In low-tech classrooms, students interact more with each other, participate more fully, and stay on task longer (*Common Sense Classical, 2023*). One study found that over 70% of students felt more focused and remembered more when phones and laptops were set aside (Olafson et al., 2023). Schools that restrict in-class phone use are also seeing stronger academic performance, especially among students who typically struggle (Beland & Murphy, 2016).

Going tech-free doesn’t mean going backward. It means being intentional about how and when we use devices. Movement, conversation, and hands-on activities—key parts of unplugged learning—build deeper understanding and support emotional well-being. Active learning without screens has been shown to increase test scores and lower failure rates (Freeman et al., 2014). This playbook offers simple ways to bring no-tech time into your classroom—backed by research and built for real classrooms, real kids, and real results.

## Guiding Ideas

1. **Connection over Content Cramming**
2. **Collaboration over Compliance**
3. **Exploration over Exhaustion**
4. **Purposeful Play over Passive Consumption**

## Reading (K–5) No-Tech Ideas

### Partner Reading

Students take turns reading aloud to each other, stopping to ask questions or make predictions.

### Reader's Theater

Students perform a story or script to build fluency and expression.

### Word Sorts

Use index cards with words. Students sort by sound, pattern, or meaning (e.g., short vs. long vowels, prefixes/suffixes).

### Story Retelling

Students use props or drawings to retell a story in their own words, focusing on beginning, middle, and end.

### Reading Response Journals

After reading, students respond to a prompt (e.g., “What surprised you?” or “Would you be friends with the main character? Why?”).

### Book Walks

Students move around the room visiting different books or text excerpts posted on the walls, leaving sticky note comments or questions.

### Vocabulary Charades

Students act out vocabulary words while others guess the word.

### Poetry Read-Alouds

Students read poems aloud, explore rhythm, rhyme, and expression.

## Math (K–5) No-Tech Ideas

### Math Centers

Hands-on stations with activities like counting bears, base-10 blocks, flashcards, puzzles, or matching games.

### Math Talks

Pose a single math problem and discuss strategies as a class. Focus on “How did you get that answer?”

### Board Games

Use number-based board games (like dominoes, dice games, or card games) to reinforce addition, subtraction, and number sense.

**Real-Life Math**

Give students tasks like measuring items in the classroom, counting classroom supplies, or creating a simple budget for a pretend party.

**Problem of the Day**

Write a word problem on the board. Students solve it independently, then share and compare strategies.

**Math Journals**

Students write about how they solved a problem or explain their thinking using pictures and words.

**Skip Counting Hopscotch**

Create a hopscotch with numbers to practice skip counting or multiples.

**Pattern Building**

Use blocks, beads, or classroom items to create and extend patterns.

## 6-12 Core Strategies

**Socratic Seminars & Fishbowl Discussions**

**Description:** Structured conversations around essential questions, novels, articles, or historical events.

**Teacher Role:** Facilitate, guide questioning, and observe.

**Student Engagement:** Active speaking, listening, note-taking, peer feedback.

**Works Best In:** ELA, Social Studies, Science, even Math with conceptual debates.

**Project-Based Mini Challenges**

**Description:** Hands-on, inquiry-driven tasks where students create, build, or problem-solve.

**Examples:**

1. Build a bridge from paper and tape that holds 20 pennies.
2. Create a board game that teaches fractions.
3. “Who Done It” Mysteries or Science Dioramas

**Assessment:** Rubrics based on creativity, teamwork, and understanding.

**Gallery Walks / Learning Stations**

**Description:** Students move around the room to explore different topics or questions posted on chart paper or in physical folders.

**Variation:** “Silent Conversations” — students respond in writing to questions at each station, building on each other’s ideas.

**Subjects:** Science processes, writing feedback, historical analysis, vocabulary expansion.

## **Role-Play & Simulation Activities**

**Examples:**

**Mock Trial:** Students act as lawyers, witnesses, and jurors.

**Historical Summit:** Students take on the roles of historical figures and debate policies.

**Science Lab Safety Court:** Defend or prosecute lab procedures.

**Outcome:** Develop critical thinking, empathy, and collaboration.

## **Writer's Workshop & Writer's Café**

**Description:** Students write creatively, revise, and share aloud in small groups.

**Activities:** 6-word stories, writing from a photo or object, and peer feedback carousel

**Silent Share Option:** "Read and Reflect" circles — pass notebooks around and write feedback.

## **Math in the Real World**

**Strategies:**

**Math Talks:** Mental math challenges where students explain their thinking.

**Problem of the Day:** Real-life math scenarios (e.g., planning a school event budget).

**Math Relay Races:** Teams solve math problems at stations across the classroom.

## **Science: Inquiry Without Devices (Discovery Education Science Labs)**

**Ideas:**

**Mystery Bags:** Students explore and infer the identity of objects using senses and observation.

**Nature Walks (if possible):** Document changes in the ecosystem, collect data on bugs, clouds, etc.

**Paper Labs:** Conduct labs with printed instructions and manually recorded data.

## **Creative Collaboration Circles**

**Daily Questions:** "What if water ran uphill?" — students write and then discuss their thoughts.

**Group Brainstorming:** "Design a new country" with rules, language, and a map.

**Critical Thinking Cards:** Use decks with scenarios that provoke discussion and ethical reasoning.

## Art, Drama, and Music Crossovers

**Literature to Stage:** Act out scenes from novels.

**Math + Art:** Create fractal art, geometric designs, scale drawings.

**Science Songs or Raps:** Write and perform songs about cell division, weather patterns, etc.

## Reflection Journals (Reusable All Year)

### Daily or Weekly Prompts:

What challenged you today?

Where did you succeed without tech?

What is one thing you're proud of learning today?

## What Teachers Can Do on No-Tech Days:

Guide on the side, instead of sage on the stage!

**Facilitator:** Keep the discussion going. Ask open-ended questions that encourage students to think and talk.

**Observer:** Step back and watch. Take quick notes on what students are saying or doing—use sticky notes or a clipboard.

**Coach:** Give feedback on the spot. Walk around the room with purpose, checking in and supporting students as they work.

**Collaborator:** Join in at one of the stations. Work with students, show how to collaborate, and ask curious questions alongside them.

## Suggested Weekly Flow:

**Monday:** Use tech for things like digital research or simulations.

**Tuesday (No-Tech):** Focus on deep thinking—try Socratic seminars or writing circles.

**Wednesday:** Work together on group projects or presentations.

**Thursday (No-Tech):** Go hands-on with math games, science labs, or art-based learning.

**Friday:** Wrap up the week with reflection—use journals or creative assessments.

## Intentional Planning:

It is imperative that teachers are intentional in their planning for no-tech days. **The activities they select must be aligned not only to state standards but also to the specific content currently being taught.** Teachers should ensure that hands-on activities are purposefully connected to the instructional sequence, not just the standard in isolation. Additionally, it is essential that these activities provide teachers with meaningful data that supports their instructional objectives for the week and the overall unit of study. No-tech days should reinforce

learning while offering insight into student understanding, allowing teachers to make informed decisions about next steps in instruction.

## Grading and Submission Guidelines:

On no-tech days, students should submit work and receive feedback in ways that are personal and meaningful. Recommended practices include one-on-one student writing conferences, written feedback on paper, sticky note comments, and verbal feedback. **Student work may be submitted on paper during these days. It is recommended that students not be required to submit work virtually on no-tech days.**

Teachers are encouraged to keep track of student participation and engagement through various informal measures, such as:

Participation trackers, observational notes on classroom discussions, notes from student presentations, project reflection sheets, student self-reflection sheets, running records or progress monitoring data.

## How to Measure Engagement (No Screens, No Scores)

**Check-ins:** “Fist to Five” confidence check

**Exit Tickets:** One sentence summary or drawing

**Observational Notes:** Who’s leading, who’s collaborating

**Peer Feedback Rounds:** Students give feedback on group work

## No-Tech Teaching: What Does it Look Like?

Learning without technology looks like students engaging in purposeful conversation through group discussions, solving problems in teams, participating in hands-on activities, and driving their own learning. It includes movement-based learning through games and gallery walks, open-ended writing, and investigative thinking.

Learning without technology **does not** mean students sitting and listening for long periods of time. It’s not silent reading, test-taking, or completing paper packets. It doesn’t involve students sitting in one place doing low-engagement tasks, busywork with simple right-or-wrong answers, or everyone completing the same task in isolation with little interaction.

# Resources & Video Examples on How to Implement

## Socratic Seminars & Fishbowl Discussions

“Engaging Students in Socratic Seminars” – A strong overview of setting up student-led discussions and teacher as facilitator:

facilitator: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeoGKQKXdps>

Grades 6-12 Example: Fishbowl: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVCFGLVZA3w>

WeTeachNYC “Increasing Engagement in Socratic Seminar” – A 12th-grade classroom walkthrough of boosted student participation [weteachnyc.org](http://weteachnyc.org).

## Project-Based Mini Challenges

Elementary Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5q4BiGcRqM>

Middle school example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hBZBTYRxuM>

## Gallery Walks / Learning Stations

Erikson Early Math: “A Gallery Walk to Inspire Student Collaboration” – Shows a gallery walk in a 3rd-grade math context [vimeo.com+7\\_earlymath.erikson.edu+7\\_earlymath.erikson.edu+7](http://vimeo.com+7_earlymath.erikson.edu+7_earlymath.erikson.edu+7).

Teaching Channel: “Building Background Knowledge With Gallery Walks” – Demonstrates students moving between stations, responding in writing, and collaborating [civicslearning.orgteachingchannel.com+1en.wikipedia.org+1](http://civicslearning.orgteachingchannel.com+1en.wikipedia.org+1).

## Role-Play & Simulation Activities

CivicsLearning “Mock Trial in the Classroom – Strategies” – A toolkit with role cards, rubrics, and teacher-guided implementation tips [civicslearning.org+1mocktrialstrategies.com+1](http://civicslearning.org+1mocktrialstrategies.com+1).

## Writer’s Workshop & Writer’s Café

Elementary Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09SaYA3rCPk>

## Math in the Real World

Elementary Example: -[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgyRnoW\\_4MM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgyRnoW_4MM)

Elementary Example: -<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WIGRdMWFuk>

## Creative Collaboration Circles

K-12: <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/think-pair-share>

6-12 Idea: [://www.debonogroup.com/services/core-programs/six-thinking-hats/](http://www.debonogroup.com/services/core-programs/six-thinking-hats/)

## Reflection Journals (K-12)

<https://ziplet.com/post/18-exit-ticket-questions-to-prompt-student-reflection>

<https://www.structural-learning.com/post/learning-journals-for-developing-independence>

## K-12: [NCDPI Academic Discourse Playbook](#)

Note: The *Academic Discourse Playbook* is intended to support the Comprehension: Discussion & Writing Component of the Literacy Instruction Standards (LIS). Consider incorporating its content into PLC conversations in the 25-26 SY to support alignment of instruction to the LIS.

- Three key recommendations to strengthen classroom conversations and written responses.
- Editable templates for anchor charts, note-catchers, and graphic organizers.
- Practical strategies to deepen comprehension and enrich learning.

Teachers are allowed and encouraged to use technology every day! What does that look like? Teachers use a timer to facilitate instructional time, projecting lesson plans/slideshows, and displaying instructional videos.