

Green-lighting BYOD: 3 First Steps

By Jonathan Ross and Nicholas Indeglio



The freight train of technological evolution continues to roll forward in education at breakneck speed. If you are a principal thinking about starting a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative at your school, you'll likely face roadblocks along the way from teachers, parents, your school's bandwidth, and more. Challenges to the status quo in education can bring resistance—but, fortunately, there's good news. School leaders are willing to share their experiences, paving the way

to implementation.

Before you begin, ask yourself if this is the time to tackle a new initiative. BYOD is an undertaking that, if not given the attention it needs, can create more problems than would have existed otherwise. Prepare for the initial implementation by discussing the topic with your faculty. Let them share their concerns and fears. This tactic not only gives your staff members the opportunity to work through the idea, but it also gives you, the leader, a chance to hear about potential stumbling blocks.

Here are the three most common questions and concerns that we encountered in BYOD implementation.

1. What educational value does this have for instruction?

More students come to school each year with higher levels of digital literacy. They are the "digital natives," while we are "digital immigrants." Our district's superintendent, Lawrence Mussoline, once said, "To ask [students] to power down when they enter our schools is a tremendous disservice when they're part of a fully connected community outside of school." BYOD maximizes our potential to enhance and begin transforming instruction.

Plus, in this age of fiscal cliffs and dwindling revenues, it is becoming more difficult to ask taxpayers to pony up the money for new devices. Why wouldn't we allow students to use the ones they already own and know how to use?

2. Can our Wi-Fi, bandwidth, and overall network handle all these potential devices?

While you might think this is a question for your IT department, make sure you have an answer before

considering BYOD implementation. If you anticipate that additional devices will challenge the overall fidelity of your current system, then the system needs to be fully upgraded before BYOD begins. Otherwise, you may lose your staff's trust, and then the implementation battle is lost.

3. How will we make sure kids are using the devices appropriately?

Early in implementation, consider how safety will factor into your BYOD plan. New initiatives often require visual cues and recognizable symbols to help reinforce the rules, especially for younger students.

One of our teachers, Lois Grosso, came up with the idea of setting up device "traffic light zones" throughout the school. The zones include:

- **Red Light Zones:** Devices are never permitted. This includes bathrooms and locker rooms.
- **Yellow Light Zones:** Students must first receive permission from a staff member before using their devices. All classrooms were initially designated as yellow light areas.
- **Green Light Zones:** Students may use their devices appropriately at all times. The cafeteria and hallways became green light areas.

Make sure to give students, parents, and staff plenty of lead time to get accustomed to the new BYOD system. We distributed the rules and information about these zones to all stakeholders through both social media and traditional methods (posted on websites, Facebook, and Twitter; parents were reached with robocalls, etc.).

This initial groundwork paved the way for us to move forward with BYOD implementation. Because we considered these questions early in the planning process, our schools are now cruising on an unobstructed highway of BYOD success.

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