

# The Case for BYOD and Tech-Smart Schools

Outside of school, technology is ubiquitous. Over 90 percent of people worldwide have a cell phone. Many children have their own computer, tablet, and/or cell phone. At the very least, most have access to a parent's cell phone.

Although students are using these tools at home, most school policies do not allow students to bring their own devices or use them at school. I have students who have asked to bring their Kindles and iPads to school so they can read e-books during independent reading. But, because we do not have a policy that allows students to bring their own devices (BYOD) to school, they have to read their e-books at home. What's wrong with this picture?

Further, in the classroom, teachers often stand and deliver content, with students memorizing and regurgitating information that they could easily have Siri or Google retrieve within seconds. This begs the question: If students can Google it, what do they need to know about it? How can schools support them in this increasingly technological world?

Boosting BYOD and our schools' tech-savviness are two key steps to addressing these issues.

## Tech Challenges

Across the nation, schools are struggling to keep technology current. Elementary and middle schools often receive the hand-me-down computers from high schools when their technology is upgraded. Or, to prepare for online assessments, districts are purchasing small laptops such as Chromebooks because the test companies support them.

Every technology tool has its pros and cons. Chromebooks, for example, are limited in their ability to save students' work unless they use Google tools. Chromebooks also do not allow many of the traditional apps or other programs students are able to use on their own devices at home. Regard-

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less, most schools have, at best, only several laptop carts, so students must wait their turn for a chance to use the computers. In the meantime, teachers stand and deliver content and students passively "sit and get."

Even schools with one-to-one computers *still* often use technology primarily for glorified worksheets. Teachers stand in front of interactive whiteboards that do little more than present streamed video and PowerPoint slides in much the same way Miss Landers, Beaver Cleaver's teacher on the '50s television show *Leave It To Beaver*, used a blackboard and filmstrip projector. Students demonstrate their learning with assignments that involve little collaboration from their peers. In many flipped classrooms, teachers deliver the content online that students sit, get, and memorize for "the test," rather than helping students construct their own knowledge through authentic, problem-based projects and investigations.

## BYOD and Tech-Savvy Solutions

Outside of school, students have the freedom to become self-directed

learners with infinite access to the world as they let their fingertips (and now voice recognition) help them navigate across the Internet. Is it any wonder our students have trouble focusing inside our classrooms when after school they are able to virtually travel the world, interact with others through social media and games, and discover unlimited gems of knowledge?

To bring that learning into our classrooms, principals and schools must be more tech-savvy. First, principals must ensure that all schools and students have equal access to technology in schools. One way to do this is through BYOD. Schools must also have a high-speed infrastructure that allows students and teachers to use technology to collaborate on structured learning activities—both safely within school and with others around the world.

State and federal governments must continue to build and support technology infrastructure that allows all schools to be fully connected and wireless, so that teachers and students can use technology seamlessly. They must also provide adequate funding to ensure all students have equal access to technology tools. Districts must create the policies that allow students and teachers to BYOD, so that instead of focusing on memorizing facts, they can go deeper into the curricula.

Within schools, educators must explicitly teach students (and their parents) how to safely navigate the virtual environments children "hang out" in after school hours. Most of all, we must teach our students how to become caring, global citizens and how to stay safe when they are working collaboratively with others online. (One great resource is *Net Cetera: Chatting With Kids About Being Online* found at [OnGuardOnline.gov](http://OnGuardOnline.gov).) Principals can model and support the effective use of devices by blogging with students, tweeting to parents and teachers, and sharing with their school communities gems of knowledge found online.

Finally, we must make sure that our curricula are heavily infused with the use of 21st century skills (e.g., communication, collaboration, critical thinking, innovation, problem-solving, decision-making, creativity, entrepreneurship). Students and teachers must have time to go deep within curricula to think critically, address issues, understand the world, and develop 21st century skills through collaborative peer support and exploration guided by educators. Principals must monitor online learning activities and make sure they are purposeful and aligned to district and state curricula.

### Reconsidering Assessments

We all know that what gets tested gets taught. Policymakers and testing companies must find ways to allow students to use their own devices as well as school computers during assessments. Testing companies and teachers must also create assessments that measure the 21st century skills students will need to live successful and productive lives outside of school. They must find authentic ways to measure student work through real-world, collaborative, problem-based learning tasks in virtual environments, where students can apply curricular knowledge, sometimes with peers, to solve real-time problems. After all, to be successful, people must know how to communicate, collaborate, share, solve problems, and make informed decisions together. Why can't we teach and assess this in school?

It is time to afford students the same learning tools inside school that they have access to outside of school, so that they can become actively engaged, self-directed learners and take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers must still guide these explorations and ensure that all students gain the skills they need to not only be college- and career-ready, but also able to live successful and productive lives in a global society. 

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### About the Panel

**The National Panel of New Principals is the only initiative of its kind that is dedicated to principals in the first or second year of their principalship.** By participating, new principals will contribute to a dynamic knowledge base about what it's really like to be a new principal today. And they'll gain insights into how their experience as a new principal compares to their peers throughout the nation.

### Here's How It Works

New principals can enroll directly online at [newprincipal.org](http://newprincipal.org) and can remain on the panel until the end of the second year of their principalship. Six times during the school year, participants are invited via email to answer a few brief online questions. **The total time commitment per survey is less than 10 minutes.**

### What Participants Get

Each time a principal participates, he or she receives a \$10 gift certificate to shop in the National Principal Resource Center or a special gift from one of our sponsors. Plus, we'll send our panelists the *Rise&Shine* brief, summarizing their peers' best thinking on the topic of each survey.

### Who Qualifies

- Participants must be first- or second-year principals.
- NAESP members and non-members are welcome.

### How New Principals Join the Panel

Go to [newprincipal.org](http://newprincipal.org) and fill out the brief enrollment form. It's that easy! Enrollments are accepted year-round. Administrators are encouraged to share this opportunity with new principals to ensure that your district and state are well represented.



**To enroll, visit [newprincipal.org](http://newprincipal.org)**  
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