To BYOD or Not To BYOD: Moving 88 miles per hour, both in and out of school… (#FutureReady)

The following blog post is part of the Alliance's Future Ready blog post series. The Future Ready initiative working to support school district superintendents and their leadership teams on district-wide transformation. This blog was written by Ross Cooper, Elementary Assistant Principal for Williamsport Area School District in Williamsport, PA. It originally appeared as part of a collaborative post titled, "To BYOD or Not To BYOD: that isn't the question," on the blog, The Road to Learning.

As of last year, the East Penn School District – a suburban school district located about an hour north of Philadelphia – had experienced such progressive initiatives as project-based learning, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and makerspaces. The seven elementary schools contained a decent amount of technology: a few white clamshell MacBook carts per building, some primary level rooms with a handful of PCs towards the back, the occasional Windows laptop cart that was well past its prime, and some iPads here and there.

However, despite all of these tools, there was a glaring need for the progressive district to do a better job of getting technology in front of its students on a more frequent basis. With so many of these students possessing their own mobile devices, BYOD was the obvious answer in order to assist students in moving 88 miles per hour, both in and out of school!

The BYOD initiative started at the elementary level, mostly because this is where (1) students are less likely to cause problems with their personal devices (2) there is more of an emphasis on effective pedagogy, and (3) teachers are more willing to partake. Throughout the majority of the 2013-2014 school year, two elementary school educators – a fifth grade teacher and a fourth grade teacher (me) – led BYOD

classrooms in what was called a pre-pilot. The idea was for these participants to "work out the kinks" in order to help the initiative run that much smoother in the following years.

As of now, I can only speak to the effectiveness of the pre-pilot in my own classroom. As a teacher who had been teaching the same grade level for the sixth straight year, the program served as the catalyst for several exciting instructional shifts that I was able to make.

Reflecting upon what took place, some of the lessons I learned include: students should always have their devices readily available as there is no such thing as "BYOD time," students should constantly leverage the same devices and programs between school and home, learning should be redefined as students use their devices to accomplish tasks that would not otherwise be possible without the technology itself, digital citizenship must be stressed in both a proactive and reactive fashion, and classroom parents should be made aware of all of the above and a whole lot more.

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