

Blackboard Mobile for K-12

Today's cohort of K-12 students is fundamentally different than the K-12 students of just a few years ago. Now almost 1 in 3 children between the ages of 8 and 10 owns their own cell phone¹, and the 13 to 17 age bracket is the fastest growing segment of smartphone adoption². The rise in popularity of smartphones has brought on a strong cultural shift in how children access and interact with information. On average, children between the ages of 8 and 18 who own their own smartphone use it daily for 33 minutes of talk and 49 minutes of media consumption¹. In fact, smartphones have become children and teens' preferred method for consuming media; recent studies have even found that they now favor viewing media on smartphones over televisions³. Preference for smartphones over other available technology also extends to learning, with 62% of students reporting that they would rather use a smartphone than a laptop as a learning tool³.

The market is ripe for a mobile learning revolution in the K-12 classroom. Although there is hesitation to deploy full-scale mobile learning initiatives, there are some incredible examples of schools and districts that are paving the way into mobile learning in K-12.

One such example is Arlington Public Schools (APS), in Arlington, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, DC. APS is a diverse and inclusive school community with 21,000 students who come from 126 different countries. The Strategic Goals for the school system are to eliminate the achievement gap, build effective relationships between all constituent groups, raise student achievement for all students, and deliver a responsive education. During the 2010-2011 school year, Arlington was selected by the state of Virginia to

be part of the Learning Without Boundaries, Beyond Textbooks pilot program. The program was designed by the state "to explore the technical, social, and policy implications of digital textbooks on mobile devices such as the iPad."

Currently, APS has deployed over 700 iPads within the school system, ranging from elementary to high schools. Each school has implemented the mobile devices in a way that addresses their targeted instructional need. One school is using mobile devices to support math instruction; another, to support reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Additionally, The Department of Instruction in collaboration with the Department of Information Services has deployed iPads to School Administrators,

Curriculum Supervisors and Specialists, and School Board members. Teachers are starting to notice their peers using mobile devices in the classroom and are beginning to generate ideas of how they too can integrate the mobile devices into their classroom instruction. Since the beginning of the school year, there has been an increase in the number of teachers interested in integrating the mobile devices into their classrooms.

Jeannine Richardson, from the Office of Instructional & Innovative Technologies, truly believes in pushing the boundaries of mobile devices in K-12. Through the Blackboard Mobile Learn application, students can access course content, digital textbooks, and class discussions and blogs, among other things. A great benefit of the app is that teachers can upload documents as well as instructional videos to their Blackboard classes and whenever students log into Blackboard Mobile Learn, they can pull any file down to their mobile device. In addition students can work within other applications on the mobile device and save their finished work back to Blackboard through the use of the web dav feature. The Mobile Learn application alleviates the need to sync the

instructional materials to each device for classroom use. “The Blackboard Mobile Learn application has been a time-saver for the Instructional Technology Coordinators that support the implementation of the mobile devices at our schools”, Jeannine says. “As we continue with the use of mobile devices at our schools we hope to identify truly interactive engaging content that will make our students more active and participatory in their own educational process”.

When asked how she envisions mobile technology changing the education experience, Jeannine says, “It’s making the students realize that they have more power over their own learning. It’s giving students the flexibility to access instructional resources any time/ anywhere. I am sure that we will begin to see more one to one initiatives in school systems as well as students being given the opportunity to bring their own devices to school.”

While Arlington Public Schools is piloting mobile learning for learners as young as eight years old, Erica Beasley, CIO and Systems Manager of Briarcliff Manor UFSD in Briarcliff Manor, NY, is focused on her 1,750 students from grades K-12. Erica’s goal is to take the entire Learning Management System experience to the kids’ handheld devices while keeping parents engaged too. “Mobile appeals to all ages with the multi-media experience and encourages parent’s collaboration with their kids for the younger students”.

Also a Blackboard Connect client, Briarcliff UFSD noticed that their targeted emails were receiving the most responses during rush hour, due to the large number of parents who commute into New York City. As an innovative school with a focus on advancements in technology that is making their entire campus wireless within the next year, they realized they could enable their students and their parents to be connected anytime and anywhere through the use of Blackboard Mobile Learn.

Since all teachers at Briarcliff use Blackboard Learn for their classes, Erica notes, “At this point, offering

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Amarillo Independent School District in Amarillo, Texas has 31,000 learners, 65% of whom are economically disadvantaged. They have deployed Blackboard Mobile Learn for use by their teachers and students at Amarillo Online School (AOS) in order to offer them flexibility and the ability to stay up to date on their course content. "The majority of our students have mobile phones, and a large percentage of them even have Smartphones", says Jay Barrett, Principal of both AOS and the Amarillo Area Center for Advanced Learning. "Brick and mortar schools tend to ban cell phones, but it's getting to a critical point where we have to decide if it's a distraction or if it's a way of life and we should use it for the learning opportunities it affords." Jay sees the importance in allowing learners to carry devices that are less heavy and cumbersome, while providing the same level of access. AOS plans to utilize mobile learning even further in the future, after collecting feedback this summer.

Arlington Public Schools, Briarcliff High School, and Amarillo Online School are only a few schools examples out of the hundreds that have proactively adopted mobile learning initiatives with the understanding that the current teaching and learning model must change to account for the way 21st century students are connecting to and accessing information beyond the classroom walls. For these schools, mobile learning is bridging the gap between the way students live and the way they learn. The benefits are clear; students involved in mobile learning pilots have shown improvement not only in test scores, but also in student engagement and attitudes towards learning⁴.



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Learning experiences are built around individual relationships, group collaborations, and deep connections across affinity groups. A strategic approach to mobile and mobile apps can help provide improved interactivity.

Chad Kainz
*Mobile Agility and the Anytime,
Anywhere Impact on IT*

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¹ Victoria J. Rideout, M.A., Ulla G. Foehr, Ph.D., and Donald F. Roberts, Ph.D. (2010). *GENERATION M2* Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds. California: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

² *The comScore 2010 Mobile Year in Review*

³ Chiong, C., & Shuler, C. (2010). Learning: Is there an app for that? *Investigations of young children's usage and learning with mobile devices and apps*. New York: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.

⁴ Digital Millennial Consulting (July 2010). Project K-Nect Evaluation Report July 2010. North Carolina: Project K-Nect.

