

Tablets proliferate in nation's classrooms, and take a swipe at the status quo (Posted 2014-05-18 22:26:03)

Chandler, Michael Alison; Tsukayama, Hayley . The Washington Post (Online) , Washington, D.C.: WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post. 2014.

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT

[...]Heather Blake, an Arlington second-grade teacher, was able to keep assignments flowing during the many snow days this past winter, sending daily messages with grammar lessons and math activities, directing homebound students to measure the snow drifts or follow a recipe for snow ice cream.

FULL TEXT

Social studies students in a District middle school use a touch screen to swipe through the articles of the Constitution. A fifth-grade teacher in Arlington County sends video lessons to students as homework so she can spend more time helping them in class.

And Heather Blake, an Arlington second-grade teacher, was able to keep assignments flowing during the many snow days this past winter, sending daily messages with grammar lessons and math activities, directing homebound students to measure the snow drifts or follow a recipe for snow ice cream.

"It's like we didn't really miss a beat," said Blake, who teaches at Jamestown Elementary School. "We just continued with our learning."

Teachers like these are able to abandon textbooks or stretch out the academic day because each of their students has a school-issued iPad.

One-to-one computing – in which each student receives a computer for Internet access and digital learning – took root with laptops in schools well over a decade ago, but it has gotten a huge boost in recent years with the advent of lower-cost tablet computers. U.S. schools are expected to purchase 3.5 million tablets by the end of the year, according to industry analysts, giving students access to an array of modern educational opportunities that come with the technology. Worldwide, K-12 spending on tablets has increased 60 percent over last year.

The rush for schools to buy tablets and other computers comes ahead of a looming deadline for new online standardized tests, scheduled to be introduced next year in 45 states and the District that signed on to the new national Common Core learning standards.

But many advocates for education reform, including U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, see the scaling up of classroom technology as a much bigger opportunity to rethink schools, to untether them from a calendar designed

in an agrarian era, a bell schedule that tells students when and where to go, and a teacher in the middle of the classroom who is considered the source of all knowledge.

"Before, it was more sit and get," said Leslie Wilson, chief executive of the One-to-One Institute, which advises school districts. "In this transformed environment, students can direct their own learning."

Computers can help students learn at their own pace, based on what they know rather than on whatever class they are in. Experts say this can be particularly helpful for a ninth-grader who reads at a fourth-grade level. Computers also have the potential to engage students through the same kinds of games, videos and social networks that captivate them during their free time.

But offering every student an easy window to the World Wide Web raises steep challenges for school districts. They must provide enough bandwidth and professional development, and they have to have enough network control to prevent the devices from becoming easy tools for the distractions of online shopping or instant messaging that could easily lure students away from their math classes.

The infusion of new technology also raises troubling questions for educators and parents. Many worry that the seven hours a day an average child already spends using electronic media is more than enough and that the art of teaching will be reduced to connecting students to the most helpful apps or software. Some question the notion of building major change around a device that did not exist five years ago.

That debate is playing out now in Arlington, Va., where the school board recently voted against a proposal by Superintendent Patrick K. Murphy to give tablets to all students in second and sixth grades next year, part of a longer-term plan to give tablets to every student by 2017.

Darryl Joyner, an instructional technology coordinator for Arlington schools, echoed some school leaders when he said he thinks of it not as a technology initiative, but as an "opportunity to completely change instruction and do it better."

But most teachers are not interested in dramatic change through technology, said Jaim Foster, president of the Arlington Education Association.

"Best practice is still with a live teacher. It's holding a book. It's turning the page. It's interacting with other classmates," Foster said. "It's that person-to-person communication that is still the most important piece of our instruction. Teachers feel strongly about that."

Devices catch on regionally

In the Washington area, students in hundreds of schools already have access to tablet computers. The vast majority are kept in classrooms or rolled around on communal carts, but more schools are giving the devices directly to students.

In addition to Arlington, which has a one-to-one pilot program in most schools, Prince William County is preparing to give all freshmen and sophomores at three high schools tablets next fall as part of new state grant program for struggling schools. Prince George's County has purchased more than 4,500 iPads for programs in select classrooms at more than 60 high-poverty schools, and officials in Alexandria are considering updating a decade-old laptop program with tablets starting next year. Fairfax County invites students to bring their own devices to

school, another increasingly popular approach.

There are no recent national counts of districts that issue their students tablets or laptops, Wilson said.

But many districts have launched ambitious efforts in the past few years, including a laptop initiative approved in Baltimore County this spring and a \$1 billion effort in Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest school district, to give every student an iPad. That plan has been fraught with problems, including an investigation into its bidding process and inadequate filters, which students quickly broke through to access non-educational content.

Wilson and other technology advocates say that in many districts, the impulse to buy cheap computers is wildly outpacing school districts' abilities to accommodate them and use them in meaningful ways.

A boon for technology firms

The steady growth and stability of the K-12 market, combined with the excitement from school districts, is encouraging all kinds of technology companies to hawk their tablets for classroom use.

Apple, which has a long history of marketing to schools, is leading the pack with a market share of more than 90 percent in 2013, said International Data Corporation senior analyst Rajani Singh. But Google and its less expensive (about \$150 each), lightweight Chromebook laptops are gaining ground quickly. School districts also are turning to other tablets that run Google's Android operating system or low-cost e-readers such as Amazon.com's Kindle. (Amazon chief executive Jeffrey P. Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

Some nontraditional companies have created arms devoted entirely to education technology, such as News Corp's Amplify, run by former New York City schools chancellor Joel Klein.

Several start-ups are dedicated solely to education technology, creating apps that teachers and students can use on their new devices to create seating charts, simulate a frog dissection or analyze poems.

Textbook publishers have moved quickly to capture the growing digital market -- and stay in business -- by creating interactive electronic books with videos and multimedia features that can be updated regularly.

It's questionable whether switching to online textbooks can save money. Typically, districts buy textbooks every six years. But given how quickly tablets can become outdated, procurement cycles have shrunk to two or three years, said Jay Diskey, executive director of the PreK-12 Learning Group division at the American Association of Publishers.

At the same time, a growing amount of free, open-source instructional materials is available online.

Eighth-graders at Wheatley Education Campus in the District's Trinidad neighborhood spent a recent morning tapping and swiping their way through the U.S. Constitution on their iPads. The students were using a "Techbook" from Discovery Education. Here is an example of an interactive students can use. Try it below. http://gtm-media.discoveryeducation.com/videos/dsc/externalapplications/HTML5_Interactives/ES_VirtualLabs/index.htm

"If you need help, ask your neighbor or scan the QR code on your worksheet," said Tanesha Dixon, their social studies teacher. "You have four minutes," she added, indicating the iPad timer she had displayed on the television at the front of the classroom.

As the clock ticked down, the teens peeked at one another's screens, sharing ideas about which article of the Constitution answered the question Dixon had posed. Dixon quietly told students to get ready to share their own answers with the class via Apple's screen-sharing AirPlay feature.

The introduction of individual tablets to the classroom during the past two years has helped some of her students blossom, Dixon said. Children who never pipe up in class ping her constantly with e-mails. And the data that the tablets and online curriculums can collect have proven valuable for her and her students' parents. Parents can see online what their children did in class that day, and they also can sign in on their own computers to look at such information as their child's grades.

If a student does poorly on a quiz or is struggling with a topic, Dixon knows immediately to drill down and provide custom assignments.

She has, however, been hampered from pushing too much of the curriculum online. If students don't have the same technology access at home that they do at school, they can fall behind.

"All this rich learning stops at 3:15," Dixon said. "They leave and it's like . . . a digital canyon."

District officials said that while they are increasing access to technology in the schools, they are not sure that sending computers home is the best approach, particularly when many students would be carrying the expensive equipment on public transportation and when an unknown number of students lack reliable Internet access at home.

School leaders in Arlington hope to use the tablets as a way to bridge the digital divide, as well as other gaps in the kinds of learning resources children have at home. By giving students devices loaded with educational games and books and videos (along with directions to neighborhood WiFi hotspots), they hope their learning will continue even if no one at home can read to them or help with homework.

Plans for a districtwide rollout of computers are in flux now, but the number of teachers piloting one-to-one programs is expected to grow next year. The teachers all use the tablets differently and plan to share with their colleagues what works.

For Katharine Hale's fifth-grade class at Abingdon Elementary School, many lessons actually start after the school day ends. Her students use their iPads to watch videos that Hale has recorded from her desk at school or her dining room table about the order of operations in math or how to identify different kinds of nonfiction essays.

The videos are short – often just five minutes, followed by a short quiz or activity. But the activities provide feedback that saves her precious classroom time the next day. Based on how well they understood the material, she is able to immediately break students into groups or work with them individually.

Student Zachary Kjiri said he likes being able to watch the videos more than once and knowing that he can text his teacher if he has questions. "It's kind of like bringing your teacher home," he said.

For Hale, it has been a "total learning curve" to teach in front of an iPad camera instead of a room full of students, she said.

Sometimes she has to record a single lesson three or four times, as she hones broadcast skills that are not commonly taught in education programs. "The hardest part is not rambling," she said.

But she thinks her efforts in front of the camera are paying off.

"Instead of feeling rushed, I can go a little bit deeper and students can marinate a little longer with the content," she said.

Sharing and learning

At Jamestown Elementary in Arlington, second-grade students ring a chime every time they publish something new.

They use their iPads to write book reviews or stories about their spring vacations or current events, then they illustrate them with photos or pictures. When they are done, they post them in a class drop box and ring the chime. That is their classmates' cue to log on and read.

Their teacher, Heather Blake, said making it easy for students to share their work has been a real motivator. Students are spending more time reading and writing this year, whether at home on the weekends, on snow days or while waiting for doctor's appointments, she said.

The students also made book reports the old-fashioned way, with paper and pencil. But then they used their iPads to take pictures of the pages and recorded themselves narrating the text. They combined the images and sound in iMovie and published them on a video-sharing Web site that their parents -- and everyone else -- could see.

Now when she displays their book reports in the hallway, Blake adds a QR code so visitors can use their smartphones to look at the high-tech versions.

Camilla Gagliolo, a technology coordinator at the school, said the iPads have helped the students become an active part of the "world of other learners."

"My kids used to come home with something crumpled in their backpacks," she said. "But this is a live piece of evidence that they have created something. They know they have an audience, and they love that."

michael.chandler@washpost.com

hayley.tsukayama@washpost.com

Credit: Michael Alison Chandler;Hayley Tsukayama

DETAILS

Subject: Students; Teachers; Education; Teaching; Computers; Learning; School boards; Educational technology

Publication title:	The Washington Post (Online); Washington, D.C.
Publication year:	2014
Publication date:	2014
Publisher:	WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post
Place of publication:	Washington, D.C.
Country of publication:	United States, Washington, D.C.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
ISSN:	26419599
Source type:	Blog, Podcast, or Website
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	1525957377
Document URL:	https://library.access.arlingtonva.us/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/tablets-proliferate-nations-classrooms-take-swipe/docview/1525957377/se-2?accountid=57895
Copyright:	(Copyright The Washington Post Company, May 18, 2014)
Last updated:	2021-04-22
Database:	U.S. Major Dailies

Database copyright © 2022 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)