

What is BYOD?

BYOD is also sometimes known as BYOT (bring your own technology) or referred to as “the consumerization of IT.” Within education, it refers to the practice of allowing students to bring their own mobile devices to school that are capable of connecting to the Internet, and can include everything from laptops to netbooks, tablets, smartphones, PDAs, e-readers and gaming devices.

“It’s letting kids use the tools of their generation to accelerate learning,” says Bailey Mitchell, chief technology and information officer for Forsyth County Schools in Georgia, which has offered a BYOT program for four years.⁵

In a typical BYOD classroom, the array of devices varies tremendously as students work through common tasks. Some students might have more than one, shifting attention between a tablet and smartphone as assignment needs dictate, while other students use a single game device, laptop or netbook. Students might film each other with phone cameras solving problems at a whiteboard, then post the video to a classroom wiki to share. Other students videoconference with peers in other classrooms about a collaborative project.

Outside the classroom, students turn to their devices while at home, sports practice or wherever they might be to work on assignments, check messages from the teacher, view test grades and so forth. Those on field trips use mobile tools to collect pictures and other data, sometimes incorporating GPS technology.

Just as uses for mobile devices in education are varied, so are the ways schools construct their BYOD policies. Some allow students full use of devices at school — not just in the classroom, but in corridors, cafeterias and other common areas, both inside and outside campus buildings. At Hinsdale Central High School in the Chicago suburb of Hinsdale, rules were eased in 2011 allowing students to use cell phones, laptops and other mobile devices between classes, during lunch periods and study halls, and in some classrooms (those in which teachers have incorporated mobile technology).⁶ Others require mobile devices to be turned off and stowed away when students are not in class, and to only be used for educational purposes (no Facebooking on school time, for example).

A related mobile device strategy is BYOL, or bring your own laptop, in which students buy and bring in only laptops that meet specified requirements. Such plans typically exclude smartphones and tablets.

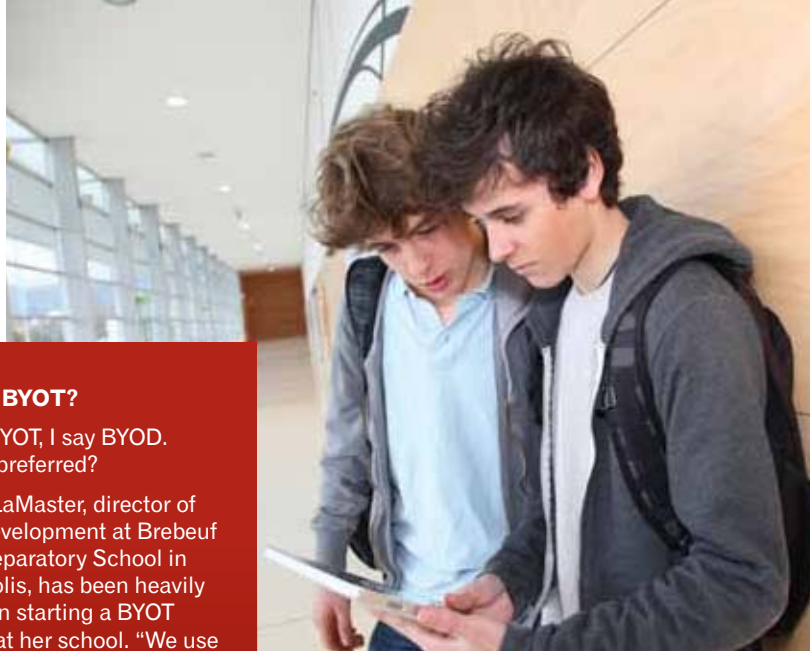


BYOD allows schools to achieve one-to-one computing and the benefits of mobile learning without the school having to purchase and maintain devices for every student — an appealing option in times of ever-tighter education budgets. Yet as a relatively new concept in K-12, it is not in wide use; indeed, schools today are still more likely to ban cell phones and similar devices than to encourage them to be brought to class. Common Sense Media found in 2010 that 69 percent of high schools banned cell phones, for example.⁷

In 2010, Project Tomorrow released a survey of 3,500 K-12 administrators and CIOs that found 35 percent favor BYOD, with 65 percent opposing.⁸ However, the survey reflects data compiled in 2009, pre-dating the introduction and popularization of tablet devices. It also gives the opinions of IT directors, who may be more concerned with network control and access issues, rather than the views of instructional technologists, who can be more focused on curriculum improvement and technology integration.

More current research shows interest in BYOD is high — and growing. From a sample of 30 interviews conducted by the Center for Digital Education in 2011, eight districts (27 percent) expressed interest in BYOD initiatives. Meanwhile, tech leaders at schools with BYOD policies already in place often receive inquiries about their programs, speak at conferences to packed rooms and host visits from administrators at other districts.

What is BYOD?



BYOD or BYOT?

You say BYOT, I say BYOD.
Which is preferred?

Jennifer LaMaster, director of faculty development at Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in Indianapolis, has been heavily involved in starting a BYOT program at her school. “We use the term BYOT around here — it’s not just the device but all resources students bring into the classroom.”

Similarly, Mitchell says the Forsyth district debated BYOT vs. BYOD for its initiative, before settling on BYOT.

“Philosophically it’s really not about the device per se,” he explains. “We didn’t want people to get preoccupied by ‘device.’ We wanted to be more encompassing of possibilities.”

But so far, LaMaster and Mitchell are outnumbered, at least if you go by Google Trends, which show BYOD beating BYOT by about a four-to-one margin.¹¹

“Clearly most districts do not engage in BYOT, but almost all districts have probably had conversations not only at the school but at the district level about readiness for it,” says Mitchell. “Technology departments are being pinged as to feasibility. Parents are asking questions of a particular school and those are rolling up. It’s certainly something that’s on everybody’s discussion agenda. Most are not allowing for this just yet — but most are fully aware and engaged in discussions in and around what it would look like for them.”⁹

The Project Tomorrow survey showed that a majority of parents (67 percent) would purchase mobile devices for their children to use in school and 66 percent supported online textbooks, with 61 percent supporting the use of mobile devices to access these online textbooks. Students also express a strong desire for mobile technology in the classroom.

More than half — 53 percent — of middle and high schoolers say not allowing smartphones or MP3 players is the biggest obstacle to using technology in school.¹⁰