

## **Kids Use Smart Devices to Help Make Kids Smarter**

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Pulling a cellphone out during class used to mean likely confiscation and perhaps detention for students bold enough to try, but now, a growing number of schools are turning to the smartphones students bring with them to school as an instructional device that can augment classroom learning.

Teachers ask students to use their smartphones to look up a vocabulary word, take a photo of an assignment written on the board or text themselves a homework reminder. Teachers use countless apps, many of them free, to better connect students with coursework on a platform they're familiar with.

Eston Melton, an assistant principal at West Potomac High School in Alexandria, Va., says students can better internalize their lessons when they're doing them on their own personal smartphones or tablets.

"My education becomes something I walk around with in my pocket," he says.

Outside Washington, West Potomac draws from rich and poor neighborhoods. Melton says not every student has an iPad or iPhone, so teachers have to be mindful not to alienate students who don't have one.

One way is to put students into small groups, in which only one is using the phone while others are tasked with different responsibilities.

West Potomac lets students check out laptops from the library. Melton says, "Kids are incredibly responsible with it.

"Some people are going to have a visceral response of, 'Oh my God, you let a poor kid check out a laptop? You're never going to see it again!' But we've never had that problem," he says.

Other schools are moving to incorporate private smartphones and tablets in the classroom.

Stephen Decatur High School in Berlin, Md., is one. Administrators say they first have to figure out how to install a wireless network that will accommodate about 400 students at once. And, they say, they've got to make sure students will be responsible with the access.

"How do we know they're not texting somebody when we think they're on a calculator?" says John Gaddis, assistant superintendent for Worcester County, Md., schools, which is home to Stephen Decatur High. "We're trying to address those issues."

The goal at Decatur is to have mobile device management software next year, so the school knows about every device plugged into its network, and a digital cloud where all content can be uploaded.

"In five years," Gaddis says, "I see all students with some sort of tablet in their hands."

## **Standard Teen Equipment**

Teens already have cellphones, many of them smart versions, in their hands.

A March study by the Pew Research Center found that 77% of young people ages 12-17 have cellphones. One in four has a smartphone. The study found no differences in smartphone ownership across racial, income, or ethnic lines.

A November study from Teen Research Unlimited, done for the Verizon Foundation, found that 39% of middle school students use smartphones to do homework. Among them, just 6% said they were permitted to use a smartphone in class.

The number is bound to grow as more schools experiment with using smart electronic devices and mobile apps as learning tools.

The Verizon Foundation chose 12 schools this year and 24 next year to receive up to \$50,000 in grant funding to bring laptops, tablets and mobile phones to class. The focus is on science, math and technology studies.

One of the schools is Assabet Valley Vocational High School in Marlborough, Mass. Teachers use a number of smartphone apps: iCell for biology, Quizlet for digital flash cards and Poll Everywhere for a quick group survey.

The apps offer an easy way to do research, solve problems quickly and motivate students, says Assabet science teacher Alexia Forhan.

"You really get away from a lot of the photocopying and the pen and paper," she said. "This kind of teaching definitely keeps (students) engaged."

## **Safety Aspects**

The idea of allowing phones in class is being raised as a possible safety measure after the Newtown, Conn., school shooting.

At Assabet, having phones in the class was "a natural fit," says Cindy Zomar, a school spokeswoman. "There was absolutely nothing to do with safety considerations."

Zomar points out that the first-graders at Sandy Hook Elementary would have been too young to carry cellphones. "It wouldn't have made a difference in what happened," she says.

But in Salisbury, Md., a private school is putting iPads in the hands of kindergartners. It also encourages fifth-graders to use their own phones to research ancient Egypt.

"Why ignore the fact that our students forever will have a smartphone or an iPad somewhere in the vicinity that they can access anything imaginable?" says Debbie Wessels, an administrator at

The Salisbury School. "Everybody needs to understand that this is going to be a shift that is forever going to change the face of education."