

Reaching the
NEW DIGITAL PARENT:
an administrator's guide

Developed by Schoolwires and Project Tomorrow



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Chapter 1

Key characteristics of the digital parent

Introduction

The demand for more effective use of technology both in the classroom and in school-to-home communications is being increasingly driven by the emergence of a new, digitally proactive cadre of parents within the school community. This new digital parent is fluent with technology tools personally, and has high expectations for the use of digital tools and resources within their child's learning environments. And in many ways, the expectations and demands of these new digital parents are forcing school and district administrators to re-think their long-held assumptions about parental engagement and communications, and to re-engineer previously proven strategies to gain community support, share information and identify strategic district initiatives.

Each year, Project Tomorrow®, a national education nonprofit organization, facilitates the Speak Up National Research Project. As part of this initiative, we track the increasing interest and growth in using emerging technologies to address the specific needs of K-12 students, parents and educators. From more online classes and e-textbooks to the increased use of mobile devices within instruction and digital tools to support improved teacher-student-parent communications, parents are generating significant new demands on their child's school to "get with the times" and tap into technology tools and resources to create more personalized learning environments that meet their child's unique educational needs. Parents' concerns about the preparation of their children to compete in an increasingly global information economy are driving many aspects of this new demand. Many parents see the use of technology both at school and at home as an effective approach to ensuring that their children have the right skills to be successful in this dynamic economy. It is not surprising therefore, that 89 percent of parents in last fall's Speak Up surveys said that the effective implementation of technology within classroom instruction is important for their child's future success. In fact, a majority of those parents (56 percent) identify technology use as extremely important.

"PARENTS ARE GENERATING SIGNIFICANT NEW DEMANDS ON THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL TO "GET WITH THE TIMES"

In this first chapter of the Administrator's Guide, we will examine the defining characteristics of digitally proactive parents and provide you with recommendations on how your school or district team can use this information to meet the needs of digital parents. Chapters 2 and 3 will focus on the expectations of the new digital parents for enhanced school-to-home communications and digital learning in the classroom. The fourth chapter in the series will explore the new digital parents' vision for 21st century learning environments. Additionally, we will discuss how to create a shared vision for technology-enabled learning within your school or district community that honors the expectations of your school parents as well as your staff, faculty and students. But first, we need to meet this new digital parent!

Who are the new digital parents?

Digital parents are mobile users who are texting, tweeting social media devotees with children in grades ranging from kindergarten through high school.

To better understand the emerging profile of the new digital parent, we examined the data findings from our Speak Up 2012. Through Speak Up 2012, we polled more than 39,000 parents of school-aged children nationwide to learn about their personal use of mobile devices and online resources and their expectations for the use of these kinds of digital tools within their child's education. Our resulting profile is based upon four key data markers that demonstrate strong growth over the past few years of Speak Up findings.

WE POLLED MORE THAN 39,000 PARENTS OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN NATIONWIDE TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL USE OF MOBILE DEVICES AND ONLINE RESOURCES AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE USE OF THESE KINDS OF DIGITAL TOOLS WITHIN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION.

Using these key Speak Up data markers as our defining profile, we determined that 37 percent of parents of school aged children fit the profile of the new digital parent — a cohort sizeable enough not to be ignored. Let's now learn more about the characteristics and technology behaviors of these parents, since they'll influence how your district connects, communicates and collaborates with these digitally proactive parents.

Parents' ranking of the value of effective technology use in schools on their child's future success as important or extremely important



14%

A GROWTH FACTOR OF 14 PERCENT SINCE 2008

Parents' personal use of a smartphone or tablet computer



128%

FROM 2008 TO 2012, PARENTS' ACCESS TO A SMARTPHONE GREW BY 128 PERCENT AND ACCESS TO A TABLET EXPLODED FROM ONLY 5 PERCENT IN 2008 TO 49 PERCENT IN 2012

Parents' personal experience with taking an online class or their interest in taking an online class



65%

WITHIN JUST THREE YEARS, THE NUMBER OF PARENTS WITH FIRST-HAND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN ONLINE LEARNING FOR WORK OR JOB TRAINING INCREASED BY 65 PERCENT

Parents' desires to have their child's school use digital tools for school-to-home communications



23%

AS JUST ONE EXAMPLE FROM THIS CATEGORY, ONLY 2 PERCENT OF PARENTS WERE INTERESTED IN FOLLOWING A CLASS BLOG IN 2006; THAT NUMBER GREW TO 23 PERCENT IN 2012, WITH A QUARTER OF PARENTS WANTING THAT KIND OF ACCESS

What you need to know about the key characteristics of the new digital parents

Based upon our data analysis, we uncovered several interesting characteristics of the new digital parents, some of which may challenge conventional wisdom or myths about parents and their technology interests.

- **The new digital parents have children in all K-12 grades.**
 - 30 percent of parents of students in Grades K-2
 - 36 percent of parents of students in Grades 3-5
 - 40 percent of parents of students in Grades 6-8
 - 38 percent of parents of students in Grades 9-12
- **The new digital parents actively use social media.**
 - 51 percent use Skype and other online communication tools regularly, 65 percent regularly update a social networking site and 19 percent are using Twitter to communicate with or follow others.
- **Since the new digital parents are mobile users themselves, they have strong views on the potential of mobile devices for learning.**
 - Twice as many new digital parents (61 percent) as non-digital parents (30 percent) say they would provide a mobile device for their child to use at school for academics – thus enabling a Bring Your Own Device policy that many schools are interested in today.
 - 89 percent of new digital parents want their child in a class that uses mobile devices.
- **The new digital parents want teachers held accountable for technology integration in the classroom.**
 - 37 percent want teachers to be evaluated on their proficiency in using technology within instruction. While 31 percent of district administrators agree with parents on this point, only 7 percent of teachers do.
- **School to home communications? The new digital parent says text it!**
 - 47 percent of digital parents want their child's teacher or school to send text messages to their mobile device. Comparatively in 2010, only 5 percent of all parents were advocates of text messaging for school communications. Times are changing quickly!

New digital parents recognize the value of technology in school-to-home communications, too. That's the subject of our next chapter, so stay tuned for additional insights into what digital parents want and what it could mean for your school or district plans.

How you can use these insights on the new digital parent today

As explained by one school district superintendent, "We're in quite a time of transition in public education in the U.S. and our parents represent a full spectrum of wants, needs, and desires for their children's education." Understanding what parents want is the first step in meeting the needs of this critical group of stakeholders in your district. Here are three recommendations to help you better connect with the new digital parent:

1. Help teachers and staff understand the new digital parent. Use the data included here or in our related presentation to start a discussion and develop a deeper understanding about who digital parents are and what they want in the way of digital connections. You may need to dispel some myths about parents and technology; use the Speak Up facts to help tell the story.
2. Compare how your staff and faculty use digital tools to the way new digital parents use them. For example, use of mobile devices is on the rise among administrators and teachers too. In fact, the Speak Up 2012 data shows that 67 percent of district administrators and teachers are smartphone users. Our research tells us that when educators use mobile devices or social media in their personal lives, they are more likely to appreciate the value of these same tools for learning and for school-to-home communications. Maybe you have more in common with the new digital parent than you think. Hello, New Digital Administrator!
3. Learn more about new digital parents and what they want by asking them directly. Project Tomorrow is dedicated to representing authentic, unfiltered education stakeholder voices in local school and district planning and decision-making. That is why we facilitate the annual Speak Up surveys each fall to help you listen and learn from the voices of your students, parents and staff. In the meantime, you can bring together a representative group of parents and ask them about their preferences for using digital tools and resources, then compare their comments with the profile of the new digital parent.

Chapter 2

Using digital tools to communicate with digital parents



Introduction

As was discussed in Chapter 1 of the administrators' guide, the demand for more effective use of technology both in the classroom and in school-to-home communications is increasingly being driven by the emergence of a new, digitally proactive cadre of parents within the school community. This new digital parent is fluent with technology tools personally, and has high expectations for the use of digital tools and resources within their child's learning environments. And in many ways, the expectations and demands of these new digital parents are forcing school and district administrators to re-think their long-held assumptions about parental engagement and communications, and to re-engineer previously proven strategies to gain community support, share information and identify strategic district initiatives.

37 PERCENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IDENTIFIED ENGAGING PARENTS AS CO-TEACHERS IN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION AS A VIABLE METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we examine the specific views of the new digital parent on the use of digital tools and resources for school-to-home communications. We also position those expectations against current policies and approaches within traditional school or district communications. The foundation for this examination is data compiled from the latest Speak Up survey, collected from over 39,000 parents and 6,000 administrators nationwide in fall 2012. Among the most noteworthy findings is the importance of effective school-to-home communications as a way to engage parents in the learning process, a far cry from the simple, one-way oriented information sharing that has been the primary goal of communications in many districts. When asked to identify the strategies or approaches that have the greatest potential to improve student achievement, 37 percent of school principals identified engaging parents as co-teachers in their child's education as a viable methodology. Appropriately, how schools and districts communicate and engage their students' parents in the learning process is increasingly an essential component of their overall strategic plans. But it may not seem as easy as it looks. In fact, a quarter of school and district administrators (26 percent) see effective communications with parents as a major challenge today. Much of that challenge has to do with the variety of digital methods that can be used to communicate and engage with parents. Increasingly, school and district leaders are realizing that the printed flyer that goes home in the backpack about the upcoming fall festival is no longer sufficient!

Digital tools for communications

For many schools and districts, the use of digital tools represents a way to both engage and communicate with an increasingly diverse set of parents. Faced with continuously challenging budgets, administrators are also tapping into digital products and methods as a means to enhance organizational efficiency at a lower cost. For example, 54 percent of district administrators say that within the past three years they have implemented an online or phone based notification system within their district as a way to leverage technology to address their budget challenges. Four out of ten administrators (41 percent) say they are using more social media resources to connect with parents today, and 17 percent are already tapping into Twitter as a way to communicate with parents.

In many ways, this unprecedented use of technology for school-to-home communications is the result of educators using these tools in their personal lives. Given that 70 percent of administrators have personal access to a smartphone and 30 percent use tablets, it is not surprising that 48 percent of school site administrators see improved teacher-parent-student communications as a key benefit of using smartphones and tablets within instruction. The translation from personal use to professional use, however, is still an obstacle for many teachers. For example, while 79 percent of teachers say they regularly use text messaging to communicate with friends and colleagues, less than one quarter (23 percent) say they use texting to communicate with parents of their students. This may explain why 71 percent of school principals say they want college students in teacher preparation programs to learn explicitly how to use technology to communicate effectively with parents. Looking to the future, today's school principals want to ensure that the next generation of teachers are well prepared to use technology to communicate and connect with parents.

71 PERCENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS SAY THEY WANT COLLEGE STUDENTS
IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS TO LEARN EXPLICITLY HOW TO USE
TECHNOLOGY TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH PARENTS

The new digital parent and communications

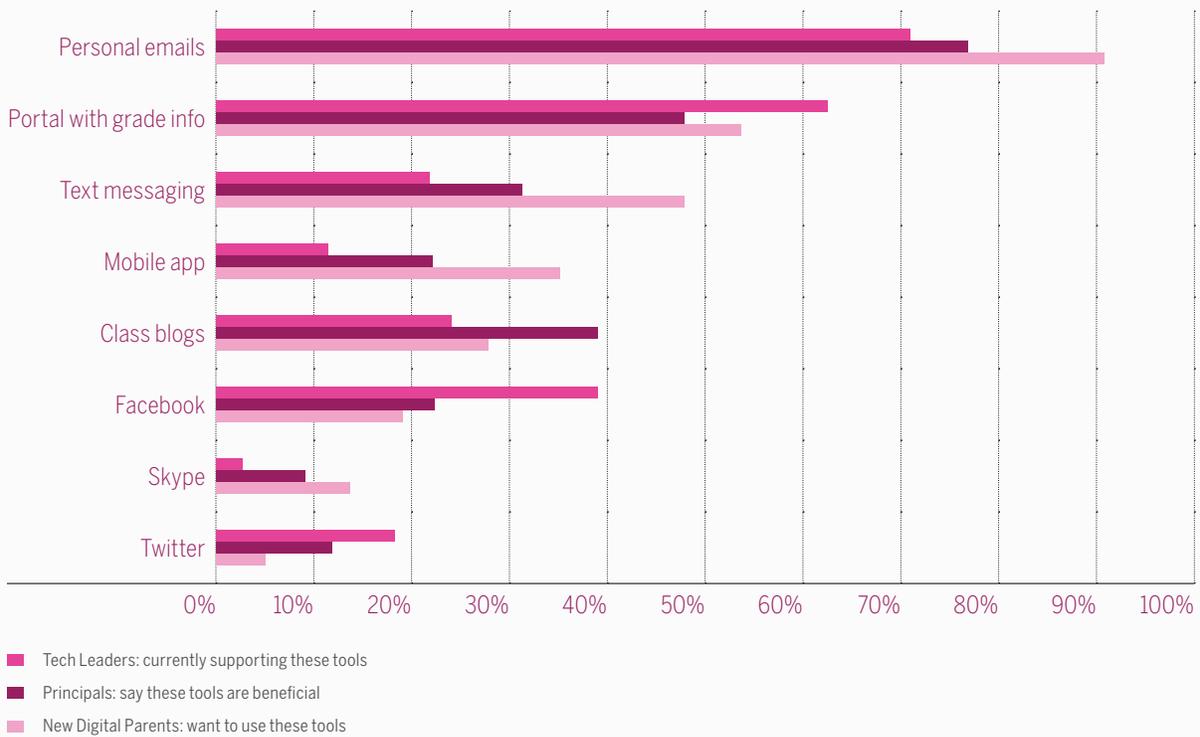
In many ways, this demand for more digitally based school-to-home communications is also coming from the parents themselves. As outlined in Chapter 1, the new digital parent has different expectations for how they want their child's teacher or school to communicate with them. Today's parents of school-aged children are highly socialized to use digital tools to personalize their lives and increase efficiency. Figure 1 details how today's parents, with children in all grades from K-12, are active social media users in their personal lives.

Figure 1: Parents' use of social media resources in their personal lives

What social media do you regularly use in your personal life?	Elementary school parents	Middle school parents	High school parents
Communicating via text messages	86%	86%	86%
Maintaining a social networking site	62%	55%	52%
Watching online videos	40%	36%	34%
Streaming online TV shows	37%	34%	32%
Playing online or mobile app games	30%	28%	25%
Using Twitter	14%	13%	13%

Parents' familiarity with these tools is naturally propelling greater interest in their use for communications with their child's school. However, parents' aspirations for digital connections with their local school is not yet universally realized or acted upon by administrators. Figure 2 documents this disconnect between the expectations of parents for digital communications, and how district administrators and technology leaders are currently supporting those aspirations. How innovative education leaders reconcile this new digital disconnect will have interesting ramifications for the overall use of technology within our schools and districts. In many ways, digital connectivity with parents is a cornerstone for transforming the learning process through technology.

Figure 2: Using digital tools for school-to-home communications – three points of view



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Figure 2 provides us with a snapshot as to what digital tools districts are currently enabling and how those tools align with the aspirations of parents, or the values of administrators. As noted, in many cases the misalignment is stark. For example, while many districts have placed a high value on building Facebook or social networking sites to support school-to-home communications, parents are less enthusiastic about that approach, even though, as noted in Figure 1, a majority of parents are social network users. Rather, the new digital parents are more interested in leveraging text messaging and a school or district mobile app as a communications tool than what is currently provided. Correspondingly, both technology leaders and school principals underestimate the value of personal emails to parents. With the key characteristic being the personalization of that communication, these new digitally enabled parents are making a strong statement about the value associated with individualizing their communications with the child's teacher and school. The "one size fits all" blanket email about overall school test scores no longer fits the bill. The new digital parents want their child's school or teacher to tailor communications and engagement activities around their own unique child and his/her experience in school.

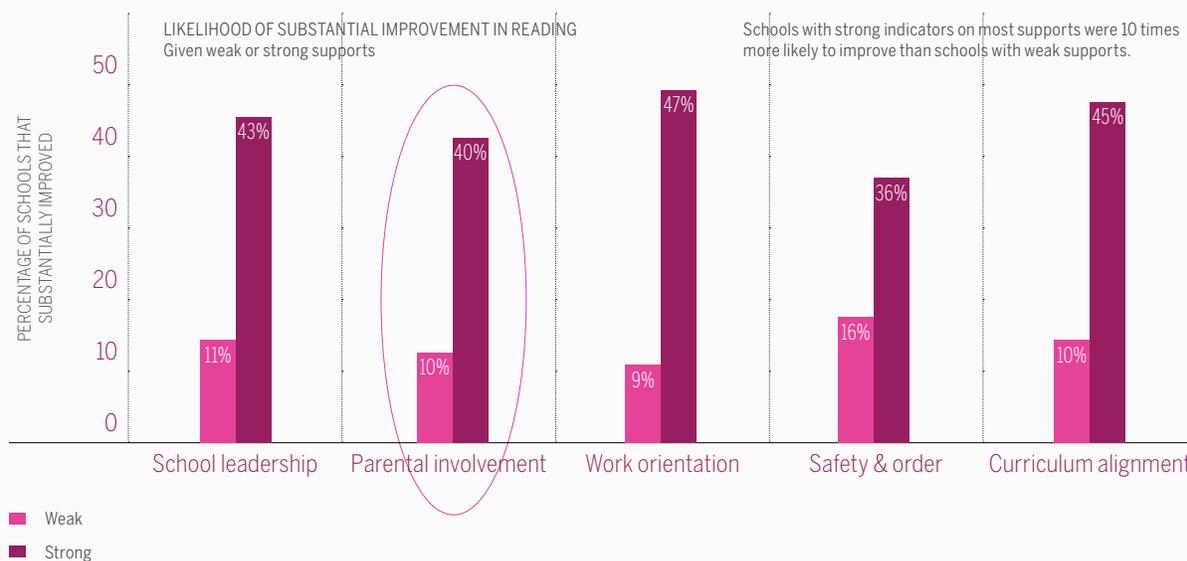
Using these insights to improve your district's communications

Take a moment today to consider these questions:

- How are your current communications tools and strategies facilitating opportunities for you to engage, connect and communicate with your students' parents?
- Are your school or district communications tools meeting the expectations of parents (especially the new digital parents) for effective communications?
- How can you more effectively use a wide range of new and innovative digital tools and resources to improve school-to-home communications and establish a new foundation for raising student achievement levels by engaging parents in the learning process?

Now, consider this: A long-term research study on school reform conducted by the University of Chicago shows that "strong parent-community-school ties" are one of five essential supports for school improvement.

Figure 3: Strong parent-community-school ties are an essential support for school improvement



Source: Bryk, Anthony S. (2010, April). Organizing School for Improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan Magazine*, 23-30.

Given that only 21 percent of parents today consider communications from their child's school to be effective, it is critical that we "think differently" about the importance of effective school-to-home communications, and how we align technology-based tools and strategies to meet the needs and expectations of today's digital parents.

Chapter 3Involving digital parents
in digital learning**Introduction**

In the same way that the new digital parents are pushing their child's school and district to adopt digital tools to support the all-important, school-to-home connection, they also have high expectations for the use of digital tools within their child's learning experiences at school. In some cases, these expectations are based upon their own personal use of digital tools, such as mobile devices and online courses. These firsthand personal experiences provide parents with a context for understanding how the tools could support student learning. Therefore, the involvement of today's digital parents in school and district planning for the use of technology is critical.

In this chapter, we examine the specific views of the new digital parent on the use of two types of digital tools and resources to transform the learning experience in the classroom: the use of mobile devices and the availability of online courses for students. We frame this conversation around parents' personal familiarity with these emerging technologies. Additionally, to test the depth of parents' commitment to the use of technology within learning, we evaluate their interest on a specific policy question: Do you think that teachers' evaluation should include an assessment on how well they are integrating technology into instruction? This timely though somewhat controversial issue has strong resonance in this conversation because of the views of the new digital parents.

**THE INVOLVEMENT OF TODAY'S DIGITAL PARENTS IN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT
PLANNING FOR THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IS CRITICAL**

The foundation for this in-depth examination is data compiled from the latest Speak Up survey, collected from over 39,000 parents and 6,000 administrators nationwide in fall 2012. Among the most noteworthy findings are the following:

- Digital parents with children in all grades give high marks to mobile learning.
- Digital parents are willing to back up that value proposition by buying a mobile device for their child to use at school – if mobile devices are allowed for academic purposes.
- Given that over three-quarters of digital parents (77 percent) have taken an online course, it is not surprising that these techno-minded parents are particularly interested in the benefits of online learning for their own children.
- Digital parents strongly support the idea that teachers should be held accountable for the use of technology within learning.

Mobile learning

Within a four-year span, the personal access of parents to mobile devices has changed dramatically. As illustrated in Figure 4, parents have migrated from cell phones without Internet access to Internet-connected mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets.

Figure 4: Parents' access to mobile devices – 2008 to 2012

	Cell phone without Internet access	Smartphone	Tablet computer
Parents in 2008	90%	32%	5%
Parents in 2012	35%	73%	49%

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While parents have progressively picked up smartphones and tablets, they have moved away from the feature-oriented cell phones that lack Internet access. And as they have developed a greater personal dependency on the anytime, anywhere access to the Internet from the palm of their hand, their views on the potential benefits of similar technology for students has changed as well. In the case of parents, only a quarter of parents (25 percent) in 2008 saw mobile devices within instruction as the means to transforming the learning experience. However, in 2012, a majority of parents now endorse the idea that mobile learning can increase student engagement in learning, personalize the learning process for the student by providing out-of-school and remediation opportunities, and improve parent-teacher-student communications. This is especially true for the new digital parents as evidenced by Figure 5.

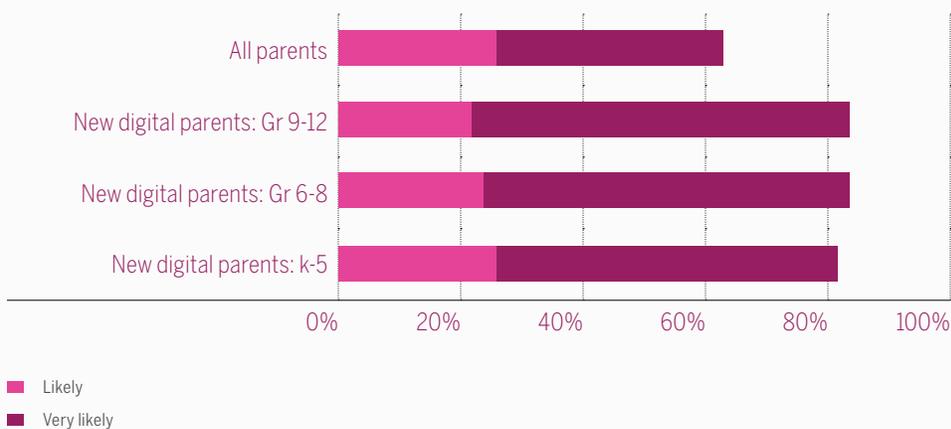
Figure 5: Parents' views on the benefits of mobile learning

Benefits of mobile learning	All parents	New digital parents
Increase student engagement in learning	57%	74%
Provides access to online textbooks	65%	74%
Students can review class materials anytime	60%	66%
Enables more personalized learning	48%	64%
Extends learning beyond the school day	50%	63%
Improves school-to-home communications	50%	64%

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This increased interest in the potential of mobile devices to transform learning goes beyond philosophical discussion for the new digital parents, however. When asked if they would be willing to purchase a mobile device for their child to use at school if allowed by the principal or teacher, almost 9 out of 10 digital parents with children in elementary, middle and high school said it was likely they would do so. While two-thirds of parents also say that it is the likely they would purchase such a device for their child, the overwhelming support of the digital parents should definitely provide administrators who are considering a "Bring Your Own Device" to school policy to consider reaching out directly to these digital parents for support. Figure 6 documents the intensity of the new digital parents' support for the use of student owned devices at school.

Figure 6: How likely is it that you would buy your child a mobile device to use at school for academics?



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As a similar statement on the strong interest that digital parents have with mobile learning, given a choice between a class where their child could use a mobile device and a class where that usage was prohibited, 90 percent say they would want their child in the mobile-device using class. The message is loud and clear. The new digital parents, who are “mobilists” themselves, highly value the inclusion of mobile devices within instruction for their children.

Online learning

As with the mobile devices, parents’ first hand experiences taking an online course are changing their perceptions on the value of online learning for their own child. From this past fall’s surveys, we learned that 43 percent of parents, for example, have taken an online course for work or job training, an increase of 65 percent since 2009. Additionally, 29 percent of parents have experienced online learning within an academic or college program, 13 percent have used that learning modality to explore a new hobby, and even 7 percent have taken an online course to meet the requirements for traffic school. All of these experiences have provided parents with new insights about online learning and allowed them to conceptualize how these learning approaches may benefit their child.

When asked to identify therefore the benefits of online learning, parents with online learning experiences such as those within our digital parent cohort, provide a unique perspective. Figure 7 demonstrates that parents of elementary, middle and high school students all highly value the benefits of online courses to provide a more personalized learning experience.

Figure 7: Parents’ views on the benefits of online learning

	Digital parents – elementary school students	Digital parents – middle school students	Digital parents – high school students
Students can work at their own pace	69%	69%	71%
Students can review class materials anytime, anywhere	64%	67%	71%
Students can take classes not offered at their school	56%	54%	63%
Students could get college or advanced credit for courses	48%	46%	58%
Students would be more engaged in learning	40%	41%	41%

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What may be most surprising for school and district administrators is that the digital parents also have a universal interest in providing opportunities for their children to learn at their own pace – from elementary school to high school. While most online learning classes today focus on the high school student, it may be wise for our elementary education leaders to consider how they can also offer online learning as an alternative for their students as well.

Teacher accountability

As illustrated with our data on parents' interest in mobile and online learning, the new digital parent not only believes strongly in the importance and value of technology within their child's learning lives, but they are also willing to make time and financial investments to support that belief. They therefore also believe that their child's teachers should be willing to step up and be accountable for the use of technology within instruction as well. When asked to identify their biggest concerns about technology use at their child's school, 33 percent of parents commented on the variance in effective technology use between classrooms, and how the level of integration of technology was very teacher dependent. When asked therefore to agree or disagree with the idea of teacher performance evaluations including an assessment of the use of technology within the classroom, 89 percent of new digital parents agreed with this concept, with 37 percent voicing strong agreement. Correspondingly, 74 percent of administrators agreed, but, perhaps not surprisingly, only 43 percent of teachers like this idea. As the new digital parents continue to advocate for the more effective use of technology within school, this concept of teacher accountability for technology integration will become a more important issue.

Questions to think about regarding how to involve parents in your digital learning plans

Based upon this new data, school and district leaders may want to consider these questions:

- What do you know about the experiences or expectations of your parents for digital learning?
- What do your parents know about the current use of digital tools in your classrooms? Are their perceptions accurate?
- What do you communicate to your parents about your school's digital learning plans?
- How are you effectively engaging parents, as an asset, in your planning and implementation for digital learning?

Chapter 4

Creating a shared vision with the new digital parents



Introduction

There is an impressive body of research around the correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. In short, the children of parents who are engaged and involved with their child's education are more likely to be successful in school. Given that research, education leaders are increasingly interested in the transformation of their students' parents from "supply" parents to "demand" parents. According to a May 2011 column in *Educational Leadership* by Dr. Rudy Crew, parents and caregivers generally play one of two roles when it comes to their child's education: supply or demand. As Dr. Crew explains, "... supply parents consider their role to be limited to handing their children over — in effect, 'supplying' them — to the school. In contrast, demand parents actively participate in their children's education, provide ideas and feedback, and lobby to be included in decision making." The administrators who participated in *Speak Up 2012* (more than 6,000) see a new role for parents within learning. Over one-third (34 percent) of those school and district administrators believe that engaging parents as co-teachers has a significant impact on improving student outcomes and achievement. As we have learned in the first three chapters of this administrator's guide, the new digital parents are particularly interested in being more engaged in their child's education and sharing their ideas on the use of technology within instruction. Not surprisingly, these new digital parents also fit Dr. Crew's description of the demand parents who are so highly valued by education leaders today.

EDUCATION LEADERS ARE INCREASINGLY INTERESTED IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THEIR STUDENTS' PARENTS FROM "SUPPLY" PARENTS TO "DEMAND" PARENTS.

Key findings from Speak Up data

As shown in the Speak Up national data findings, 37 percent of parents of school-aged children match our digital parent profile in both their personal use of technology and their views on the role of digital tools to support learning. Let's review some of the key findings from our earlier chapters:

- Digital parents are interested in the use of emerging technology tools to improve school-to-home communications.
 - Example: Nearly 30% of digital parents want a class blog or teacher page to provide insight into what's happening in their child's classroom.
- Digital parents highly value the role of online learning within their child's education.
 - Example: 73 percent of digital parents say a key benefit of online courses is that children can learn at their own pace.
- Digital parents also see a significant role for mobile devices within their child's learning environment.
 - Example: Almost 9 out of 10 digital parents want their child to be able to use a mobile device (laptop, tablet, smartphone or e-reader) in class for academic work.
- Digital parents believe that teachers should be evaluated on how well they integrate technology within instruction.
 - Example: 89 percent agree with this concept – 37 percent strongly agree!

While these data findings provide interesting new insights into parent perceptions of the value of different technologies, the true power of this information lies in using it to create a shared vision of 21st century learning between parents and a school or district. In the January/February 2012 issue of *Principal*, the leadership magazine published by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, Nancye Blair notes that to successfully create a technology-infused campus that meets the needs of the 21st century learner, leaders must “establish a shared vision” around the use of digital tools and resources that involves all stakeholders. Dr. Jill Gildea, Superintendent of Fremont School District 79 in Illinois, underscores the vital importance of including parents in that decision-making process. Her leadership team has used Speak Up data from students, teachers and parents to inform their district plans and Dr. Gildea notes the criticality of parent input in particular to “explain, interpret, and verify their viewpoints to ensure we exceed their expectations in planning for tomorrow — today!”

Comparing perspectives on digital learning

In this final chapter of our administrator's guide we take what we have learned about digital parents and examine their views on the role of technology in their ultimate school vision as compared to the views of teachers and principals. By comparing the views of these three key stakeholder groups within a school, we are able to quickly evaluate if we have a shared vision around the use of digital tools and resources. In other words, are we all on the same page when it comes to using technology for learning? Comparing perspectives also provides us with a roadmap for identifying stakeholders who may need additional information to better appreciate new initiatives and programs within our schools and districts: How about engaging digital parents as the champions for your school or district's 21st century vision? Let's see what digital tools and resources these parents value most.

As noted in chapter one of this guide, 89 percent of parents of school-aged children consider the effective use of technology within education as important or very important to their child's future success. Not surprisingly, parents who are digitally active in both their personal and professional lives place an even higher premium on the value of technology within learning. When asked to identify the technology tools and resources they want their child's school to invest in more heavily, digital parents painted a clear picture of the digital tools they consider most essential to a 21st century education.

Figure 8: Ranking digital tools essential to learning – the parents' perspective

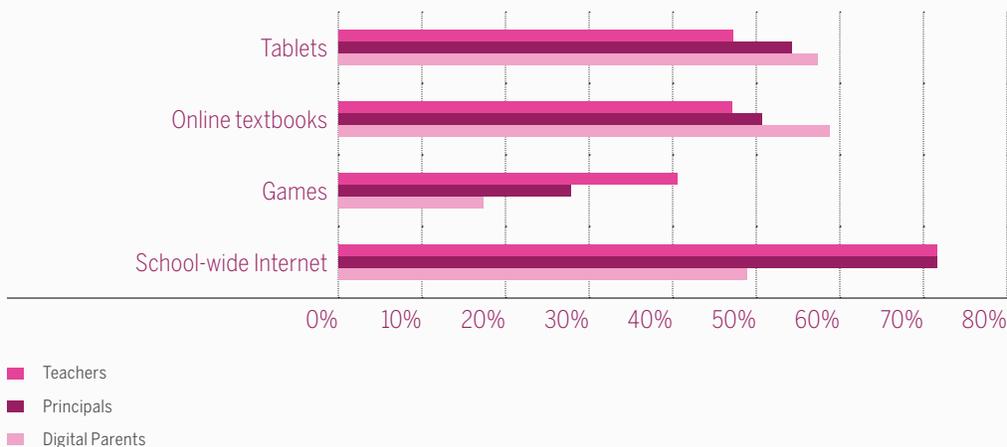
Digital tools	All parents	Digital parents
1. Online textbooks	56%	65%
2. Educational mobile apps	53%	63%
3. Digital content	50%	59%
4. School portal	51%	57%
5. Tablets	43%	56%
6. School-wide Internet access	45%	54%
7. Student-owned mobile devices (BYOD)	40%	54%
8. Online classes	36%	45%
9. Social media	12%	18%
10. Educational games	12%	16%

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In many ways, parent choices reflect their own familiarity with these digital tools. For example, 49 percent of parents of school-aged children report using a tablet computer while 43 percent of all parents and 56 percent of digital parents endorse the idea of student access to tablets at school. Similarly, 43 percent of parents say they have taken an online class for their own work or job training; 35 percent of all parents and 45 percent of digital parents want to see more online classes at their child's school.

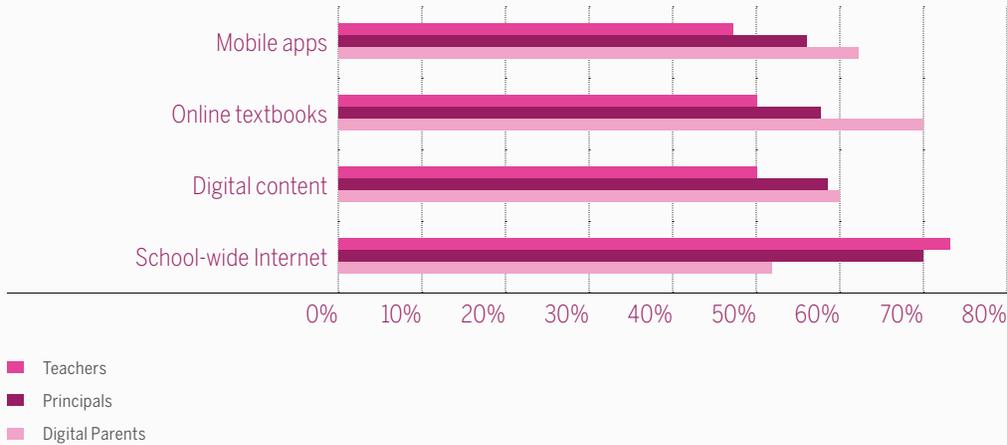
To assess the depth or clarity of a shared vision around digital learning, it is important to evaluate the level of alignment of digital parents, teachers and principals on the different technologies that can be leveraged in the classroom to improve student learning. Figures 9, 10 and 11 provide an unprecedented glimpse into the alignment (or lack thereof) around selected common technologies that many elementary, middle and high schools are considering.

Figure 9: Envisioning the ultimate elementary school: Elementary parents, teachers and principals



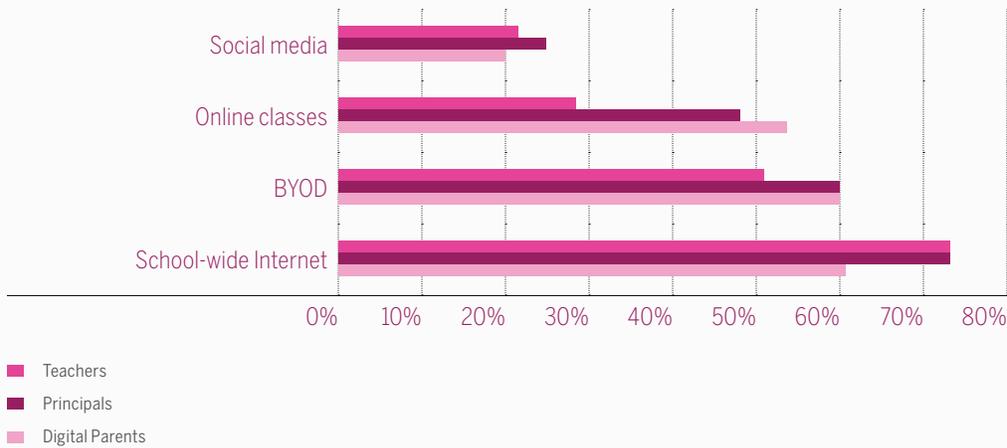
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Figure 10: Envisioning the ultimate middle school: Middle school parents, teachers and principals



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Figure 11: Envisioning the ultimate high school: High school parents, teachers and principals



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As we can see from these figures, we have more to do to create a shared vision for digital learning within our schools. For some technologies, teachers, principals and digital parents are in alignment on how they value the importance of digital tools within learning. For example, while teachers are slightly less enthusiastic about students using their own mobile devices at school (BYOD), in general there is strong alignment on the value of this technology approach across the three key stakeholders. Elementary teachers, principals and digital parents also share relatively similar views on the role of tablets in their vision for the ultimate school. With some technologies, however, there exists a significant digital disconnect among teachers, principals and digital parents. As an example, parents of elementary and middle school students are more supportive of online textbooks than their child’s teachers. Parents are particularly enthusiastic about online textbooks as a way to reduce the weight of the books that today’s students are carrying in their backpacks. Teachers’ hesitancy around online textbooks may have more to do with a lack of training on how to use these digital resources effectively. Paradoxically though, elementary teachers are more likely than parents to see educational games as having a valid place within the classroom. Over the past few years, teachers have increased their appreciation for how online educational games can engage students in learning, but many parents continue to see games as purely an entertainment activity. These differences or digital disconnects between teachers, principals and digital parents naturally point to the need for increased information. They also provide a new entry point for engaging parents in important school and district discussions on the future of learning.

Dr. Gildea from Fremont School District 79 accurately sums up the current state of education when she says, "We're in quite a time of transition in public education in the US." Engaging the ideas and views of key stakeholders, most notably the new digital parents, can provide a roadmap for navigating this critical transition. We hope this administrators' guide and our suggestions offer you new insights into how you can engage digital parents and make them the biggest champions of your district's digital vision.

New ways to engage parents in your district's digital learning vision

- Explore digital ways to collect feedback and ideas from parents within your school or district, especially the views of working parents or those who are less likely to be involved as room moms or booster dads. Use your website to promote school and district news to keep parents informed, and use online survey tools to keep a pulse on what parents are thinking and collect their feedback.
- To gain support for a new program, hold small group house parties in different neighborhoods for parents. Thinking about a new tablet program with educational apps for math? Bring tablets to the house parties and let parents play with the educational apps so they can see the future for their children. Hands-on activities like these also will stimulate new ideas for using mobile devices both at home and at school. Be sure to promote these activities and events on your school and district websites, and send follow up with email invitations and text message reminders.
- Knowing that parents are increasingly using social media, explore ways to include social media tools in your website and mobile apps. Tap into Twitter not only to disseminate information about snow days and testing, but to share research on digital learning and develop stronger ties between school and home. Share both provocative ideas for consideration as well as news. Set a goal to have 20% of your parents following your Twitter account within the first six months of the school year!
- What if back to school night wasn't just a show-and-tell for teachers, but a mini conference where parents could pick and choose from a host of discussions and demonstrations led by teachers? "In Room 2B, learn how 2nd graders are going to create digital movies this year on photosynthesis" or "In the science lab test your skills with doing a virtual dissection of a frog." Why not take a QR code scavenger hunt through the library to learn about the latest online databases for student research? Post photos of these hands on events on your school and district websites. You might even consider creating a parent page on your website and invite parents to share a comment about the experience.
- Do a road show! Rather than holding a tech showcase at your school, take your showcase on the road and to the places where parents work, shop or do business. Set up an information booth at the mall, the post office, city hall or a big employer in town to meet with parents and share your ideas for enhancing education with digital tools and resources. Promote these events on your school and district websites to gain wider community support for your district!

The Schoolwires Story

Schoolwires is dedicated to K-12 education, and to the people who are part of every local school community — students, families, teachers, administrators, and supporters of education. From the beginning, we've believed that a successful school district is a product of total community involvement. That's why our Web-based solutions are expressly designed to connect K-12 communities with the information, services and people they need to achieve their district goals. For more than 10 years, our intuitive technologies have been helping administrators and educators, students and parents, communicate and collaborate like never before — to come together around success.

Today, more than 10 million users in the U.S. and China rely on our website, content management and safe social learning solutions to drive engagement in the classroom, locally and across the globe. We're proud to be a part of that. And we remain committed to helping K-12 communities extend their local reach and transcend the boundaries of their districts so that individuals everywhere can achieve their full potential.

Project Tomorrow®

Project Tomorrow® is the nation's leading education nonprofit organization dedicated to the empowerment of student voices in education. With 17 years of experience in the K-12 education sector, Project Tomorrow regularly provides consulting and research support about key trends in K-12 science, math and technology education to school districts, government agencies, business and higher education.

The Speak Up National Research Project annually polls K-12 students, parents and educators about the role of technology for learning in and out of school and represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder voice on digital learning. Since 2003, over 3 million K-12 students, parents, teachers, librarians, principals, technology leaders and district administrators have shared their views and ideas through Speak Up. Learn more at www.tomorrow.org

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