SIX TIPS FOR LAUNCHING SUCCESSFUL MOBILE LEARNING IN YOUR DISTRICT

The administrator’s guide to getting mobile learning right
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As an administrator, starting—or refining—a mobile initiative in your school or district can seem like a daunting task filled with an endless list of considerations. Whether you are just beginning a mobile program or already have one in place, the tips, resources, and anecdotes in this eBook provide a flexible framework that can be revised and revisited over time.

INTRODUCTION:

WHY MOBILE LEARNING?

Chances are you have already heard quite a bit about mobile learning. No longer simply a buzzword, mobile initiatives have rolled out in various forms across some of the most notable districts in the US, and even on a global scale. The popularity, prevalence, and relatively low cost of mobile devices provide unprecedented opportunities for student learning and engagement. Districts and educators alike are embracing mobile devices as a way to make learning more relevant to students and to reach them in an environment they enjoy communicating, playing, and working in. Mobile devices allow students to take responsibility for their learning by connecting formal and informal learning opportunities.
“THE BIG POTENTIAL WITH MOBILE IS THAT IT REALLY IS THE PRIMARY PORTAL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION RIGHT NOW. YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN BEST WHEN IT’S RELEVANT TO THEM, WHEN THERE’S SOCIAL CONNECTION TIED TO IT, AND WHEN THEY ACTUALLY HAVE A PERSONAL INTEREST.”

MIMI ITO, CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGIST, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE AND JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION CHAIR IN DIGITAL MEDIA AND LEARNING.

Source: Edutopia
TIP #1: BEGIN WITH AN END IN MIND

While it is tempting to jump headfirst into an exciting new initiative, it’s crucial to first consider the high-level objectives of what a mobile learning program will accomplish. Plan for the desired outcomes of mobile learning at your school. What will students and educators achieve as a result of this program? How does mobile learning fit into the bigger picture of digital learning initiatives that may already be in place?

At this stage, it is important to consult resources—people and publications—that can give you firsthand insight into the implementation of mobile learning programs. You can network with fellow administrators in your PLCs, through social media, or at events, who can offer insight into their own program rollouts. Consulting research, anecdotes, and data from case studies can also prove useful at this point. Building a mobile learning program requires a paradigm shift—a change in perspective for both administrators and educators—that the most successful initiatives embrace when creating curriculum and new approaches to instruction.

TAKEAWAY

Moving forward with a strategy in place will keep the initiative discussions focused, communications consistent, and provide you with logical objectives to measure program effectiveness.
TIP #2:
COMMON MOBILE MODELS AND TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

A common misconception with mobile learning is that a program’s success hinges on the device you choose. This shouldn’t have to be the case since there are many flexible models available for integrating mobile learning into instruction. Each of the three common mobile models outlined below can be implemented with any device, in any combination that makes sense for your district or school needs (e.g., device carts of tablets that are shared within the middle school while high school students have one designated BYOD day per week).

COMMON MOBILE LEARNING MODELS:

- Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)
- Device Carts
- 1:1
BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE (BYOD)

Emerging as a realistic option for many environments, BYOD refers to students bringing mobile devices they already own into school and utilizing them in the classroom. Because of the attractive budgetary aspect of BYOD, and the prevalence of mobile device ownership, this approach is gaining popularity in many schools.

If you are considering BYOD as a part of your mobile program, reading about the successful program at Edina (MN) Public Schools and reviewing this BYOD blueprint will help get you started.
DEVICE CARTS

Another reasonable alternative for mobile integration is in the form of device carts where students can check out a device (usually a tablet) to use during a class period and return it at the close of the same class. This is often a good barometer to test how educators and students will adapt to a more integrated mobile program.

You can see how device carts work in a classroom context in this video of a Chicago public high school.
1:1 computing—or, in the context of mobile learning, one device per student—has popularly referred to iPad programs, though there are many other brands of tablets with equivalent capabilities on the market. It should be noted that 1:1 programs are increasingly utilizing more diverse technology, including Google Chromebooks, Android devices, and even e-readers like Amazon’s Kindle. While costly, these 1:1 initiatives best guarantee full-time access to devices for all students.

The challenges and benefits of implementing 1:1 iPads are well documented in case studies and in these two articles about getting started and lessons learned.
TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

Equally as important as the method you choose for your mobile learning program are the apps and cloud-based software that will be used to facilitate learning and collaboration on the devices. It is important to consider choosing "device agnostic" apps (apps that can be used on any brand of device) that also have a web platform as a cornerstone for a mobile learning program. This way, educators can use a classroom computer to lead assignments while students participate on their devices.

SUPPORTING MOBILE LEARNING WITH THE RIGHT LMS

Ideally, a learning management system (LMS) will serve as an integrated instructional hub for your mobile program, combining educational apps, course management, and communication in one centralized platform. Launching a mobile program with an LMS that provides native mobile apps will structure and support your mobile initiative in several ways:

**Workflow:** A fully featured LMS mobile app will give teachers the tools to administer, organize, and grade assignments. Students will be able to access course content and to complete and submit assignments on the go.

**Collaboration:** A collaborative, interactive mobile interface will motivate students to engage from their mobile devices, extending learning outside the classroom.

**Communication:** Use an LMS to streamline communication to parents, students, and other teachers with a mobile app.

**TAKEAWAY**

Don’t let learning objectives get lost in the excitement of assessing which mobile devices to use—and be sure you’re using the right apps to support mobile learning.
“MOBILE LEARNING IS ALL ABOUT CHANGING INSTRUCTION. BECAUSE IF THE INSTRUCTION DOESN’T CHANGE, ALLOWING THE KIDS TO BRING THEIR OWN [MOBILE] DEVICE WILL DO NOTHING.”

LENNY SCHAD, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER, KATY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Source: Mindshift
TIP #3: ENGAGE INTERNAL RESOURCES TO CREATE A PLAN

With a high-level vision and outcomes determined, you can begin the tactical road map for this program. Use this time to engage internal resources within your district—and to perhaps discover resources you didn’t know existed—working with educators who may already be experimenting with mobile devices in their classrooms.

A diverse committee of mobile/tech-savvy educators, IT staff, and curriculum developers will be valued partners in making the mobile learning initiative a reality. While every district will have its own needs, here are some of the most common considerations to factor into your plan.
**BUDGET:**
Are there grants or funding available for this program? If you plan to purchase mobile devices, who will assume the costs?

**INFRASTRUCTURE:**
Does the school need wireless internet installed? What content filtering will the network have in place?

**STAFFING:**
Who will be the main point of contact for any troubleshooting? Do you need to increase IT headcount or retrain staff?

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**
What is expected of educators who participate in the program, how much training is needed, and how will training be delivered? What guidelines can you give educators to adapt their teaching strategies to align with mobile learning?

**CURRICULUM:**
Does curriculum need to be adapted or do new lessons need to be written in order to make the most of this new method of instruction? Are there existing apps or resources that can supplement lesson content creation?

**STUDENT-PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES:**
What are the expectations of students and parents who are a part of this initiative?

**TAKEAWAY**
Utilize staff members and internal resources to create a document (example) that includes a mission statement, goals, and a plan, which may include multiple phases, in the rollout of the initiative.
TIP #4:
COMMUNICATION BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER PROGRAM ROLLOUT

Interacting with students and parents should be an important and ongoing process throughout this entire program. Successful communication with families will explain the mobile program’s main objectives, clearly outline any new responsibilities for students and families, and answer any anticipated questions or concerns.

Distributing this information may require an official school letter that is mailed home, in-person parent-teacher meetings, or even ‘mobile certified’ courses that students and parents can complete together.
COMMUNICATING ABOUT MOBILE PROGRAMS TO FAMILIES

BASIC OVERVIEW AND GOALS OF THE PROGRAM:
There may be a general misconception or lack of understanding about what mobile learning means. Explain why the school is spending time, resources, and money on this program, being sure to bring the focus back to student learning objectives. How does this program fit into larger learning initiatives already happening in the district?

MOBILE POLICY, INFORMATION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES:
Consider what new responsibilities families will have as a part of the mobile initiative and be sure these are spelled out in a policy that both students and parents can sign. Including any applicable how-to manuals and troubleshooting guides as well as contact information for support will prove helpful in the long run. This mobile policy covers many aspects of what might be necessary for a BYOD program while a 1:1 iPad program may write a more comprehensive policy similar to this one.

ADDRESSING QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:
Parental concerns can range from a general lack of knowledge about mobile devices to worries about distractions in class, connectivity at home, or increased screen time. This video helps prepare educators and administrators for parent perspectives on mobile learning.

TAKEAWAY
Clearly communicating the program’s objectives, progress, and success to parents will help with the adoption and long-term success of your mobile initiative.
“SIGNIFICANTLY, WHEN STUDENTS LEARN WITH PERSONAL MOBILE DEVICES EMBEDDED IN THEIR OWN PERSONAL CONTEXTS, THERE IS MUCH GREATER SCOPE FOR INDIVIDUAL CUSTOMIZATION OF EDUCATION.”

Source: Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 2013, 29(1)
TIP #5:
PILOTING THE PROGRAM: THINK BIG, START SMALL

Successful mobile programs often begin with a big idea, followed by a small scale rollout. Launching the program on a limited scale allows for incremental learning along the way, without a major frustration backlash from educators, students, or parents. Some methods include testing BYOD days, using mobile device carts, or launching a mobile program in a handful of classrooms or a single grade level.

Encourage educators to build blended learning activities around using the devices, and once the enthusiasm for using the devices has built and technical issues have been worked out, these small launches can pave the way for larger mobile implementations.

BLENDED LESSON IDEAS TO INSPIRE EDUCATORS:

★ Kick off a class session and get discussion started with an interactive "warm up" activity on mobile devices. Have students take a quick class survey to gauge understanding and class sentiment or post a picture or video and ask each student to write a comment about it.

★ Create a scavenger hunt where students must find clues by scanning QR codes on their devices around the classroom or school building to get the next hint.

★ Rather than having students memorize a vocabulary list, ask them to take pictures of objects that illustrate each of the words on the list. The pictures can be posted to a discussion board where other students can view and comment on them.

TAKEAWAY

Launching mobile integration with pilot programs can pay off in valuable findings for a school or district-wide implementation.
MOBILE LEARNING IN PRACTICE: MINNETONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Minnetonka teachers are seeing increased class participation since the launch of their 1:1 iPad initiative. Using a messaging feature within their learning management system (LMS), students can ask their teachers, and other students, questions while they’re working on an assignment at school, at home, or even from a coffee shop. Teachers are also using the built-in quiz feature in their LMS to post pre- or post-class quizzes to quickly gauge student understanding. Students are notified of the quiz and take it directly on their iPads with results showing up immediately for their teachers.
TIP #6: ASSESS, REVIEW, AND KEEP GROWING

After a set period of time into the launch of your mobile initiative, you should prepare to take a step back and evaluate success using the original objectives and learning outcomes outlined in your plan (Tips 1 and 3). Check in with your original planning committee for ongoing feedback, try gathering a focus group of student representatives, and consider surveying parents about their experience.

If the program has been successful, you may decide you want to expand the mobile program to other grade levels or schools. If technical challenges are getting in the way of student learning, you may want to change the way the mobile program has been implemented.

TAKEAWAY

Periodically evaluating the mobile learning initiative and being responsive to change will keep student learning objectives in focus.
CONCLUSION

Mobile devices can embody the best aspects of blended learning in an interactive, highly engaged format. As you prepare to launch a mobile learning initiative, keep focused on the high-level objectives for student learning and exercise patience when challenges arise. Be sure to reach out to your PLNs for support and advice when needed while remaining responsive to change, and be sure to utilize the resources in this eBook to help you along the way. Good luck!
ABOUT SCHOOLOGY

For more than three million users at over 40,000 K-12 schools and universities around the world, Schoology's learning management solution is revolutionizing the way students, educators, and parents use education technology.

Schoology's award-winning mobile apps expand learning beyond the classroom by providing the means to communicate, create and complete assignments, and administer assessments anytime, anywhere. Available for iOS, Android, and Kindle Fire devices, these apps extend the platform's formative learning environment and collaborative interface to any smartphone or tablet for a robust and economical 1:1 solution or connected BYOD experience.

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