



# Creating a New Digital Learning Playbook in Your School

By Julie Evans

**M**ost K–12 schools across the nation, both public and private, have done an admirable job over the past few years of equipping their classrooms with technology tools and providing their teachers with professional development to support digital teaching and learning. However, with a new emphasis on ensuring that today’s students are well prepared with college, career, and civic readiness skills to succeed in the global society, many school leaders are now reevaluating the relevancy of their technology plans. The emergence of new digital tools, content, and resources developed especially for K–12 education is also propelling many leaders to envision a new digital learning playbook for their schools—a playbook that takes advantage of these innovative technologies while continuing to honor the values of their school community and prepare their students for future success. But what information can Christian school leaders use to inform their new digital learning playbook?

For the past 11 years, Project Tomorrow, a national education nonprofit organization, has facilitated the annual Speak Up Research Project to help school leaders understand the ideas and views of their community stakeholders on digital learning. Through a series of targeted online surveys, K–12 students, parents, teachers, and administrators share how they are currently

using technology to support learning, the value they place on that usage, and their aspirations for leveraging digital tools more effectively. Since the Speak Up surveys are available to all schools, both public and private, the subset of the Speak Up database collected from private school students, parents, and staff is especially meaningful for Christian school leaders as they prepare for new digital learning initiatives. Utilizing the Speak Up survey responses from over 11,000 private school students, parents, teachers, and administrators, I will review a few data trends that can help inform school discussions and plans for twenty-first-century teaching and learning.

Understanding how your students are currently using technology to support learning, both in school and out of school, is a good first step in developing a new digital learning playbook. Similar to their peers in public schools, private school students are using technology in their classrooms for a range of different tasks, most often facilitated by their teachers. These activities include using digital textbooks, taking tests online, and accessing school or class information through an online portal or website. However, outside of school, the students are creatively adapting various digital tools to supplement or support their schoolwork activities as well. For example, 77 percent of high school students in private schools report using text messaging to communicate

with classmates about assignments and school topics, 51 percent are finding online videos to help with homework, and 41 percent are using Facebook as a collaboration site for class projects.

The Speak Up Research Project has long documented how students' use of technology outside of school to self-direct learning is often a harbinger of how they would like to use similar digital tools and resources in the classroom. As noted above, private school students are actively leveraging mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets as well as digital content to support learning outside of school. Correspondingly, private school leaders identified similar technologies as having the greatest potential to improve student outcomes and achievement: educational digital content such as videos, games and simulations, tablets and mobile devices assigned individually to students, and digital media tools that allow students to create content. A closer review of the insights and ideas of private school students, educators, and parents regarding digital content and mobile devices can help provide a clearer road map for developing that new digital learning playbook.

## Digital Content

Private school teachers report using a wide range of digital content to support instruction in their classrooms as noted in Table 1. Compatible with a trend in public schools, private school teachers are enthusiastic about the role of videos to help students connect academic content to real-world context and to stimulate deeper class conversations, whether the videos are sourced online or created by the teacher.

Private school students endorse this movement to greater use of digital content for learning, as evidenced by 54 percent of the high school students calling for more online textbooks and 73 percent asking for Internet access to be schoolwide. While private school parents continue to express concerns about their child's online safety, two-thirds of private school students in grades 6–12 say they are mindful and careful about their online activities and know how to be safe online.



## Mobile Devices

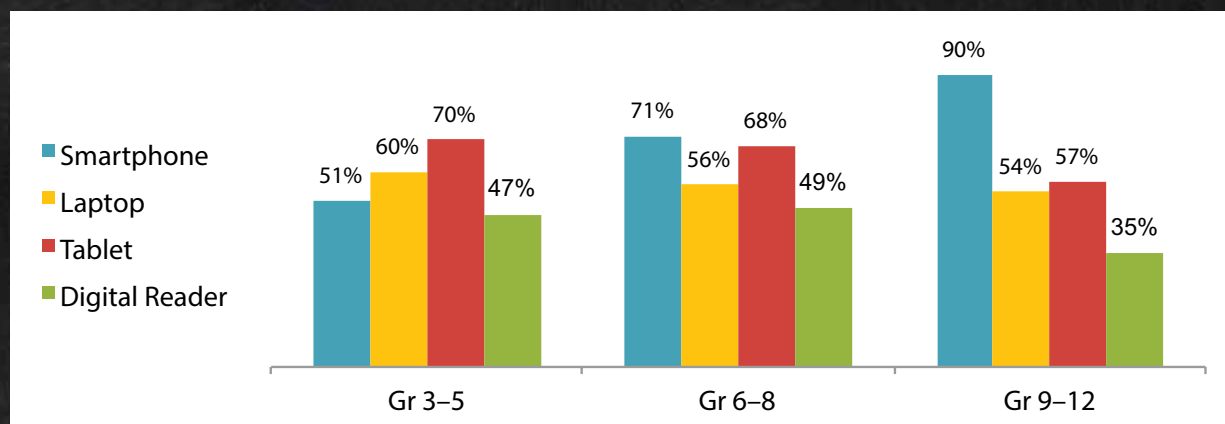
In addition to aspirations for expanded Internet access and digital textbooks, 62 percent of private school students also would like to use their own mobile devices in their classes to support learning. This interest in using their own smartphone, tablet, or laptop in class is being fueled somewhat by students' increasing personal access to these devices. Chart 1 documents the types of mobile devices that students have for their own personal use and that are not provided to them by their school.

**Table 1: What types of digital content are private school teachers currently using in their classroom?**

Type of Digital Content	Percentage of Private School Teachers Using that Type of Digital Content
Videos that I find online	52%
Lesson plans and other teaching aids	25%
Online textbooks	24%
Animations and simulations	22%
Videos that I create for my class	19%
Educational games	18%

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Chart 1: What mobile devices do you have for your own use that are not provided by your school?



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While the pervasiveness of these devices in students' backpacks may stimulate new discussions around implementing a "Bring Your Own Device" to school program, administrators and teachers in private schools continue to be concerned about potential distractions when students have these devices in class. However, both teachers and administrators acknowledge a need for more training on how to effectively leverage these convenient and compelling devices to realize proven mobile learning benefits such as increasing student engagement in learning, extending the learning process beyond the classroom, the personalization of instruction, and the development of self-organization skills.

With any new digital learning initiative, teacher training is critical to a successful implementation. The wish list from private school teachers for professional development reflects an understanding of the value associated with digital learning. That wish list includes learning more about these topics:

- How to use technology to differentiate instruction
- How to identify high-quality digital content and mobile apps for classroom usage
- How to use technology to support formative assessment
- How to use educational games and tablets within instruction
- How to create videos of my lessons or labs for students to review outside of class

It should be the goal of any new digital learning playbook to articulate how the use of technology can help prepare today's students for future success in college or in a career. On the basis of the Speak Up data from private

school students and parents, this goal is an imperative. According to parents of private school students, the most important college- and career-ready skills for their child to acquire include critical thinking and problem solving (88 percent), creativity and communication (75 percent), collaboration (73 percent), and technology skills (71 percent). These same parents link the development of these skills to their child's use of digital tools and resources on a regular basis in their day-to-day classes. With a slightly higher endorsement than public school parents, 59 percent of parents of private school students believe that the effective implementation of technology within learning is *extremely important* for their child's future. Therefore, school leaders and administrators should be vigilant about revisiting technology plans, investments, and teacher professional development to ensure that the goals of their school are compatible with the aspirations of their community to support student success. School-wide participation in the annual Speak Up surveys by students, parents, and staff can provide school leaders with an annual pulse on the views and ideas of their community on digital learning and can help to inform the development of timely and relevant digital learning plans.

For more information about Project Tomorrow and the Speak Up Research Project, please visit [www.tomorrow.org](http://www.tomorrow.org).

Julie Evans is the chief executive officer of Project Tomorrow. She developed the Speak Up National Research Project in 2003, and she has served as the chief researcher on this project and other digital learning national research projects. Ms. Evans was named in April 2008 as one of the Top Ten Most Influential People in Education Technology over the past 10 years by eSchool News.