J.C. Booth MS BYOT Letter to Parents 12-16-11

Booth MS has been selected as the pilot middle school for the district-wide Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) initiative, starting 2nd semester. The staff & faculty are working hard to put things into place.

We are taking a "go slow" approach to this while trying to do a good job of testing the use of student-owned electronic communications devices in the classroom. By no means do we have all of the answers to the many questions that will come up during this trial period. We are not mandating the use of these devices by teachers for instruction nor are we requiring any student to have a device. A select number of volunteer teachers will start to experiment with developing classroom lessons that allow students to use these devices in a productive and interactive way. During the semester, the teachers will share what they have learned with each other and other schools.

Every student who wishes to participate in this program must return a signed BYOT 'contract' which outlines the policy and guidelines for the use of personal technology. Students will receive these to take home on January 5th.

We know that parents and students have a lot of questions about this program. We have set up both teacher and student committees to get input from these two groups and we are working with our PTO and School Council with this initiative. I've set up a parent Q&A meeting for Wednesday, January 4th, at 9:00am in our cafeteria. Another meeting can be scheduled after school, if needed. We are happy to talk to you about our plans and address your questions.

Some parents have asked about what kind of devices we recommend. We can't recommend any specific brand or device. The basic requirements are a WiFi capable device that is portable and kid-proof. A data plan or cell service is NOT needed. Students will access the internet via our district's web filter. In fact, students will not be allowed to use their 3G/4G functions in the classroom. The variety of devices that have been seen at schools in other districts include smart phones, laptops, PDAs, net-books, tablets, i-pads, i-pod and i-pod touches, gaming devices, Nooks, Kindles, e-readers, etc. It may be wise to hold off on any immediate purchase until you learn more. Consideration should be made about what devices are available at home, the familiarity your child has with the device, the level of responsibility your child has shown, what your family can afford and how much you anticipate your child using the device. Our website has additional insight on this matter from our Technology Director.

Other parents are concerned about some students being left out because of family financial situations or other reasons. As part of our Pilot Program, we will be working with our school's stakeholders and other community resources to try to address this equity issue, but it hasn't been resolved. If a student doesn't have their own technology in a class where the teacher plans on using it, students will be able to work in groups with one device or they can use the student computers already in many classrooms. I want to emphasis that if a child cannot provide a device that they will not be left out in the cold, so to speak. If you want to assist in this effort, speak to your business, community organization, and neighbors about helping us out by donating devices or cash. You may have a portable device such as the ones described above at home or at

your office that isn't being used and could be donated. If so, send it in. We will evaluated it and make it available to teachers.

As for security and safety of the devices, we must rely on students to make good choices and to be responsible. We provide individual lockers to secure personal items and devices can be stored there when not in use. Parents are encouraged to make sure that devices have a cover or carrier and have some identification on them. We plan to 'register" the devices on our website and provide adhesive labels as well. Inappropriate use of the technology will be dealt with just as it is now, through our progressive discipline program. Teachers will be required to maintain a higher level of alertness and student will lose this privilege quickly if this privilege it is abused. I am confident that our students will be both respectful and responsible.

Our BYOT Committees will develop a BYOT Newsletter to help keep you informed on how the pilot program is working.

Here is our proposed timeline:

Dec 9, 2011 - Parent Survey sent out to get feedback (see jcbooth.org website)

Jan 2, 2012 - Meeting with the teachers and staff to address our expectations and procedures

Jan 4, 2012 - BYOT Student Committee meeting (warrior time)

Jan 4, 2012 - Parent meeting - 9am - cafeteria

Jan 5, 2012 - BYOT Contracts reviewed in homeroom and handed to all students to take home for parent signatures (a copy will be placed on our website)

Jan 5, 2012 - Grade level assemblies to address behavior expectations and the BYOT rules.

Jan 6 - 13, 2012 - Students return signed contracts. Those who do not have a signed contract will not be allowed to bring to school or use a personal communications device in class nor may they use anyone else's.

Jan 17, 2012 - Students may bring to school their WiFi capable devices for use in classrooms. Some teachers may start to use them for instruction.

Jan 18, 2012 - District BYOT Pilot Program meeting @ Whitewater HS - 2pm

Jan 23, 2012 - School Council meeting - 4pm (Dr. Bearden in attendance)

Booth Middle School is proud and excited to be on the forefront of this instructional innovation. We appreciate your support and cooperation.

Thank you,
Ted Lombard