FAQ's About the Wyatt Technology Campaign
By Mrs. Hentges/Principal

- **The Technology Campaign – What's hAPPening?** *Our very creative Wyatt staff came up with this catchy title to capture our focus on technology for this school year. We have had a lot of fun with the theme right down to our t-shirts! The kids understand it, and have connected with it. But, I want you to know that our plea for mobile tech devices is not just about Apps. We are not about the latest/greatest app, but about meeting the needs of our students. When you think about it, our kids know nothing other than the digital age. Most of the kids at Wyatt have been using one type of device or another since they were toddlers. Today's students are wired differently because of this and that's why we want our school to become an institution of learning that mirrors the real world. In the real world, individuals use technology to communicate, create, collaborate and research. Does it make sense for a school like ours not to offer that to our students during their school day? This question is really what the campaign is all about. What follows are my answers to other questions that have been submitted to me.*

- **Does the district support this? And, why can't they just pay for it?** *The district definitely supports our efforts to get technology devices into our schools. As schools become eligible for technology upgrades, each campus is being asked, "What do you want your campus technology to look like?" The current model of eight desktop computers in every classroom no longer accommodates the needs of our teaching and learning. As you probably already know we have 72 schools in our district and even if we were given the green light to move forward to replace all the desktops with mobile devices, the enormity of that project would not be completed overnight – probably not in a full school year. Schools are upgraded about every five years and Wyatt is in line for an upgrade within the next year or so. I know this, because I have been asked the question, "What do you want your technology to look like?"*

- *I reached out to our teachers to answer that question. Without hesitation, they asked that the desktops be replaced with chromebooks, ipads, or laptops. Students no longer use computers in the classroom solely to practice skills on a variety of learning programs. Students are working in small collaborative groups to share ideas and create solutions. Students are not limited to working at their desk or even in their own classroom. They can move to a space that will accommodate their group and the size of the project. For example, they may move the entire group to the library which not only has flat table surfaces to work on, but a huge variety of resources at their fingertips. In this case, it makes sense to be able to bring their tech with them rather than to hope a computer is available in the new location. Technology makes it easy for students to continue working beyond the school day and many of our students dig into research at a much greater depth because the tool allows them to do it with ease.*

- **Why does the school need technology if kids can bring their own devices from home?** *I can understand why parents might ask this question. When you allow your child to bring their own device to school, it's most likely with the expectation that he or she would be using it for their own independent work. There is time during the school day when students read independently and work alone on projects or assignments. During those times, it's great that they can use their own device.*

- *In today's classrooms, much of the school day requires students to work in small groups – this assimilates teaming, that is part of everyday life – they create, solve and explore together and often they use technology to assist in that process. It's during these times, that we want to have devices handy that the group can use. We certainly aren't going to <u>require</u> a student to share his/her device. And if one of the objectives of a project is to foster teamwork, we are not going to allow a child to 'work alone' because they have a device.*

- **I'm trying to get my kid OFF their devices at home – do I really want them using it at school?** *This is a simple question, but not such a simple answer because there are so many variables at play here. I believe we all want the same thing for our kids. We want them to be able to communicate and thrive and contribute to the world that exists in their lifetime. The fact is that today's kids are living in a world unlike the one we grew up in. They have no memory of life prior to cell phones, laptops, video games, etc.. This is part of their culture. Many of the kids who attend Wyatt right now have been learning and game playing on ipads and other electronics since they were toddlers. Tech continues to become more sophisticated and students are incredibly savvy at figuring things out. We want our students to be connected in our learning environment too, not dreaming about what they will do with their favorite device when they get home from school. It is our job as parents and educators to help students learn how to function in this environment. We can teach them that there is time for electronic devices vs. time for eye contact and personal communication. Children are a work in progress and they follow our lead. If we teach them that for example, when we go out to dinner with the family, there will be no phones out at the table, and we are consistent about that guideline (family value) that will become a norm for them. We as parents and teachers can make time for talking, and allow time for game playing and using tech tools.*

- *Central to collaborative group work is the idea that those in the group share their ideas and work through strategies to find solutions to problems. Doesn't this sound like what's required of people in the workplace? This is a necessary skill and we can't just assume that everyone's got it. It takes a lot of practice. That's why it's such a big part of the teaching and learning in our classrooms. A very large portion of the school day is spent on problem solving… the key component for problem solving is <u>thinking</u>. Students don't always need a device to help with thinking, but to enhance the learning, to give greater depth, to use multiple sources for research, technology provides a new dimension of engagement which contributes greatly to student learning. But just look around in your own world, can you think of even one thing that has not been touched by tech?*

- **Does my kid's teacher really want this? Or is this just the latest fad in education?** *First, let me assure you that your kid's teacher really wants this. Teachers are transforming the way they've been teaching because we know that students are more engaged when technology is a component of the learning process. It's not about just adding technology, but about meaningful learning that incorporates tools when possible, that will engage students. Our district has encouraged teachers to attend numerous trainings, join professional learning networks, and expand their understanding of social media and all things that will lead to student engagement. Teachers are latching on to learning opportunities that have become available through social media sights like Twitter, for example. You'll find teachers sharing and learning from each other long after regular school hours. Teachers are joining book studies, sharing research and ideas about what's working in their classrooms by these platforms that did not previously exist. This is going on 24/7. Any teacher who does not see the necessity to adapt, or thinks this is just a fad, might be in the wrong place in terms of being in education right now.*

- ***How are we ensuring safe and appropriate use of the technology (not logging onto inappropriate sites, etc.)?*** *The safety component is a shared responsibility and it is one of the most important aspects of helping our kids manage their digital world. Kids can find themselves in places on the internet that they never intended to end up in. Just as we teach our students not to talk to strangers, we need to teach them about how to be present on the internet. We can't just expect kids to 'know' how to act online. At school, the safety component will be woven within the use of the devices. There are some good programs that have been developed such as Digital Passport, that we are looking at to formally hit on the basics. We will also be looking for ways to work with parents and provide information and guidelines that parents can turn to at home.*

- *An important component to safety whether at home or at school is supervision. As with anything else, kids need guidelines and they need supervision.*

Technology changes so fast; won't we be spending all this $ and the technology will be outdated in a couple of years?

- *That's not a reason not to move forward on this. That would be like saying never upgrade your phone, for example, because there's just going to be a better one soon. Just as we have all adjusted our budgets at home to include expenses for high speed internet, cool devices, etc… we will be adjusting our spending on campuses to reflect changes in our vision for creating a school environment that accommodates today's learners. Education and everything it encompasses is an investment. Our third graders are never going to be third graders again. We can't say, hold that thought, maybe we will be able to develop that idea sometime in the future… Last year, middle school kids who attend Rice Middle School got together, and put some very innovative ideas together to create an app that could benefit students with dyslexia. Student ingenuity and creativity evolves over time with consistent nurturing and encouragement. The fact that the idea came to fruition in middle school is very cool, but I promise the seeds were planted much earlier.*