**Writing Task**

Based on your reading of “The Digital Parent Trap,” write an argumentative essay that argues whether kids should avoid or embrace technology. Reed Union School District officials and parents have sought student essays to help guide future use of technology in school. Your position must be supported with evidence from the text.

**The Digital Parent Trap**

Should your kids avoid tech--or embrace it?

By Eliana Dockterman Monday, Aug. 19, 2013

Even before Dave Crandall's kids were born, he knew they'd be weaned on technology. "My second son--we wanted to name him Kyle," he recalls. Problem was, that Web domain kylecrandall.com [1] and Gmail address were taken, and Crandall wanted him to have both. "So we went with Cole instead," he says.

By the ripe age of 3, Cole--like siblings Chase and Zoey Grace--had more than just the keys to a burgeoning digital empire. He'd learned actionable tech skills, like how to create a password, log in to a computer and navigate some websites. And Crandall, a 37-year-old software engineer from Westborough, Mass., was proud.

By all measures, this generation of American kids (ages 3 to 18) is the tech-savviest in history: 27% of them use tablets, 43% use smartphones, and 52% use laptops. And in just a few weeks they will start the most tech-saturated school year ever: Los Angeles County alone will spend $30 million on classroom iPads this year, outfitting 640,000 kids by late 2014.

Yet, according to the latest findings from the research firm Grunwald Associates, barely half of U.S. parents agree that mobile technology should play a more prominent role in schools. Some are even paying as much as $24,000 to send their kids to monthlong "digital detox" programs like the one at Capio Nightingale Hospital in the U.K.

Roxanne McGrath--a 41-year- old mother from Essex, Mass., who banned text messaging, social networking and mobile wi-fi in her house after catching her sons sexting and bullying kids on Instagram. "There's no reason to have iPhones till they turn 18," she says.

So who's right--the mom trying to protect her kids from the perils of new technology or the dad who's coaching his kids to embrace it? It's an urgent question at a time when more than 80% of U.S. school districts say they are on the cusp of incorporating Web-enabled tablets into everyday curriculums.

For years, the Parental Adage was simple: The less time spent with screens, the better. That thinking stems from, among other things, reports about the rise of cyberbullying and sexual predators, as well as the fact that social media-- specifically the sight of others looking happy in photos--can make kids feel depressed and insecure.

There's also a fundamental aversion to sitting kids in front of screens, thanks to decades of studies proving that watching too much TV can lead to obesity, violence and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

In that vein, the Waldorf Schools--a consortium of private K-12 schools in North America designed to "connect children to nature" and "ignite passion for lifelong learning"--limit tech in the classroom and bar the use of smartphones, laptops, televisions and even radios at home. "You could say some computer games develop creativity," says Lucy Wurtz, an administrator at the Waldorf School in Los Altos, Calif., minutes from Silicon Valley. "But I don't see any benefit. Waldorf kids knit and build things and paint--a lot of really practical and creative endeavors."

But it's not that simple. While there are dangers inherent in access to Facebook, new research suggests that social-networking sites also offer unprecedented learning opportunities. "Online, kids can engage with specialized communities of interest," says Mimi Ito, an anthropologist at the University of California at Irvine who's studying how technology affects young adults. "They're no longer limited by what's offered in school."

Early tech use has cognitive benefits as well. Although parenting experts have questioned the value of educational games--as Jim Taylor, author of Raising Generation Tech, puts it, "they're a load of crap ... meant to make money"--new studies have shown they can add real value. In a recent study by SRI, a nonprofit research firm, kids who played games like Samorost (solving puzzles) did 12% better on logic tests than those who did not. And at MIT's Education Arcade, playing the empire-building game Civilization piqued students' interest in history and was directly linked to an improvement in the quality of their history-class reports.

The reason: engagement. On average, according to research cited by MIT, students can remember only 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear and 50% of what they see demonstrated. But when they're actually doing something themselves--in the virtual worlds on iPads or laptops--that retention rate skyrockets to 90%.

The most convincing argument for early-age tech fluency, however, is more basic: staying competitive. "If you look at applying for college or a job, that's on the computer," says Shawn Jackson, principal of Spencer Tech, a public school in one of Chicago's lower-income neighborhoods. Ditto the essential skills for jobs in fast-growing sectors such as programming, engineering and biotechnology. "If we're not exposing our students to this stuff early," Jackson continues, "they're going to be left behind."

None of this means kids deserve unfettered access to the gadget of their choice-- especially if, as McGrath notes, they've already been caught abusing it. As with any childhood privilege, monitoring is key. But parents should keep an open mind about the benefits of tech fluency--and even, when possible, work with their kids to make it useful. As Sandra Calvert, director of the Children's Digital Media Center at Georgetown, puts it, "Kids are going to learn more engaging with adults on these media than using them independently."