SCHOLASTIC

"I firmly believe that to prepare kids for their future, we need to start speaking the language of kids," says Cook. "They're using this stuff anyway—let's teach them how to use it productively."

The GoKnow software turns the students' smartphones into computers, allowing students to use word processors, spreadsheets, and art programs, among others, on their cell phones. For example, every child learns the concept of the water cycle: how water moves on, above, and below Earth's surface through the processes of evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and so on. With GoKnow's cell-based applications, a student could draw a concept map showing the relationship between the processes, create an animation illustrating how it all looks, and write up a text report on what they've learned—all centralized on a desktop-like interface on the smartphone's screen.

At the end of the day, the students can upload all their work online. "The kids sync their phone up to the server. The parents can look at the work they've done, and the teachers can make annotations and grade the work, all online," says Cook.

Elliot Soloway, founder of GoKnow, sees the key to popularizing cell phone use in classrooms is to make it easy to integrate into a school's existing curriculum. GoKnow's software has been engineered to make the process as easy as possible, he says. "We can do this in eight minutes with a teacher. Sit down with your paper-and-pencil lesson, and we're going to show you how to transform that lesson into a cell phone–based lesson you can integrate with your existing curriculum."

Soloway says that if the Keller program is successful, smartphones could become a part of the curriculum in neighboring districts. "We've talked to other districts in Texas that are watching," he says. If cell phones in classrooms do catch on, the schools would, in effect, be getting low-cost computers into their students' hands.

Dolman thinks that the possibilities for cell phones will only increase as kids become more familiar with the technology. "The more we discover what we can do with them, the more valuable they are. If you can harness what students are interested in, you have massive amounts of potential. And if you can get that into the classroom, you're set."