In 2012, Hart County became interested in introducing Bring Your Own Technology, or BYOT, to its classrooms. In January 2013, the county reached out to Archway Partnership. As perhaps a testament to the speed at which today’s learning methods move, by the end of the spring semester the collaboration and a pilot program was already in motion and being implemented.

Archway’s Lenie George, a UGA doctoral student in the College of Education’s program of Learning, Design, and Technology, began one-on-one instruction with three Hart County High School teachers to integrate technology into lessons. The idea was to focus on student-centered uses of the technologies, rather than teacher-centered ones. Working directly with George’s advisor, UGA College of Education faculty member T.J. Koptcha, George and the teachers then wrote an acceptable-use policy, a frequently-asked-questions document, a parental-permission form, and a BYOT overview for the students to take home.

By the end of the year, the school introduced a comprehensive rollout plan for the remaining teachers to become BYOT ready, and made suggestions for how to proceed during the 2013-2014 school year.

The reasons for BYOT, and examples of its use, in the classroom are vast. But it is not merely the existence of the technology that the program is seeking. It is the use of technology in the right way to promote active rather than passive learning that is most important.

“Students learn at different paces, and the current structure wasn’t designed for that flexibility,” says George. “With devices, the pacing can change per student. It’s not a question of how can we put more technology into a student’s hand, but how can we provide each student a challenging, robust, and worthwhile education.”

An example was a Spanish-class project in which students filmed stop-motion videos about famous Spanish folk stories. The students researched, wrote scripts (in Spanish), and created props. Then, the students made videos with narration in Spanish.

In one year, BYOT has gone from an idea to changing education practices. Today, around 30 Hart County High School classrooms are involved.

“Without our partnership with Archway we would not have had Lenie to help us with our implementation,” says Kevin Gaines, the principal of Hart County High School. “Archway has opened up avenues with UGA within all of our schools. It is a true asset.”

Advancing Community Priorities: The BYOT program meets the community-identified priority of making education a cornerstone for students’ futures and for the economic development of Hart County.