

Cell phone use growing among ages 12-17

By Claudia Buck, Sacramento Bee

Brandon Gonzales has been carrying his black Pantech cell phone with the slide-out keyboard for two years. Brandon is 12.

And he's certainly not unusual. Over the last decade, the age of kids packing their first cell phone has been dialing back younger and younger.

This month, as millions of students swarm back to school, it's estimated that more than 75 percent of all U.S. teens have a cell phone.

And so-called "tweens" – kids ages 9 to 12 – may be the fastest-growing cell phone market out there.

"The age a child gets a first cellphone is getting progressively younger. Parents want to be in touch with their kids," said John Breyault, who authored a new guide on tweens and cellphones for the National Consumers League (NCL) in Washington, D.C.

For Brandon, a skateboarding tween, having a cell phone is no big deal. Even though he almost doesn't "know anyone who doesn't have one," Brandon said he's not much of a serial texter and only makes occasional calls.

Picking up Brandon outside Sutter Middle School last week, his mom, Elizabeth Gonzales, said he got his first phone at 10 "for safety reasons." Even when he's outside with friends in their midtown Sacramento neighborhood, she likes knowing Brandon can call home in any emergency. "It gives me peace of mind," Gonzales said.

There's plenty of debate over what age kids should get their first cell phone.

Read the whole story