

Nebraska 24-7 (1-1 Laptop) Initiative – A Few Questions and Answers

1. Why do kids today need this stuff to learn - we didn't need it?

Today's kids are digital natives and rely on technology as a way to communicate. We MUST communicate on their level if we are going to teach them anything. Moreover; colleges and the work force have expectations of students leaving high school with the digital skills to become effective members of that organization. Technology literacy is the ability to responsibly use appropriate technology to communicate, solve problems, and access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information to improve learning in all subject areas and to acquire lifelong knowledge and skills in the 21st century.

2. Does the High School need to be re-wired to handle all the laptops for Internet hook-ups, power plug-ins, etc.?

The short answer here is "no". We will need to install wireless infrastructure, but that will work of the existing wiring. No additional power outlets are needed; most student machines will make it through the day on a single charge (depending on usage). We may create power stations in the library and in each classroom, but that should not require the increase in power outlets. We are completely wireless today, affording freedom to roam from classroom to classroom and log in or stay logged in.

3. What are the advantages of all students having laptops? Are there any disadvantages?

Integrating technology improves student enthusiasm toward learning and when students are actively engaged in learning, they achieve more! Another big advantage for learning is TOTAL EQUITY for all students and providing equal learning opportunities for everyone through the equalization of technology. Laptops extend the class day to 24 hours. Teachers can assign one project/assignment to a class and know that everyone has the same tools to complete the task. Another advantage is that information can be immediately shared between students and teachers; this allows for curriculums to be structured to challenge those students that otherwise are not challenged by the traditional curriculum. The biggest disadvantage may be the lack of Internet at home. Other disadvantages may be the loss of the student's computer due to improper use or down time, although this seldom occurs.

4. Are there Federal Funds available for this project for which Bloomfield Community Schools would be eligible?

Most schools utilize a variety of funds to pay for a project of this magnitude. Often a combination of ERATE, Federal REAP money, and multiple grants from stimulus funds (small schools) based upon poverty enrollment/free-reduced lunch rate money will be put toward this purchase. The bottom line is that those funds which were in the form of grants are no longer available, or very sparingly.

5. How many IT people are we going to need for this project?

That is a good question. One-person use to be able to handle all the technology needs, do the reporting, somewhat fix the hardware, etc, and that wasn't their primary function. We now utilize one individual dedicated solely to maintaining hardware and software and providing some teacher in-service on a regular basis.

6. What's this going to cost the school district?

This varies considerably, however, the initial cost of new computers for grades 9-12 and staff was over to \$100,000. When you add into the mix, interactive whiteboards in every classroom, we add another considerable sum. We felt it was more beneficial to supply every student in grades 7-12 with technology if we are requiring staff to incorporate the use of technology into their classrooms and assignments handed out. The bottom line is that there is very little we do not use technology for and it will only get more involved. The only issue in the future will be what type of technology (hardware and software) will we be using. You can virtually run all your business from your I-phone. Our priorities have shifted somewhat from textbooks in every student's hands to a computer or technology in some form in every student and teacher's hands. We have not abandoned textbooks but every year more are becoming available for use on the computer.

7. Is this project going to raise our taxes in Bloomfield's school district?

No. We will likely be repurposing funds and no additional taxes will be required for initiating or sustaining the project. We budget for technology every year, planning ahead for future years as well. It is a road that we cannot turn back on. The task becomes being as efficient with what we have, making it last as long as we can.

8. Is this going to hurt or take away from any of the other courses or classes offered here at WHS?

Elaboration on the question would be needed to address individual class impact. That said, properly planned, this can be one of the best tools students will use throughout their education.

9. Do we have to get all our courses made into computer programs or what?

No. Most schools do not ask teachers to change what they're teaching, only how they utilize that content. Online tools, such as Blackboard, MyBigCampus, or Angel can help digitize some of the educational content; however the bigger picture of what teachers will be teaching will not change. This technology does not replace the teacher; but rather allows the teacher to enhance his/her learning on the subject material.

10. How computer savvy are our teachers or staff going to have to be and will they have to be educated more on using computers and using the computer programs? If so, will this be extra cost to the District?

One of the most important parts of a laptop initiative is professional development. We will include this cost into the overall plan. All staff including Para-educators have been using laptop technology for the past 4 years. We train our staff in software applications that we directly use with students and in instruction. Training is ongoing, never ending and will always be a part of the use of technology by students and staff at Bloomfield Community Schools.

11. How do we compare to other districts in this area of technology or computers being used by their students?

This is a challenging question to answer due to the diversity of Nebraska school districts. Data shows that there are a steadily increasing number of schools going to heavy use of technology in some way, shape or form. Most area schools are utilizing laptops, notebooks or I-Pads for students and staff, either in a lab setting or one-to-one.

12. Can't we get a cheaper product?

Apple's computer prices are competitive. The question becomes reliability, durability and longevity. Apple is slightly more expensive than most competitors, but has much fewer problems with software failure, and equipment failure.

13. What happens when they break? Who pays?

This has become a real issue. The school carries insurance for such cases and the deductible is \$250 for the school. School liability/insurance will be used to cover major claims over \$250 through the total cost of the unit. This has changed the complexity of student/parent financial responsibility considerably. The way it stands now, the student will pay half of the deductible the first time (\$125), all of the deductible the second time (\$250) and will have their computer taken away if a 3rd major repair is needed.

It is a major responsibility on the part of the student to take care of his/her machine. The majority of repairs were due to abuse, neglect or carelessness. In other words, if water or a beverage gets spilled on the unit, ruining the motherboard and it was by a sibling or friend or another person other than the student it is assigned to, the responsibility still lies with the student who was issued the computer.

Another common repair issue was with the lid/screen, cracking or breaking the screen because of improper opening or closing. Cases were frequently damaged due to the computer being set down too hard or dropped.

The bottom line is that it is a very expensive tool, not a toy. If you owned it personally, we would expect it to be taken care of as if it were your own. Sometimes, that is the problem.

14. Does everyone have to have the Internet at home?

No- the difference between our technology and Windows technology is our non-reliance on the Internet to be productive. That's the beauty of iLife and all the digital tools built right into each one of our machines. In the event that you would need Internet access to complete schoolwork before and afterschool arrangements can be made. Contact Mr. Alexander or Mrs. Johnson if needed.

15. What about Internet safety?

Although we cannot guarantee 100% success- our computers are set up with software that allows the school to monitor where the student is or has been. This system allows teachers and/or administrators to immediately lock individual computers if the need should arise. This program digitally records each student screen every 30 seconds even when students are working from home.

If you have any other questions, please contact Principal Shane Alexander: salexander@esu1.org
or Technology Director Renea Johnson: johnsonr@esu1.org

THANK YOU!!