

Students to start year with iPads, laptops in their hands

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/082913/techSM.png>

Personal computers for students are centerpiece of PW-S technology initiative

The Port Washington-Saukville School District will roll out its \$1 million technology initiative with the start of classes next week by putting an iPad or Chromebook laptop computer in the hands of every middle and high school student.

The sweeping initiative, administrators say, will change the way educators teach and the way students learn.

“I think technology is bringing revolutionary change to education in general and to our school district because we are now able to put computer devices directly in the hands of our students,” Supt. Michael Weber said. “Teachers are no longer necessarily the dispensers of knowledge. They have become facilitators of learning, which is a whole different concept than when I was trained as a teacher.

“Our goal is to encourage kids to become independent learners and to seek knowledge, and now we have the tools to help them do that more effectively.”



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The district is leasing 1,114 Samsung Chromebooks — laptops that run the Google Chrome operating system and use applications that reside on the Web — and 640 Apple iPad2 tablets and will assign them to students shortly after classes begin Tuesday, Sept. 3.

High school students and eighth-graders will receive Chromebooks. Students in fifth through seventh grades will be assigned iPads. They will treat the computers, which will come with protective cases and an optional insurance policy that can be purchased by parents, as their own for the duration of the school year, using them at school and home and anywhere in between.

At Thomas Jefferson Middle School, computers will be distributed during a series of meeting for parents and students starting at 5:45 p.m. Sept. 3, 4, 5 and 9, depending on grade level.

At Port Washington High School, computers will distributed during a special period Sept. 10.

Both schools will then dedicate class time to sessions that, in addition to teaching students how to use their computers, will focus on district technology policies and “digital citizenship,” a term used to describe responsible use of electronic devices on the Internet.

Although elementary school students won't receive individual computers, their teachers will in order to create and use Web-based learning centers consisting of networked mobile computers in lab settings.

The backbone of the technology initiative is a powerful WiFi system in each of the schools, electronic filters to regulate the content students have access to and a new learning management system called Haiku.

The district is paying for the computers, staff training and technology infrastructure with what administrators call “one-time” funds. Instead of financing the initiative with state aid and property tax revenue — a virtually impossible scenario given state revenue limits — the district is using money from the federal Education Jobs Fund it received several years ago, as well as money it has saved.

It has opted to lease rather than buy the iPads and Chromebooks for a cost of \$535,624. At the end of the three-year lease, the district will have the option of keeping the computers or having the leasing company sell them and return a portion of the profits to the district. Administrators estimate the district could recover nearly \$100,000 from the sale of the devices, putting its total leasing cost at \$439,624, which is significantly less than the \$522,174 it would cost to buy them.

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The district has also increased student fees to help finance the technology initiative. The fee for students in fifth grade through high school is \$65 this year and will increase to \$85 next year. It was \$40 for fifth and sixth-graders and \$45 for students in seventh through 12th grade.

The goal of the initiative, administrators say, is to give educators the ability to adapt the curriculum to the specific needs of each student while preparing them for a world that is run by technology.

Although they say the changes being ushered in by the focus on technology promise to be sweeping, they are quick to debunk the myth that computers will diminish the role of the teacher. In fact, they say, the initiative has put a premium on high-quality educators who have adapted to new teaching strategies and are able to seamlessly integrate technology into their lessons.

“Our teachers have gone through a massive amount of training, giving up a lot of their own time to learn how to use iPads and Chromebooks in the classroom,” Thomas Jefferson Middle School Principal Arlan Galarowicz said. “Everything we do is about meeting the individual needs of each and every student, and technology is one of the tools — an extremely effective tool — that teachers now have to do that.”

Administrators say the possible applications for the use of technology in the classroom are essentially limitless, but some of the strategies teachers will employ include assigning students to watch lectures at home on their computers to free classroom time for more in-depth exploration of subjects, using the Internet to incorporate up-to-the-minute information into classroom projects and working in real-time with students on the other side of the state or world.

In many cases, textbooks, notes, study guides, calendars and calculators will reside on student computers.

Administrators said the initiative has sparked excitement for a new era of education in the district.

“This is my 41st year in education, and I’m as excited about starting this school year as I was about starting my first year because we are doing things now that are so new and engaging,” Galarowicz said. “It’s definitely not a normal start to the school year.”

Also new for the start of classes are entrances at Lincoln Elementary School in Port Washington and Saukville Elementary

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School, part of a building security plan prompted by the school shooting in Newtown, Conn.

Shortly after the massacre, the district installed buzzer systems and cameras at each of the elementary schools to ensure all doors to the building were locked, but over the summer, the main office at Lincoln Elementary School was moved and the entrance reconstructed to create a secure waiting area for parents and other visitors. A similar entrance was created at Saukville Elementary School.

The construction cost \$107,000, leaving about \$85,000 for other security improvements, such as redesigning the entrance to Dunwiddie Elementary School and installing automated lock systems and external security cameras at schools.

A series of building projects intended to improve energy efficiency are also nearly completed. The district borrowed \$1.8 million and is investing \$400,000 in savings in the projects, which include new heating, cooling and air-handling systems in schools.

Image Information: PORT WASHINGTON-SAUKVILLE School District hardware technicians Meghan Schmidt and Bryan Ryer held a Chromebook laptop and an iPad2 in an Otterbox case like the ones that will be distributed to students beginning next week. The district has leased more than 1,700 of the computers, enough for each student in fifth grade through high school. Photo by Bill Schanen IV