

Frequently Asked Questions about the PowerLearning One-to-One Laptop Program

FAQ's about the PowerLearning Computers

What are the laptops like?

For the 2008/09 school year we are distributing Dell Latitude E5400 computers with Higher Ground Shuttle 15 cases. The basic specifications of the laptops are as follows:

- Intel 2.0 GHz Dual Core processor
- 2 GB of RAM
- 15.4" screen
- 80GB hard drive
- 802.11b/g/n on-board wireless
- 6 cell battery with approx. 4 hour runtime
- Microsoft XP OS
- CDRW/DVD ROM optical drive
- The case has a rigid frame, foam padding, "cool deck" for heat dissipation and is an "always on" design.
- More information available at www.dell.com & www.highergroundgear.com

What type of software will be available?

A full range of software will be provided to the students including but not limited to: office productivity (word processing, spreadsheet, presentation...), audio and video editing, media players, science data collection, geometry software... A specific listing of software included on the laptops is available at the PowerLearning website.

Why does the laptop come with some "Open Source" software?

The following is a definition of what open source software is:

"Open source is a development method for software that harnesses the power of distributed peer review and transparency of process. The promise of open source is better quality, higher reliability, more flexibility, lower cost, and an end to predatory vendor lock-in." - www.opensource.org

In an effort to make the best educational resources available to students while also keeping the costs of the PowerLearning program reasonable we have utilized many programs created by the open source community. After thorough review of different programs we have found many of the open source programs to offer better features, better software design/stability and a better user experience than for-profit software. We have selected the software to maximize the academic resources available to the students and expose them to tools necessary to operate in a technology driven society.

Will they have access to the school's server(s) at home? How about our Internet?

Data for MHS students shows that almost 85% of families have an Internet connection at home. The district will not supply Internet connectivity at home but will try to help families if needed. Free dial-up internet is available in the Manistee area with additional details about this program available on the PowerLearning website. District servers such as students network drive will not be available off-campus so students will need to prepare properly so that they have the necessary resources off-campus. Moodle, PowerSchool, Outlook and other web-based resources will be available to students off-campus.

How durable is the laptop?

The Dell Latitude E5400 laptop computer is a "business class" machine meaning that it has been engineered for an active lifespan of use. It was designed to spend a lot of time traveling in a backpack, a briefcase or anywhere you want to take it. That said, students should be careful with the laptop they have been assigned. They will have the same machine for the duration of their high school career at MHS so they have incentive to take good care of it.

What will it cost if my student breaks the laptop?

In cases of negligence or abuse, a student/family will be required to pay for the damages/replacement of the supplied equipment as explained in the PowerLearning Policy and agreed to by the parents and student in the PowerLearning agreement form. To make students and parents aware of the cost and responsibility, a list of costs for common repair parts is provided below. These costs are subject to change and are provided only to give parents/students an approximation of cost. Other items will be charged at the current cost at the time of damage.

- Total loss of the laptop - \$800.00

- Broken screen - \$600.00
- Broken keyboard - \$100.00
- Power adaptor - \$50.00
- Computer bag - \$45.00

Can students modify the hardware configuration of the laptops (for instance adding RAM, internal DVD burner...)?

No. The laptops are the property of MAPS and it violates the PowerLearning agreement to modify the hardware configuration of the laptops.

Since the District has insurance on the laptops should the families consider getting insurance also?

Families do not have to have to insure the laptops but it is advisable for families to get a rider on their homeowners/renters insurance to cover the laptops. Since families are financially responsible for damage that results from negligence, theft and abuse, getting coverage for the laptop under homeowners/renters insurance is a very economical way to help cover these potential expenses.

FAQ's about the PowerLearning Policies

Will this be in the whole High School?

We will be starting this program with the incoming freshman (Class of 2012). We will include each freshman class until all full-time participants of MHS programming have access to one-to-one computing. The program will adjust to new technologies.

I see that many other districts focus on Middle School? Why 9th grade?

MHS was in a position where we have been investing a lot of money to increase the accessibility of technology for students and teachers and at the same time are seeing an anticipated rise in textbook expenditures. By “combining” these two needs it became financially feasible for MHS move forward on the one-to-one project. In the long-term we would like to see more grade levels at MAPS utilize a one-to-one model but MHS is currently in a position move forward with this project.

Will supporting this HS program take away from the other buildings?

The District is fully committed to supporting the other buildings in their technology and other needs.

What will prevent the student from selling the lap top to make a few bucks?

Parents and students sign an agreement with the district expressly stating that they will not do this. We have installed laptop tracking software to help catch anyone that violates this agreement. Violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

With these steps in place we hope that parents/students will not abuse this program. We have researched this issues and it has shown that the steps that we have taken typically keep theft from being a significant issue.

Is participation in the PowerLearning program mandatory? Does my student have to have a computer?

Participation is not mandatory but we highly encourage you to take one because the laptop initiative will allow your student's learning to be seamless and continuous. The PowerLearning program brings individual learning to your student and provides your student the ability to “connect” with his peers, his teachers and the world! If you do not want your student to participate, contact MHS Principal Andy Huber.

If I already have an Internet provider at home, will my student be able to use our service with the school's laptop?

Yes. We will assist your student in setting up their computer to switch from the school's Internet access to your Internet provider.

Is it mandatory to have Internet access at home?

No. Students will be able complete homework assignments at home and turn in their work when they return to school the next day. Internet access points are available at community locations such as the Manistee County Library, Goody's, The Grounds, McDonalds... Free dial-up internet is also available in the Manistee area.

What if we can't afford the \$25/term insurance fee?

Contact MHS Principal Andy Huber.

Can my student arrive early or stay late at school to do research, etc.?

The high school building is open from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each school day. The High school has wireless connectivity available in the Commons as well as throughout the rest of the building.

If my student can't keep the computer in his locker, where can she/he store it safely while he is on a field trip or at an extracurricular event?

If your student does not need the computer overnight, he can leave it with MAPS Technology Department where it will be locked in a secure location and returned to your student the next morning. If your student wants to take the computer home after a trip, the supervising staff member will lock the laptop in a secure location and return it to your student after the trip.

If my student breaks his laptop, who will determine if the problem is a manufacturing defect or if it is negligence on the part of my student?

Working in conjunction with the manufacturer, MAPS will determine if it is a covered loss. Each incident will be dealt with on an individual basis.

Can my student bring his own computer to school?

Yes. If they have been assigned a PowerLearning laptop we discouraged them from doing this because they will not have the same resources available on their personal laptop therefore interfering with their learning experience. If a student does not belong to the graduating class that is receiving a PowerLearning laptop they may bring their personal laptop to school and connect to our guest wireless network.

When my student is a senior, can she/he purchase the laptop at the end of the year?

As of now no, families will not be able to purchase their laptop when their student graduates. MAPS will be reviewing this policy as we move forward but currently we believe we will have a greater return on its investment and greatest academic benefit if we keep the laptops and redistribute them in the district after students graduate.

Where will the money come from for the purchase of the laptops?

The annual PowerLearning program cost will come out of our general fund. 1-to-1 computing obviously necessitates more money to be spent on computers but saves money in other areas:

- Decrease in textbook expenditures with a switch to putting curriculum and resources online.
- Decreasing in printing costs
- Shifting existing desktop computer, specialized furniture and other expenditures related to our current technology to the laptop program

All of this adds up to a marginal increase in operating costs over "traditional" instruction but a BIG increase in educational opportunity.

May other household members use the student's laptop?

The laptops are provided for the expressed use by the students to foster their academic opportunities.

Will my student be able to take the laptop home over the summer?

No. MAPS is planning to use the summer months to update the laptop, check them over for issues and make sure that they are ready for the next academic school year.

Who will monitor my student's Internet access at home?

We have setup the laptops such that they still pass through our content filtration when at home. That said, it is imperative that parents/guardians be involved and monitor their student's use of the Internet at home.

Will my student have a personal e-mail account?

Yes. Students have already been issued a school email account.

FAQ's about the Classroom Use of the Laptops

How is the teacher going to manage the classroom? Controlling students from – Emailing, viewing photos, instant messaging, playing games, shopping online...

When the student is at school we have filters and appropriate protection that can control some of these actions. MAPS also has every student sign an Acceptable Use Policy that covers appropriate use of school technology.

Teachers have Moodle and PowerSchool that they can use to communicate with students and parents. This will allow students to use some of the tools mentioned in the original question in an educational environment. Email, photos, instant messaging, blogging and social networking are not "bad" if used properly. Again, teachers will have to be aware of how these tools can be used. Professional development is being provided to teachers.

How will the laptops fit into the curriculum? Will they fit into all classes or just a few?

Computers can fit into any curriculum. This is one of many tools teachers can use to achieve the standards and GLCE's that are laid out by the State. The laptops can be used to challenge gifted and talented students and help students that are at risk. Even in Weight Training, students could track their progress on an Excel worksheet. They can use the Internet to research different types of programs and what each program is focused on.

The tools we are giving our students are what they are using to communicating now. Students use technology tools like laptops, the Internet and software daily outside of school. The laptops will give the teachers an opportunity to present the curriculum in a more meaningful way.

If my student does not accept a laptop, will he/she be able to complete classroom assignments?

There are computers available to students during the school day and for a period of time before and after school.

Will my student use traditional textbooks?

Many classes will still use traditional textbooks. The laptop computer is an instructional tool, a vehicle for the student to have greater access to learning resources. A few classes at MHS currently use an online textbook.