



Classroom Connections

Issue Brief

Laptop Initiative

What is it?

Governor Rounds' laptop initiative is a plan to provide high school students with laptop computers. It begins with a pilot program in the 2006-07 school year. Participation is voluntary.

Why now?

Today's K-12 students live in a digital world. Technology is not a handy tool used to accomplish tasks; it is the way of life. In the old days, students and teachers looked to the Encyclopedia Britannica for answers. Today, they have a world of information at their fingertips available 24/7 via the Internet. This new mode of operation has fueled a transformation in the way teachers instruct and students learn.

What will this initiative do?

The laptop initiative will help students develop skills that are critical in our 21st century work world. These include:

- Critical and creative thinking
- Problem solving skills
- Information and communication skills
- Interpersonal and self-direction skills
- Technology literacy

Tell me about the benefits.

The benefits of a laptop initiative are far-reaching. They impact students and teachers, as well as the economy.

Student outcomes:

- Students have improved research skills.
- Evidence points to improved student achievement. For example, after two years of a laptop initiative in Henrico County, Va., scores for high school students increased on all 11 of the Virginia Standards of Learning tests.
- Students report that laptops make their school work easier and help improve the quality of their work.
- Students are more interested in their school work and more motivated to learn.
- Students spend more time engaging in collaborative work

Teacher outcomes:

- Technology allows teachers to more easily differentiate lessons.
- Teachers find the laptops useful in developing integrated lessons and extending learning.



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- Teachers report a positive impact on their instruction, allowing them to expand their own knowledge and increase their efficiency.
- Teachers report improved communication with students, parents and other teachers.

Economic:

- This initiative levels the playing field when it comes to resources. Currently, children in high-income families are four times more likely to use computers than those in low-income families. By providing laptops to all high school students, it bridges what is commonly called the “digital divide.”
- This initiative gives students a competitive edge as they enter the workforce.

Who’s doing it?

A number of states and school districts have implemented laptop immersion projects.

These pioneers include:

- Henrico County (Va.) Schools
- State of Maine
- State of Texas
- State of Michigan
- Union City (N.J.) School District
- Watertown, S.D., School District

What are the successes specifically?

- Union City Public Schools found that standardized test scores rose significantly for those students involved in the laptop pilot. By the second and third year of the project, participating students scored significantly higher than students not participating in the project.
- Henrico County’s laptop program is achieving better returns than earlier investments in computer labs and desktops. One-hundred percent of the district’s schools now meet Virginia’s full accreditation standards compared to 70 percent when the laptop program began three years ago. In addition to increased student achievement, other benefits include: substantial savings on calculators, periodicals, maps and reference books – all of which are now available via computer.
- Henrico’s high school students also have SAT preparation programs installed on their laptops and last year realized a 13-point gain and the highest average scores in the district’s history.
- Michigan’s 1:1 Freedom to Learn initiative reported increased student achievement.



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The 2005 Education Assessment Program shows improvement in students' math and reading scores.

- A report by Rockman ET AL regarding laptop initiative results across 26 sites states that the greatest change seems to be in project-based instruction, an approach that allows students to manage their own learning by completing individual or small group projects. The projects often span various disciplines, require a diverse set of skills, and include numerous steps that lead to a final product.
- Several groups that have implemented laptop initiatives have indicated that attendance has risen and disciplinary issues have drastically declined since implementation. The Texas Education Agency has advised that many schools reported 100 percent attendance after the rollout.

Where will the money come from?

The laptop initiative would be \$1 match from the state for every \$2 invested by a local school district.

The program is optional. Governor Rounds is prepared to dedicate \$13 million over a three-year period to fund the state's portion of the cost. Funding would come from several sources, including \$9 million in

technology funds and \$1 million in South Dakota Reads funds.

Where can I find out more?

The reports listed below offer insight into the benefits of laptop immersion.

Laptops for Learning: Final Report and Recommendations of the Laptops for Learning Task Force
March 22, 2004
<http://etc.usf.edu/L4L>

The Maine Learning Technology Initiative: Teacher, Student, and School Perspectives – Mid-Year Evaluation Report
March 2003
www.usm.maine.edu/cepare/mlti.htm

“Learning With Technology: The Impact of Laptop Use on Student Achievement,” Journal of Technology, Learning, and Assessment, Volume 3, Number 2, January 2005
www.bc.edu/research/intasc/jtla/journal/v3n2.shtml

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Date: Jan. 10, 2006

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