

Piedmont, Alabama's One-to-One Program

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MPower Piedmont

Faced with the decline of the local textile industry, in 2009 the rural Piedmont City School district in northeastern Alabama, began MPower, a program to provide laptops to all students in Grades 4-12. The MPower program was designed to support the district's goals:

- A strong academic foundation
- An excellent extra-curricular program
- Outstanding facilities
- The most effective technologies in teaching and learning

Starting with a 2009 pilot program which provided 150 laptops to students in a high school of 325 students, the initiative was expanded in 2010. To fully implement the plan, the school district's leadership formed

partnerships with ITS, a virtual service company, to expand broadband access for the community. In 2012, the program was expanded to include sets of laptop computers to be checked out for Grades K-3.

MPower was initiated to address the needs of the district's 1100 students, 65% of whom receive free or reduced lunch, to prepare them for the workplace and post-secondary education, as well as to improve student achievement on state tests. After just a year, the results appear to be positive. Graduation test scores increased by 13%, and 8th graders on free or reduced lunch scoring above proficiency on the math test increased from 15.38% to 47.06%, while those scoring below proficiency reduced from 15.38% to 7.84%. The "above proficiency" scores of minority students also rose from 8.3 percent to 26.6 percent. The superintendent, Matthew Akin, is quick to point out that these improvements cannot be tied directly to the one-to-one laptop program, but he notes that he has observed more engagement and participation by students.

Broadband Access

A critical component of the MPower program is increasing student access to a broadband Internet connection outside the school. Many Piedmont students live in rural areas where a good connection is unavailable, and for others, a broadband connection is too expensive. The district implemented several strategies to ensure that students received the full benefits of the laptops. Local businesses and fast-food restaurants agreed to offer free wifi while some churches provided not only a wifi connection, but also supervision for students using the service. In addition a city-wide wireless network is being created for students to access free of charge. Other community members will be able to use the network for a fee.

Professional Development

The leadership for Piedmont City Schools recognized the importance of professional development in the implementation of their one-to-one computing program. Before the laptop initiative, most of the teachers of Grades 4-12 were not technologically literate. Forty-three teachers received professional development in technology integration, specifically designed to help teachers improve student test scores in reading and math. The training also focused on using technology effectively in all subject areas, special education, ELL, and gifted programs.

Funding Mpower

Piedmont City Schools took advantage of diverse funding sources to create the one-to-one laptop initiative for their students.

| Phase of Program | Funding Source(s) | Purchases |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Preparation | Federal Dropout Prevention Grant | Professional development for teachers |
| Pilot | Enhancing Education Through Technology-2 Grant (federal stimulus) | 150 MacBooks for high school students Technology in every classroom (wireless slates and sound systems, mounted projectors, etc.) |
| Grades 4-12 One-to-One | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interest 4-year lease from Apple • Federal technology grant • Local city and county funds | 640 MacBooks |
| Broadband Access | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Communications Commission E-Rate grant • City funds | Set up city-wide broadband wireless network, free for students, paid for other community members |
| Primary Grades One-to-One | Susie Parker Stringfellow Health Fund of the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama | A set of MacBooks for each primary grade |

One-To-One Computer Policy

Although the educators and parents of Piedmont students appreciate the benefits that individual laptops can provide, they also recognize challenges that the program had to address. A variety of strategies have been put in place to ensure that students have a positive learning experience with their laptops.

Even before the laptops were distributed to students, parents were involved in the process. Both students and their parents were required to attend a meeting where they learned the rules and expectations for using the computers, including a \$50 insurance policy to cover damage. Students were allowed to take the MacBooks home immediately after the meeting.

Safety and privacy using the Internet are addressed through a combination of filtering, teacher and parent supervision, and education in technology literacy. The school filters Internet access on campuses, and when the laptops are off the school grounds, the Internet is still routed through the school's filter, so inappropriate sites are blocked wherever students use the laptops. The district's Internet access provider can also send a student a message or even lock a screen if it detects inappropriate online behavior, and principals can access the screens of all students' computers at any time.

During the school day, all computer use must meet educational goals. Personal devices, such as iPods and smartphones are permitted but not supported by the school's technical staff. The school does, however, recognize the difference between school computer behavior and how students use their laptops at home. For example, Facebook is filtered at school, but students can log on to the social network at home. Superintendent Akin hopes that students are using that site because they are learning in school how to use such technology appropriately and safely.

Required Use Policy

Students in Piedmont City Schools and their parents must sign a Student Required Use Policy and Internet Safety Policy. This document addresses most of the typical issues that schools must address in online behavior, such as the use of appropriate language, adherence to copyright laws, and modification of school hardware and software. Other guidelines describe appropriate care of laptops and efficient computer behavior like backing up files. By signing the document, parents and students acknowledge that violation of the terms may result in disciplinary action.

Conclusion

Piedmont City Schools clearly owes the success of its one-to-one computer program to the cooperation among key players in the community. A visionary superintendent, Matthew Akin, dedicated teachers, local businesses who supported the initiative with grants, and city and county agencies, all contributed to the dream of providing Piedmont students access to the technology they need to be successful participants in the world of the 21st century.

Read more about MPower, Piedmont's one-to-one computing initiative.

- [1-to-1 Computing: Turning Around School Technology](#)
- [Best Practice in Piedmont, AL: Connecting All Kids to Their Potential](#)
- [Grant enables Piedmont schools to provide Apple hardware to K-3](#)
- [In Piedmont City, a 1-to-1 Laptop Initiative Aims to Empower Students and Strengthen Community](#)
- [Piedmont Schools Offer Guidance on Computer Protocol](#)
- [Required Use and Internet Safety Policy \(RUP\)](#)