

Dear Parents and One-to-One Laptop Pilot Participants,

In 2016, our small laptop pilot was developed with the goal of exploring and collecting data on several elements pertaining to the use of students' ubiquitous access to technology at MLWGS. To help oversee this program and to ultimately make recommendations to the school administration regarding its outcome, the One-to-One Laptop Pilot Advisory Committee was formed in February of 2017. This voluntary committee was made up of members of all stakeholder groups including parents, students, teachers, school technology staff, and school administration. **After reviewing and discussing the collected data, the committee came to a near unanimous consensus to recommend that a one-to-one laptop program not be expanded or continued in the 2018-19 school year.** Despite some positive feedback in the surveys, there were several areas where the pilot program revealed issues including a minimal impact on instruction and the feasibility of an expanded program.

There were several areas of investigation for the pilot. We examined the impact of student laptops on classroom instruction of gifted students. Additionally, we explored the feasibility (cost, maintenance, and staffing) of having a school-wide one-to-one laptop program by comparing three different devices. Finally, we investigated various tools to provide broadband Internet access at home (for those without) as well as online instructional materials.

The pilot program also served to act as a catalyst to deepen the faculty conversation on establishing "clear and concise" instructional goals for the use of classroom technology and address a need for "equitable access" to technology and the Internet for students.

Every day at Maggie Walker with the existing computer labs and our BYOD program, there are many wonderful examples of innovative and transformative instructional use of new technologies. Some of these include: peer-to-peer live conversations with students from around the world in their native languages, utilizing geographic-based data in analyzing environmental and demographic trends, and the use of collaboration tools to model solutions to real-world problems. However, there is also a philosophic belief among much of our talented faculty, that the educational process with gifted students is ultimately a human endeavor, that is not always enhanced by the addition of technology. Instead of using technology for technology's sake, which is often the forced result of many one-to-one laptop programs, much of our faculty instead embraces what I like to call the "W.I.S.E." application of technology (Where It Seems Effective). This process is one where the teacher and/or student chooses the best pedagogical approach available. In situations where technology can be truly transformative to instruction, (distant collaboration, analysis of data, etc.) it is utilized. Where it is an obstacle or a distraction, traditional methods are used. Based on the feedback of the types of classroom usage, the committee did not feel that a one-to-one program would be an improvement over our current computer access.

The second issue that the pilot identified was the feasibility of expanding such a program to all students. Due to the unique funding methodology of MLWGS, there was concern about the long term budgetary consequences of such an expanded technology program. Our school's dependence on state funds and "tuition" from our participating districts as well as our inability to raise capital through bond initiatives (many school divisions initially funded similar programs in this manner). restricts funding at the same time as other essential budget items are on the rise. Also, the pilot revealed a need for more IT staff to implement an expansion. With an IT staff of only two people, the prospect of deploying and servicing 750 new additional devices on top of the current responsibilities was impossible. Funding for staff and device management systems would need to be included in any future consideration of a one-to-one program.

Instructional technology objectives are regularly reviewed. While this pilot program was intended to look at the immediate possibility of a one-to-one laptop program, there is the possibility of revisiting this issue in the future should the instructional technology approach for the school shift and/or the budgetary concerns evolve.

Despite the fact that it was not recommended to expand the laptop program, there were some other very positive outcomes that resulted from the multi-year process. With the support of the Governor's School Foundation, we successfully piloted a portable cellular wireless hotspot for students who do not have Internet in their homes. This program will continue into the 2018-19 school year. The One-to-One Laptop Pilot Committee also came to a consensus that, to be successful, MLWGS students need full access to a modern computer and Internet in the home. When polled, the percentage of students in need was small, therefore the committee felt that "home access" to a computer was a goal that could be addressed. Students will have a letter sent home with course registration

materials to identify those without these learning tools at home. Please take time to fill out this form and return it to school.

Additional information will be sent closer to the end of the school year regarding the process for returning your pilot laptop. Students will not be able to purchase their device at the end of the pilot. Please watch for the home technology access survey which will be included in the course registration materials. Families should complete and return this form to school.

Thank you very much for your ongoing participation in the program. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Jeff Hall

Coordinator of Instructional Technology

Maggie L. Walker Governor's School

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