

Huntsville City Schools to transform 21st Century Education

Digital textbooks on mobile devices to help personalize instruction for each student and prepare them for college and career

FAQ

Learning:

How will this move to digital affect Huntsville students?

Huntsville City Schools has a vision to personalize education for our students – focusing on an increased level of student engagement in the classroom and outside of the classroom. The learning day will be increased beyond the school day. The curriculum will always be current and will link to specific core standards. Students can ditch their heavy textbooks as part of the school district’s major effort to better prepare them for college and careers with digital learning.

How will this help my child who is gifted/has special needs?

Digital learning is designed to help teachers apply digital technology to personalize instruction to every student’s needs, so children can learn like never before possible.

Digital programs sound fun, but how will students learn better?

In addition to giving schools a common academic standard across the district and enhanced rigor, educators will be able to make sure students are progressing at their own pace. Digital programs will help give feedback much more regularly to help teachers quickly identify academic strengths and weaknesses and provide assignments customized for the student’s level of understanding. The student’s learning day will be extended beyond the classroom. Wi-fi will be installed on each bus so that students can continue learning during their bus ride to and from school.

Financial:

How can the school district afford this massive effort?

The school district has been preparing for the major transition by reallocating money ordinarily budgeted for printed textbooks and saving money through significant operational efficiencies. The money for this project was already in the budget, we are just shifting the expense from textbooks to technology. The school district also worked to secure federal E-Rate funding earmarked for technology in the classroom to help cover most of the cost. Over time, the shift to digital is expected to save the district money.

How can digital textbooks cost less?

The digital books can be purchased for a lower cost on a subscription basis similar to the way music files are typically purchased online —per user. Printed books are purchased for the life of the textbook and are passed from one student to the next.

What will happen to all of our existing textbooks?

We have a plan to collect the current textbook supply from each school, review the market value and sell it to other school districts if market value is applicable.

Will there be a cost to students for the mobile devices?

There will be a nominal user fee of \$35 charged, which will help cover repairs/replacement devices. If under financial hardship, the school district will help make special accommodations for our free and reduced lunch students.

Teaching:

Will teachers actually use the technology?

- Most of our teachers already spend a lot of time trying to incorporate technology into their lessons to make them interesting for their students. Fifth grade teachers who started using netbooks last year have told us the use of technology has helped saved them enormous amounts of time. The digital programs are designed to help save time and make it easier for them to develop engaging, personalized lessons with interactive videos and animations, instantaneous feedback on students' understanding, assignments based on students' performance level, and more. Each teacher signs a "Key Affirmation" document that states "*I am willing to employ technology to create a differentiated learning environment that supports the varied learning needs of students.*"

Will teachers know how to incorporate technology?

We will work closely with teachers to help them incorporate these digital tools into everyday learning. We will train and support teachers and staff over the summer and through the year with the shift to a digital learning environment. Teachers will receive a \$700 stipend to use for professional development. They will have early access to the Pearson curriculum sites to explore and plan for classroom implementation.

What type of support will teachers receive throughout the year?

Pearson has agreed to place 7-8 of their team members in our district for two years. We will have one Pearson team member for every four schools. The Pearson team will be in the schools demonstrating the curriculum to the teaching staff. The IT Dept. has been staffed to support this technology roll-out; there will be an IT Help Desk set up for parents and teachers to seek assistance with specific academic needs.

Will this new method of teaching impact class size?

No.

School Infrastructure:

Do schools have the infrastructure needed for the digital learning environment?

The school district has been building up the technology infrastructure in schools to prepare for the transition and will make adjustments throughout the year to the wireless Internet system. Internet bandwidth will steadily increase in schools as students and teachers take full advantage of the comprehensive digital resources.

Technology:

What devices will students use?

Students in fourth through 12th grade will be learning on laptops while third-grade students will work on Netbooks, and students in pre-Kindergarten through second grades will use iPads. Students in grades three through 12 will be able to take their device home.

- Students in 2nd grade will each have an I-pad to use in class – 1:1
- Students in 1st grade will each have an I-pad to use in class – 1:1
- Students in Kindergarten will share one I-pad to 3 students to use in class – 1:3
- Students in Pre-K will share one I-pad per 5 students to use in class – 1:5

Each laptop, HP Pro-Book 6460B, will be set up with Windows 7-Office Professional 2010 and will be loaded with the following: Pearson curriculum, promethean board, student handbook (located on the Desktop), Computrace, Moodle, Trendmicro (virus protection). Each laptop will also come with a bag and power cord. The life of the laptop battery is 13.5 hours.

Will children be able to take mobile devices home? What if they don't have Internet access at home?

Yes, children will have assigned laptops to use from home. The school district is collaborating with community organizations to help increase students' access to the Internet outside of schools. For school bus riders, there will be internet access on the bus. There are several locations that host internet access, such as: the libraries, churches, community centers, schools, etc. Comcast is also offering internet service for \$9.95/month for families that receive free or reduced price lunches. Students will also be able to download their Pearson curriculum so that it is housed on their laptop for take home usage. We will be surveying our families to inquire about the number of homes without access to the internet.

Will headsets be provided with the laptop?

Most students already have some type of headset device, whether it be earbuds or headphones. If a student does not have this type of device, they may purchase their own at a very minimal cost.

How will children be able to learn if the technology fails or the mobile device is damaged/lost?

Every classroom will have a free set of printed textbooks for teachers to assign as needed. Experience from fifth graders' use of Netbooks last year, though, shows few damages/losses. The mobile devices will be protected by CompuTrace, which will track the location of any lost devices, and a plan will be in place to replace student devices as soon as possible. Each school will have a supply of spare computers to use if/when a device is lost or damaged.

How will the school district help protect against technology theft?

Missing mobile devices will be remotely deactivated and will lose all functionality so can only be used by the student who signs it out. Computrace, a tracking and recovery system, will be installed on all devices to locate their whereabouts when missing.

What about the 5th grade teachers' laptops that were distributed last year?

If you teach, you are getting a new laptop. The laptops that the 5th grade teachers rec'd. last year will most likely be turned in at a future date so they can be reimaged.

What about the teachers who rec'd. a Macbook last year?

These teachers will be issued a new laptop. There is a possibility that the Macbooks will be collected for reimaging.

Will teachers who teach Pre-K through 2nd grade receive an I-pad?

These teachers will receive a laptop to begin with and possibly a laptop at a later date.

Pearson:

Why did we choose Pearson as the curriculum provider? Were other companies reviewed? Why is Pearson the best provider?

Pearson is a participant in the Textbook Adoption program for the entire state of Alabama. They are leaders in the field of textbooks, as well as digital curriculum. We've been using many of their textbooks for years and have been pleased with their products. The bid process is not required for this product selection.

Safety:

How will we know children will be safe online?

The safety of our students is our top priority. The school district's robust filters exceed the federal guidelines for online child safety, and all mobile devices will run through the filters—whether they're accessed from home, from school, or from anywhere. Our local district filters are more robust than the supercomputer filters.

Schedule/Timeline:

Teachers will be able to begin picking up their device early August. Students will be invited to pick up their devices from the Distribution Warehouse beginning August 7th (schedule TBD). Additional pick-up locations will be set up at some of the schools the week prior to the start of school. Keep in mind, this is a transition year and schedules may change.

Device Distribution:

What is our backup plan for teachers who are out of town during the initial laptop distribution?

We are planning a makeup day sometime next week... John Higginbotham with Leanfrog has spoken to many of the teachers who called to ask this question. We will conduct a schoolcast (robo call) to notify the faculty of the make-up date and will also post this information on the HCS website. Plan "C" is to deliver the teacher laptop to the student distribution site.

Will teachers who teach Pre-K through 2nd grade receive an I-pad?

These teachers will receive a laptop to begin with and possibly a laptop at a later date.

Will librarians and counselors receive a new laptop?

Not at this time. The priority positions for receiving new laptops are those teachers that teach a core subject and use a textbook for instruction.

When will the I-pads be ready for pick-up?

All Apple Products will be delivered to the schools all at once. The goal is to distribute the I-pads the week prior to school starting – or, the week that school starts. John Higginbotham from Lean Frog will work with each Principal to set up the best time and day for delivery.

Will Principals and Assistant Principals be receiving their new laptops during teacher distribution?

We are currently only distributing laptops to the teachers who teach a core class and use a textbook for their class. Principals will receive a device at a later date.

Professional Development/Training:

How will teachers be trained on the new digital curriculum?

Core Curriculum teachers will attend a **3-day Summer Workshop** on the following dates:
August 14th, 15th, & 16th

There will also be Webinars hosted – the schedule for the webinars can be found on the huntsvilledigital.com website.

Will the Lab Techs be trained on the new curriculum so they can assist their team members in the school?

IT and the Pearson Team will conduct training for all Lab Techs on Tuesday, August 7th, Wednesday, August 8th and Thursday, August 9th – Training will take place at the new Lee H.S. and Lab Techs will attend all 3 days. Lab techs will also be used for the Pearson curriculum training August 14, 15, 16.