

Bangor and the Maine Learning Technology Initiative

“It’s hard to imagine life before laptops!” -7th grader

The Laptop Revolution

by Steve Goulette

“The British are coming! The British are coming!” Paul Revere used these words to signal the patriots of Lexington, Massachusetts that the British would arrive there soon. The day, April 19, 1775.

On June 7th, 2002, 241 schools were notified by Maine’s Department of Education (DOE): “The laptops are coming! The laptops are coming!” No one had to ride a horse to notify the schools. Teachers simply opened an e-mail from the DOE.

The deployment of the laptops has begun a revolution in education. Students now have “fingertip” access to educational information. While composing this article on my laptop, I needed to refresh my history. In less than a minute, I opened the World Book Encyclopedia on my laptop, typed in “Paul Revere,” and had all the information I needed. A student couldn’t walk from a classroom to the Media Center in that amount of time; say nothing of finding an article on Paul Revere. That’s revolutionary!

“And, I can find my work! (I do wish I had better typing skills.)”

Student laptops arrived at the end August. Once the configuring was done and our complete network system was up and running, each school began deployment. This started on October 17th. Schools began by meeting with their seventh graders by homeroom. Student were given handling and care information, as well as a complete review of the Bangor Schools computer and Internet rules and regulations.

Our deployment strategy was an insightful vision by Judy Chandler of the Cohen School. Judy believed that from the beginning the laptop deployment had to focus on teaching and learning. Judy’s strategy introduced students to the capacities of the laptops by integrating their use into everyday curriculum in each subject area.

- *English:* students learned the basic components of the laptops. Students also learned the AppleWorks word processor while completing writing assignments.
- *Social Studies:* students learned research techniques available through the World Book Encyclopedia.
- *Reading:* these classes were the avenues used for the teaching of the FirstClass e-mail software. Teachers gave assignments via email; students responded through e-mail.
- *Math:* students employed the spreadsheet component of AppleWorks to enter data from surveys. The information was graphed in various formats for interpretation.
- *Science:* students were assigned topics to research using Internet Explorer.

With the completion of this group of skill building lessons, our teachers have become better at teaching with the laptops. Teachers are developing and redesigning some of their lessons to utilize the capacities of the laptops. Most importantly, teachers are becoming adept at deciding when and how using the laptops is most effective and efficient for their teaching.

We are indeed in the technology age of education. The integration of computers into curriculum has become commonplace. We have come full circle from using education to teach computers to our students, to using computers as a tool in education. Our children today live in a technological world. It is up to us, as educators, indeed as a community, to continue to provide them with the tools and training they need to succeed in it.

“With my disability it has always been hard to “keep up”... Now I can stay with the class!”

Laptops and English Instruction

by Paul Butler

Three seventh grade girls hovering over a desk, discussing the wording of a sentence and how it fits into a paragraph. Satisfied that they have achieved their task, two of the girls return to their own desks and to their own wording dilemmas.

A boy, admitting that he had never really tried his best on his writing until this year, smiles when he tells the computer to print.

Several students asking whether to stay after school to work on a composition that is due at the end of the week, and that afternoon, ten students appearing in the classroom to work.

These scenarios form a teacher’s vision of a successful writing classroom. With the introduction of laptops in Maine’s seventh grade classrooms, the vision is becoming more and more a reality. All of these anecdotes are actual outcomes during the first month of the Maine Learning Technology Initiative’s (MLTI) laptop program at the James F. Doughty School.

The Apple iBook computers, assigned to each seventh grade student for their

“I can make graphs and charts for class projects... And get all my work done in school now.”



instructional use throughout each day, have had a promising impact on meeting the goals of the English instruction. The English curriculum requires student writing of all types - descriptive, analytical, creative, narrative, technical - with an emphasis on the process of writing: brainstorming, outlining, prewriting, drafting, editing, and revising, and publishing.

The laptops have improved the instruction of writing for two reasons:

1. students are more motivated in their writing, taking ownership in the “professional” results they can achieve as they learn to use the laptops more effectively. Students appear to take more care in creating a piece of writing that is correctly formatted and visually appealing;
2. the most important reason for the improvement in writing instruction is that the machines simply make the process much more efficient.

While much of the students’ prewriting and outlining is done with pencil and paper, drafting, editing, and publishing have received a tremendous boost from the laptops.

“Shoulder time” - instruction by a teacher looking over a student’s shoulder to discuss his or her writing - is a big reason for this boost. “Shoulder time” is tailored for the individual needs of the student, and thus may range from spelling, punctuation, and grammar to sentence combining or strengthening a student’s argument in a writing piece. Overall, the task of writing becomes more streamlined. First drafts become polished final drafts more quickly.

The benefits of the laptops do not end with the writing process. Each day teachers and students are discovering ways to make English more rewarding and more efficient. The seventh grade laptops promises to be a valuable tool for reaching the goals of the curriculum.

“I don’t lose my notes or have a messy notebook anymore.”