

Tuscaloosa Academy Laptop Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need this program?

The computer is the latest, most powerful tool available to students in the classroom. Computers allow students to devote more time to collaborative study, in-depth thinking and creative problem solving. A one-to-one program can turn a traditional classroom into a student-centered learning lab. The students are getting both the basics and truly phenomenal things, not possible without a wireless classroom. Our children can now go to the library, confer with an expert on a specific topic, publish a poem, take a virtual field trip, or collaborate with a classmate during class time. One-to-one programs allow access to the real world and can bring learning to life!

What computer skills will be taught in preparation for this program?

There will be a required training course when the students receive their computers. In this course, the students will learn how to use their Tablet computer (calibrating the pen, computer settings, etc.), accessing the school network, file management, and an introduction to One Note. Students are learning Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel, as well as Internet skills and safety issues within their core curriculum classes. A parent will be required to attend a portion of this class along with their child.

Will total conformity in computer equipment be required?

Yes, in 7th and 8th grades we require all students to have the same laptops. The reason for this is to minimize the variables when repairing the machines or re-installing the software on them. It also makes it easier to troubleshoot problems if we only have one company to deal with. We will provide the majority of all repair work on campus. We will also require a 4 year warranty to cover most repair issues. We **will not** perform any technical support for any outside laptops.

What software will be used?

Microsoft Office software including Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, will be preinstalled on all computers. One Note, a note taking and organizational software will also be installed on all machines. We also plan to include management software for our teachers to use to interact with the student machines. We are currently looking into a software product called DyKnow. <http://www.dyknow.com>. Other pre-installed software will include the Windows OS, Antivirus, and AntiSpyware software.

What are the pricing details?

Prices fluctuate on almost a daily basis. Some of the price will depend on the number of units that are ordered. A current pricing sheet is attached.

What about insurance?

Gateway will provide repair insurance for mechanical problems. This normally does not cover replacement costs due to unintentional, accidental damage not covered under the standard product warranty, warranty upgrades or other extended service offerings. **Theft or loss is not covered. You may wish to add this under your homeowner's insurance policy.**

What kind of technical support will the school offer?

Minor repairs for school compliant computers will be handled on campus. It is possible that both students and tech staff will be repairing laptops. During repairs, students will be issued a loaner laptop. Major repairs may require that the Tablet be returned to the manufacturer for a warranty covered repair.

What's the life expectancy of the hardware and software?

The Tablets will have all of the newest software installed on them as well as the latest in hardware. We expect both the software and hardware to last at least four years before needing to be upgraded. You will be notified in a timely manner before you are asked to buy a new laptop. Tuscaloosa Academy will have another computer available at that time.

How does the school plan to use the Internet? Do students currently have access to the Internet? What about the library?

The computers have wireless networking integrated in them. Access points located throughout the campus that connect to our current network will transfer data. The students have access to the Internet throughout our campus. It is possible for students to access database material, Accelerated Reader quizzes, the Alabama Virtual Library and other reference materials via the TA wireless network. Current Internet usage policies will continue to be used. Internet content filtering will be in effect, but with the understanding that it is impossible to filter everything at all times.

What provisions will there be for printing?

Networked printers are located in computer labs and various classrooms throughout the school. Students will be able to print documents when needed.

How are students expected to charge their laptop batteries?

All students are required to have their laptop battery fully charged when they come to school each morning as part of their nightly homework assignment. Newer batteries should last through the school day, depending on usage. Students will have the opportunity to plug their laptops into power strips located in some classrooms if their batteries run low. Students will also be allowed to charge their laptops during lunch and other non-class times at teacher discretion.

What percentage of the school day will the students be using their laptops?

Initially, we will be asking our teachers to incorporate computer usage into 20-25% of the school day. This will vary depending upon the teacher, subject, and lesson plans. Core classes such as Science, English, Social Studies, and Foreign Languages will probably get the most productivity. One reason for the choice of a Tablet PC instead of a traditional laptop is the versatility that it will offer our students in courses such as Mathematics and some of our elective classes.

How do we cope with a 'misplaced' computer?

Students are required to have their laptops locked in their lockers or other designated locked areas when they are not using them. They are not allowed to set them down in the halls, on benches, etc. Any laptop found without its owner will yield consequences for that student. Teachers will know the policy and will help by reminding students of the policy, but each student will have to take personal responsibility for this valuable piece of equipment.

Will my child have to take the computer to school each day?

"My child already has to take a lot of bags to school anyway for sports, music and other activities." Yes, all students will be expected to bring their laptops to school each day. Students will have lockers for their books and laptops. Our goal is to move toward more electronic resources so that the students are using and carrying fewer textbooks.

How could this program help students who have a learning difference?

A laptop program can significantly address all learning style differences in the classroom. It will help with organization skills. A computer is a tool to assist with learning. It can be used to provide audio, visual, and tactile reinforcement. This will help students in each of the three learning modalities. Focus and concentration will be enhanced. Enrichment opportunities will be at each student's fingertips.

What about handwriting? Won't my child's handwriting suffer from using a keyboard all day long?

Handwriting has not been totally abandoned. Students still have occasions when handwritten work must be produced. Obviously the volume of handwriting has decreased, but it has not been obliterated. The need for neat, clear handwriting remains. However, with the Tablet, emphasis is now being placed on what is written and how well it is written in terms of syntax, style and clarity. Emphasis is placed on editing for correctness and revising for improvement. Students will have a 'working copy' of a document with them for anytime, anywhere revising and editing opportunities

Won't the students be able to cheat by using spelling checker? What effect will that have on their spelling skills?

Teachers in one-to-one programs have suggested that spelling skills may actually improve. Students who consistently misspell words based on common spelling rules eventually stop misspelling the same words over and over because the correction is quick and consistent. "Spell check" is not to be thought of as a "cheating" opportunity. Spell-check gets the student to the right page of the dictionary when it provides quick access to a list of possible spellings. Students still have to recognize the correct word from the list and choose that word. The same may apply to grammar check. The prompts that appear on the screen when a grammatical error occurs are just that - prompts. The student who knows nothing about subject-verb agreement, for example, will not know whether the suggested correction is appropriate or not. It will be part of the teacher's instructions to use those prompts as suggestions, and then the teacher may use those prompts as a teaching opportunity for that skill.

I can't afford the laptop. Is there any support for parents in my situation?

Tuscaloosa Academy does take into consideration families who have the additional cost of the laptop when making a decision to enroll at TA. Parents are responsible for the purchase of the computer and should not count on TA to cover this cost. It may be possible for TA to have a small number of laptops that are loaned on a year to year basis to students of financial need. This will have to be determined by the TA Board of Trustees.

Will my child automatically be able to get online at home with the Tablet, the same way they do at school?

Not exactly – the laptop is equipped with a wireless antenna that gives it the ability to communicate with our access points. However, at home, the laptop will be out of range and thus won't be able to communicate with our access points. You will need to make arrangements with your own ISP (internet service provider) in order to get online at home.

Is getting online at home a necessity?

Yes. Students need the ability to do Internet research, check email, etc. As the computers gain more use in the classroom, your child will be required to submit assignments electronically. This will be in addition to the systems that we already have in place for you and your child to check assignments and grades online.