

# Middle school implements one-to-one laptop initiative

[By Megan VerHelst, Editor](#) North Iowa Media Group | Posted: Thursday, February 10, 2011 1:36 am



**NEWS-TRIBUNE PHOTO BY MEGAN VERHELST**

Alyssa Klaas, a seventh-grade student at West Hancock Middle School, and classmate Martin Gomez work on their laptops during class last week. Each student received their own computer as part of a new district initiative.

Students at West Hancock Middle School have entered a new era of learning - and many are loving every minute of it.

Two weeks have passed since students at the middle school received their own laptop computers to use for their classes. Although the first phase of the district's one-to-one laptop initiative has required many adjustments for both staff and students, most are excited to see what the future holds for this unique way of learning.

"We can do a lot of things now we've never done before," said Jordan Weiland, a sixth grade student at the middle school. "I really hope the computers stick around."

The West Hancock Board of Education decided in November to implement the laptop initiative at the middle school. The high school will follow suit next fall.

Middle School Principal Wayne Kronemann called it a "quick transition."

"We basically had to decide whether to hop right in or wait till next year," he said. "The staff here was on board, the kids were excited - it wasn't a hard sell."

The district purchased 180 Lenovo X100E computers to distribute to middle school students. A group of staff members also researched other Iowa districts with similar initiatives in place, visiting district such as South Hamilton and Manson. During the visits, West Hancock officials visited with staff and students, as well as reviewed policies and guidelines the districts already had in place.

West Hancock was then able to develop its own set of rules and regulations to govern the initiative. The district also created Sharepoint, a website that allows middle school students and staff to access shared content and other class resources.

The site can be accessed through West Hancock's homepage.

Informational meetings were held for parents and families, at which the district required both students and parents to sign an agreement pertaining to laptop use.

Students were then ready to receive their laptops.

Each student was issued a laptop through the middle school library. Kronemann said all laptops are given a number and issued through the library's content management system. The computers also were engraved with the district logo to make them easier to identify.

"Students will check them out at the beginning of the year, back in at Christmas break and back out when they come back," Kronemann said. "That computer will stay with the student the entire time they're in middle school."

Teachers were encouraged to think of ways to utilize the laptops in the classroom.

"They were asked to think of new assignments, new projects," Kronemann said.

Kronemann said students also were asked to challenge their teachers to create ways to use the laptops.

Projectors were installed in every classroom in preparation for the initiative's launch. Doing so makes it easier for teachers to interact with students using the computers.

But implementing the new initiative was not without a few challenges.

Some teachers were nervous about changes the initiative would bring.

"I was afraid it would be a management nightmare," said Deb Hill, fifth and sixth grade science teacher.

Jennifer Hammer, fifth and sixth grade language arts teacher, also felt apprehensive.

"We were expected to have 40 to 60 percent of our curriculum adjusted to use the computers one way or another," Hammer said. "It was a little overwhelming."

One of the biggest issues students have encountered, Kronemann said, is Internet connectivity at home. He's also seen more minor issues.

"We've had a couple students whose dogs chewed through their power cords," Kronemann said.

"Students will be charged for that at the end of the year, but we're doing the best we can to overcome those things now."

Students, on the other hand, were simply excited. Weiland, as well as classmates Dylan Eckels and Ben Eisenman, were among those.

"We do a lot of things on the West Hancock home site," Eisenman said. "We've used them for a lot of stuff for language arts, like spelling tests."

Eisenman also likes not having to use computer labs anymore.

"We can take these with us and don't have to go through all the hassles of that," he said.

And now that students have their laptops, teachers agree the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

Hammer has had her students utilize a proofreading website as part of her writing curriculum.

"There's so much out there that's already been created for their use," Hammer said. "Everything is right there."

Hill said it's easier to keep the students busy during class time. She said she likes to use the Sharepoint discussion boards where she can post a topic and students can respond.

"The students find them so engaging and it's easier to keep them on task when we use them," Hill said.

From what he's seen, Kronemann agrees.

"Students can do research or work ahead when they finish an assignment," Kronemann said. "They can challenge themselves to find ways to fill their time."

Students are limited to what they can search online, Kronemann said, as each laptop is equipped with the same security features and filters as the district's other computers.

Kronemann said he hopes the use of laptops will help reduce the paper flow between students and teachers, as well as help both think of better and more efficient ways to learn.

The initiative also has helped reduce the need for computer labs in the middle school, which in turn has reduced the number of students in the hallways, creating a quieter environment.

In the coming months, Kronemann said he hopes teachers will continue to adjust their curriculums to include the laptops, as well as find additional ways to engage students in learning.

He also hopes the initiative will help prepare students for life in the 21st Century.

"They have to know how to use computers and computer applications, and this will make them more technology-proficient," Kronemann said. "If you find something digital and put it in their hands, they'll find ways to use - and they're getting better and better at it all the time."

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