



LAUSD's Technology Project Myth Busters

October 22, 2013

The Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) tablet program—the Common Core Technology Project (CCTP)—is designed to ensure that every LAUSD student has the knowledge and tools needed to succeed in the 21st century global workforce. The program is a key component of the District's transition to Common Core State Standards, which will take place in 2014-15. In a city where 80 percent of students come from low-income families, this project will help close the digital divide and provide every single student with equal opportunities for success.

In August 2013, the District began implementation of Phase 1 of the Common Core Technology Project (CCTP). As part of Phase 1, the District is providing tablet computers to 31,000 students and 1,500 teachers at 47 schools. The CCTP represents a massive transformation of how our classrooms work, and as with any truly revolutionary program, there are challenges. As challenges have arisen, the District was fully prepared to inform the relevant parties immediately and address those challenges quickly and effectively ensuring that we continue to provide our students the opportunity to explore new ways of learning in a safe and nurturing environment.

We are already 13 years into the 21st century. Access to technology is not a luxury; it's a basic necessity for every student and a key part of adopting the Common Core State Standards. Because many students do not have access to technology at home, schools have a responsibility to help them get access to the knowledge and tools they need to be on the same footing as those students who do. District leaders must keep the program moving forward in order to ensure that every child in LAUSD has the chance to succeed.

As District leaders continue to make decisions about this vital program, it is critical that myths about the program be separated from the facts.

Myth: The technology program was rushed by district leaders and is the result of a failure to plan.

FACT: Once the Board of Education approved funding for Phase 1, employees worked day and night for over six months to launch the project in August 2013. To be clear, Phase 1 is a pilot phase. By definition, a pilot program is conducted to allow an organization to collect meaningful data and learn how to improve practices before the project is rolled out on a large scale.

The fact that the program has been met with challenges is not a surprise. In fact, having the opportunity to encounter and learn from challenges is the precise reason why the program was launched in phases. The challenges thus far have not been significant, and have not caused the program to stop. With each phase, the process will run more smoothly, and the District ultimately will ensure that every student has the opportunity to prepare for success.

Consider how private companies roll out a new operating system or employ a new technology platform; they test the new technology thoroughly before unveiling it in



“prime time.” It is the same with the Common Core Technology Program, except that we do not have the luxury of conducting our pilot behind closed doors. We have been met with challenges as expected and have addressed them in full public view. As we move forward, students across the district will benefit from the lessons learned during the pilot phase and beyond.

Myth: There has been widespread “hacking” of tablets, security breaches and wireless failures.

FACT: No student has hacked into a device, compromised security, nor has any wireless system failed to function. In truth, some enterprising high school students were able to switch the settings on their tablet in order to access non-educational content outside the District’s firewall. Of the 20,000 tablets that have been provisioned to date, less than two percent were impacted. Even so, the District was able to learn immediately when students made changes, and intervened appropriately to take control of the situation. Our conversations have continued with students about why they did what they did and what they need in their learning environments. We are making sure we’re not being overzealous in our restrictions while still working to ensure their safety.

Future software releases for the tablets are expected to include better safeguards against student tampering and provide the school district with new ways to ensure only District-issued applications are used.

Myth: There is no district-wide policy stating who is responsible if a tablet is lost or stolen.

FACT: The technology project is an opportunity for the District to engage students in lessons about responsibility. The District has always held every student accountable for treating District-issued property with respect, including everything from textbooks to art supplies to calculators. Tablets are no different. Even so, as part of our Cyber Security Awareness Campaign, we expect each student to sign a statement acknowledging his or her obligation to use the technology responsibly and to keep the technology protected and safe.

Under California law, parents are responsible for District property held in the possession of their children, which includes technology devices. District leaders have made it clear they will only hold students and parents responsible when loss or damage is the result of willful negligence. Furthermore, the District has built safeguards into the program to prevent loss or damage, including equipping tablets with covers and tracking systems to help recover lost or stolen tablets.

On the issue of safety, the District has stressed that it does not want student safety to be jeopardized as tablets are introduced to the schools. The Los Angeles School Police Department is collaborating with twelve other law enforcement agencies across Southern California to ensure our students stay safe and that any potential criminals are taking a very high risk for very little reward should they intend any harm to our students. Public outreach is a major part of this initiative.



Myth: The tablet program is a waste of money.

FACT: The Common Core State Standards call for every student in every grade to use technology proficiently just as they are expected to master high standards in English language arts and math. The only way to make this happen is to put the technology into the hands of every student.

Of course, the technology comes at a cost. Providing the right learning materials has always come at a cost. Fortunately, we are able to use the technology portion of \$7 billion in capital bonds to invest in this necessary transformation.

As learning materials become increasingly digital, the District will reinvest the money it used to spend on textbooks in more advanced learning technologies, which—unlike traditional textbooks—can be updated in real time with new discoveries or new methods of learning as well as offer students the interactive experience they need to be prepared for 21st century life.

Myth: The software on the tablets is useless and unstable.

FACT: In addition to holding students to high standards in English language arts and math, the Common Core State Standards adopted by all school districts in California mandate that students in all grades be familiar with and proficiently use technology, the Internet, and digital tools.

The software that is loaded onto LAUSD tablets is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The software includes lessons and activities that teachers can integrate into the classroom setting. Also, the e-curriculum is designed so that roughly 90% can be accessed off-line, so a student does not need to be connected to the Internet at all times in order to learn.

Myth: The district forgot to buy keyboards.

FACT: The District has always had a plan to purchase keyboards as part of the CCTP. The importance of physical keyboards pertains to standardized tests that students will ultimately take online. It is important to know that the District will not administer these tests until the 2014-2015 school year. As such, the District is taking the time necessary to be strategic about keyboard purchases to ensure they meet technological requirements and are purchased in the most cost effective manner possible.

Myth: The district needs to slow down or scrap the tablet program.

FACT: As this is more of an opinion than a myth, there are many who hold the opinion that the District is not working fast enough to provide the 21st century learning experience our students need. In 2013, access to technology is not a luxury; it is a vital necessity. The



technology program is enabling LAUSD to live up to its obligation to give every student the tools they need to succeed in life.

The District is transitioning to the Common Core State Standards, which includes the call for all students to be able to use technology and Internet resources proficiently. If the program were to be delayed, there are many, many students in LAUSD who would continue to remain on the wrong side of the digital divide thirteen years into the 21st century. The Common Core Technology Project is an essential piece of the District's adoption of these new standards and achieving its overarching vision for all youth to graduate collage-prepared and career-ready.

To learn more about the Common Core Technology Project go to:
ctp.lausd.net