

cover STORY (cover design by jonathan castro)

21st century technology helps students 'PowerUp'

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It's 6 a.m. on a school day, and junior Diego Valles opens his EPISD issued laptop to the camera app and presses record. He uses it to sign so he can watch the videos repeatedly as a way to study for tests and learn the material in his American Sign Language class.

Valles is one of the more than 18,000 high school students in the district to receive a Hewlett-Packard Stream laptop at a cost of \$238. Campus students received them Sept. 2 as part of the district's new "PowerUp" initiative established by superintendent Juan Carbrera and the district's Blended Learning and Technology department.

"When I first heard about getting a school-provided laptop, I didn't expect to be able to use it the way I am now," Valles said. "Most of my teachers don't like the idea of the laptops, but I'm starting to realize the benefits of modern technology in education."

The laptops are equipped with Microsoft Office 2013 and Office 365. Teachers also received laptops to assist with instruction. Their laptops averaged \$494.

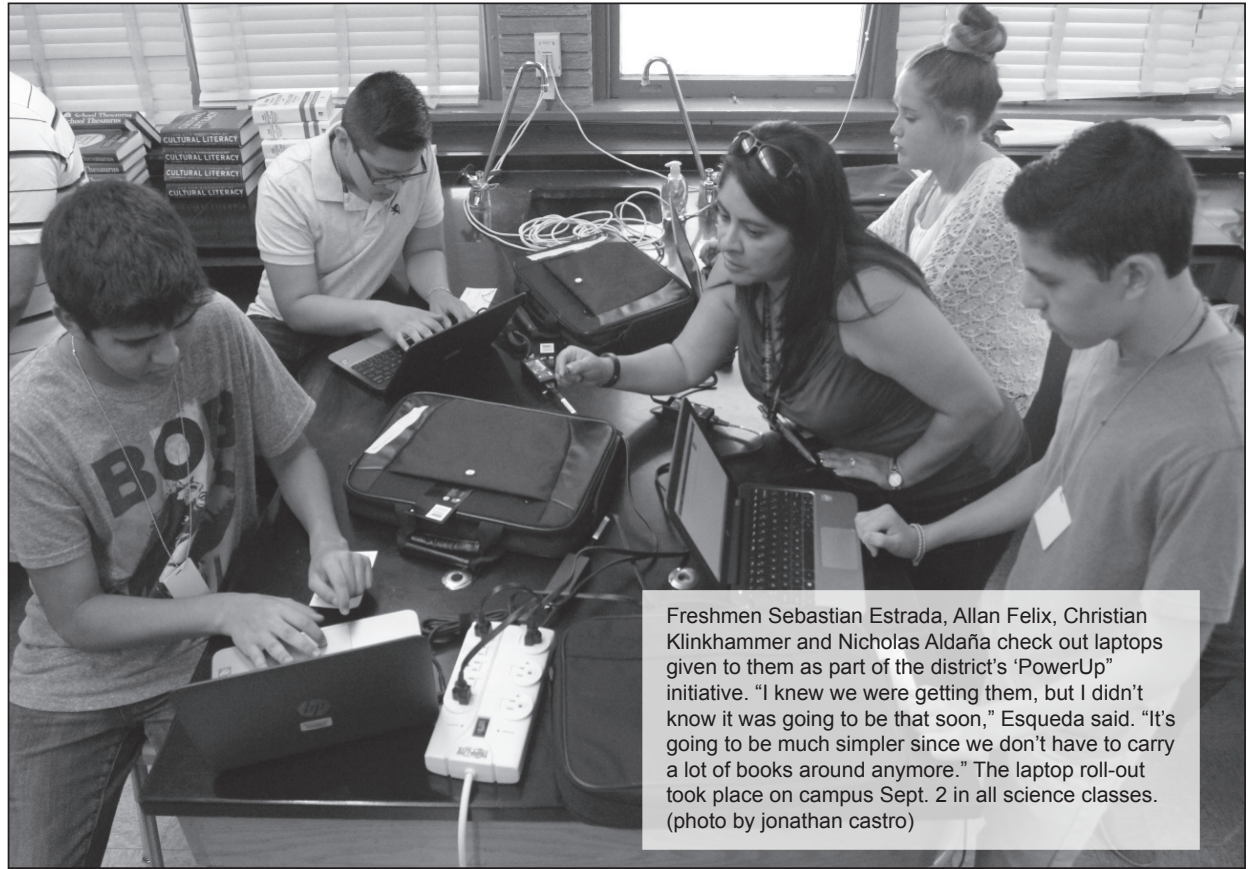
Although some teachers will continue to stick to physical textbooks, government teacher John Seymour embraces the initiative. He and colleague James Kehrl were responsible for writing government flexbook curriculum. A flexbook takes the place of a physical textbook. Currently, flexbooks exist for core subjects only.

"I've worked at integrating as much technology into my classes as I can," Seymour said. "Now that we have this, I feel empowered to do even more with technology. But it is not without its hazards. The overwhelming number of new programs and cultural changes in such a short period of time have taken a toll on everyone. We are working in uncharted waters with many potential pitfalls."

There have already been issues since the rollout. Stephen Stiles, EPISD chief officer of Learning, said Skype for Business was installed to allow students to communicate with classmates for group work. Three weeks into the program, students began video calling friends during class. Teachers complained and Cabrera decided to uninstall video calling.

"Skype is in great danger," Stiles said. "There were many complaints that students weren't paying attention and were too distracted by video calls with their friends. Although this is going to hurt how much students can do, this is necessary for the teachers."

Students and parents were required to sign a "responsible use agreement" contract. One concern



Freshmen Sebastian Estrada, Allan Felix, Christian Klinkhammer and Nicholas Aldaña check out laptops given to them as part of the district's 'PowerUp' initiative. "I knew we were getting them, but I didn't know it was going to be that soon," Esqueda said. "It's going to be much simpler since we don't have to carry a lot of books around anymore." The laptop roll-out took place on campus Sept. 2 in all science classes. (photo by jonathan castro)

brought up by teachers and parents is how the campus will deal with students who find a way to go onto inappropriate websites. Principal Randall Woods said the campus will revoke laptop privileges, use suspension, or place students in the alternative program for violations.

"We know students will get around the blockades," Woods said. "It's an ongoing issue, and at some point the district won't be able to extract or block anymore programs. Students will just have to be responsible."

The student contract also includes a list of charges students face if something were to happen to their laptop. Stiles says it is up to the campus to deal with the different situations, for example when a student can't afford to fix or replace it if they need to.

"The district doesn't determine the disciplinary action," he said. "The students signed an agreement and it's ultimately their responsibility to pay if something were to happen."

When the PowerUp initiative was in its final planning steps, Cabrera suggested getting insurance for each laptop, in case of manufacturer defects.

"Each student was to be charged \$28 for private insurance, which would replace or fix the laptop for

free," Stiles said. "The insurance was never given because in our situation, it would not be legal to charge the students in any way. A warranty is present on the laptops though. It covers factory defects that deal with the internals."

Clara Duncan-Adams, who has taught math for 20 years, said she's reluctant about the \$5 million program. She said the money could have been better spent on scholarships.

"It's a disservice for students," Duncan-Adams said. "The district forces students to work with technology when it isn't needed. You cannot dress up education, and bringing bells and whistles as a new toy will not help students understand the material."

Tim Holt, EPISD executive director of Learning, said the laptops will be a "major success."

"The district's goal is not only about the laptops," he said. "It is about the engagement inside and outside the classroom. EPISD has never done a districtwide program before, and it will change the way students learn. Kids use their devices to complete work at home, and it's only fair we let them use those devices in the classroom."

WHAT
you'll pay
for lost or
damaged
equipment
(set by EPISD)

D A M A G E S

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Screen | \$132.50 |
| Keyboard | \$70.30 |
| Keys | \$5 each |
| Charger | \$25 |
| Hinge | \$15.98 |
| Port | \$25 |
| Defacing | \$238 |
| Unfit for Reuse | \$238 |
| Operating System | \$50 |
| Internal Components | \$50 |

| | |
|------------|--|
| Case | \$25 |
| Barcode | \$1 |
| Lost | \$238 |
| Missing | \$238 |
| Stolen | \$238 |
| Unreturned | \$238 |
| Virus | Service time for removal at \$25 an hour |

