

21st century learning at students' fingertips

by jaeden fiocca

Wiping his eyes and proceeding to open his EPISD issued laptop, junior Diego Valles goes to the camera app and presses record. He uses it to study for tests and learn the material in his American Sign Language class.

Valles was one of the 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 Cabrera and the district's Blended Learning and Technology department.

"I didn't expect to be able to use it the way I am now," Valles said. "A couple months later, I am now noticing how much more efficient I am with homework and studying. Most of my teachers didn't like the idea of using laptops, but I think they realized 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, averaging out to \$494.

Although some teachers continued to stick to physical textbooks, Michael Kirkpatrick golf coach and health teacher, says the program has made a "substantial" difference in the ways he teaches and coaches.

"For seven months, I've used them nearly every day," Kirkpatrick said. "They are truly helping the students. For the team, I have them type up anything they find useful when an



POWERED UP

Sophomores Ariel Chen and Jack McCrimmon look up terms to complete their note cards to study for the STAAR test in their World History class. "I think using the laptops is a really easy way to study," Chen said. "We had about five different sections of cards. This way of studying is very convenient for me because it's fast and doesn't take up that much space in my backpack." (photo by genesis barraza)

experienced golfer shares tips or they see an improvement they can make."

When students received their laptops, social studies teacher Daniel Skertchly said he would not embrace the initiative. For the 10 years he has been teaching, he has used textbooks and says he is more than satisfied with his classes' advanced placement test scores.

"I have implemented the program," Skertchly said. "I just don't find it instructional. I have overviewed the flexbooks [online textbooks], and I feel that they will not benefit the students. I am dissatisfied with the quality of the flexbooks."

Before the devices were distributed, students and parents were required to sign a "responsible use agreement" contract. It was issued, in part,

to prevent students from visiting inappropriate websites.

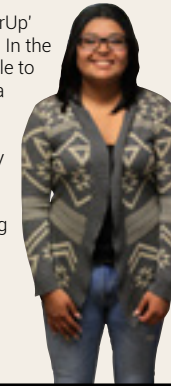
"The district needed to put in restrictions," sophomore Adam Gomez said. "Stopping students from getting distracted is essential. Because of these blockades, I've stayed on track and have noticed a significant difference in my work ethic and time management."

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

"The district's goal was not only to give students laptops," he said. "It is about the engagement inside and outside the classroom. EPISD has never done a districtwide program before, and it has changed the way students learn. By issuing these to students, EPISD has revolutionized education."

"I feel that the 'PowerUp' program is working. In the past, I was never able to have full access to a computer, making it a struggle for me to write a simple essay or do a PowerPoint. It was an excellent move because doing homework is much more convenient."

-delilah grado- 11



"There is never going to be a point where technology such as the 'PowerUp' initiative will ever take the place of a teacher. A student will always need a teacher's guidance. Without us, students would just be gaining superficial knowledge."

-hector barraza-social studies-11 years on campus



victoria brown

BORN AGAIN

A hard cover book turns into a sculpture created by senior Aylette Ortiz. "The idea of a boat and the ocean immediately caught my eye," she said. "I love how we are able to create something with a book and give it life again." The campus library donated the books to Art II students.



genesis barraza

A REAL SHOT IN THE ARM

Before flu season kicks in, math teacher Joseph Nowak takes advantage of his conference period by getting a shot in the speech room. "The nurse kept telling me to relax," Nowak said. "I've never overcome the fear of a needle. I get a shot every year. Once you get the flu, you'll never miss a flu shot ever again." Nowak has taught on campus for 28 years.



jasmine tabler

CLOSE CALL

An injury to linebacker Luciano Madrigal demands the attention of head trainer Paul Abrell and senior trainer Alyssa Armendariz during a varsity game against Irvin. "Since Luciano took a hard tackle, he injured his back," Armendariz said. "After the tackle he ran to us. I needed to help ease his pain. Mr. Abrell and I stretched Luciano's lower back in order to pull the sore muscle." Training is not a class, but students receive a P.E. credit. Those who stay in the program can earn CPR and first aid certifications.

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