

1-to-1 at Home

A Parent's Guide to School-Issued Laptops and Tablets

Jason Brand

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Introduction

The days of a child sitting with an open textbook, receiving information from the teacher at the front of a classroom are numbered. Over the next 10 years, we will see an inevitable change in education as schools embrace the digital classroom.

Schools at the forefront of this change are adopting 1-to-1 programs. These programs provide each student with a laptop or tablet that is used at school and at home. The goal is to educate a generation of students born into a digital culture and emerging into a world that requires a new set of skills.

This is a big transition, and schools are still in the process of understanding how “digital assistants”, such as laptops and tablets, fit into the learning environment. Schools, however, are not acting in a vacuum. For this transition to be truly successful, each child’s whole world needs to be considered. This requires everyone responsible for young people to be involved. Families – along with the home environment – are too often missing from this equation.

Getting families on board with 1-to-1 learning programs requires preparation, including educators knowing how to conduct appropriate conversations and giving parents some support if something goes awry. Parents who are resistant to their children having laptops or tablets need to understand why schools are adopting these programs and find ways to remain true to their values while embracing the change. This practical, hands-on guidebook is written to support the 1-to-1 program at home.

How is the 1-to-1 device (a laptop or tablet) different from all the other gadgets, gizmos and game players that your family might already own?

- It comes from school.
- It impacts the amount of screen time – the time kids are engaged with digital technologies.
- It adds new responsibilities to home life.
- It blurs the distinction between tool and toy: it’s harder to know if kids are studying, playing or socialising.
- It changes how parents establish rules and set limits.

- It asks parents to respect school rules around the acceptable use of technology.
- It asks parents to respect school values about the role technology should play in a child's life.
- Most critically, it may require parents to take a new approach to their parenting as well as to the technology.

For parents, managing the gadgets, gizmos and game players that their kids already own is often challenge enough. Many parents find that the 1-to-1 device provided at school further disrupts an area where there are already conflicts between parents and children. The good news is that these challenges can also become strengths, because the 1-to-1 device is not just about games and entertainment – it is also about school and education. This requires families to get to the heart of the matter. With proper support and good information, parents can understand new technologies, accepting the central role they increasingly play in our and our children's lives while making room for rules and limits that are in line with the family's unique values.

This guidebook is written from the perspective of a family therapist who has the skills and training to help families get to the heart of complicated matters. Two key ingredients in doing this successfully are parents having the language and the techniques to keep conversations on track with the useful perspectives of other adults who have addressed similar challenges.

This book contains many examples of language that parents can use to clearly communicate guidelines and rules in ways that kids are likely to listen to and respond to favourably. The language that this guidebook provides has been tested in consultations and with groups of parents who were struggling to set fair guidelines for their children's use of laptops or tablets at home. The *Get Set* section (Chapter 2) includes quotes from parents and educators about common areas where families struggle with the 1-to-1 device's role. The quotes were gathered in dozens of parent and teacher education workshops and through online surveys.

This guidebook takes the familiar approaches of learning a new skill or sport: *Get ready... Get set... Go...*, and, in Chapter 4, *Stop* (and reset if something goes wrong). It starts by preparing parents to have a 1-to-1 learning device in their home that their children are required by their teachers to use for homework, research and class projects. The material herein gets them set and on the go by understanding the areas where problems often arise and learning the most effective attitudes and methods for dealing with these complex issues. Parents will also learn how to stop reacting and how to start reconsidering or revising their actions when something goes wrong.

1-to-1 at Home is also designed to be a practical companion. It provides places to keep track of the details (serial number, insurance information, technical support contact information, etc.) that parents will want to have organised and at their fingertips.

When parents are prepared, they can partner with schools to embrace the 1-to-1 program, understanding that they can help their children explore the beneficial, exciting possibilities of learning in a digital environment.

A Note to Parents

You need additional, specific support to manage the effect that your child's 1-to-1 device has on family life. This guidebook provides that support by addressing the home side of 1-to-1 programs. It helps you to be aware of shifts in 21st century learning and to take realistic approaches to integrating a school-issued laptop or tablet into your family thoughtfully and responsibly.

A Note to Educators

Technology directors, teachers, school counsellors and administrators – you are often faced with figuring out how to better support parents. This guidebook can be used by educators of new or established 1-to-1 school communities in your efforts to build bridges with the parents of the children you serve.

Chapter 1



Get Ready!

Before the 1-to-1 Device Comes Home

Many parents take a wait-and-see approach to 1-to-1 devices. They trust that the school has thought through any issues that might come up, or they figure that the laptop or tablet will be similar to any other Internet-connected gadget, gizmo or game player that their child already has.

Over and over again, parents have told me that they were caught off guard by the effect of their child's 1-to-1 device. This is a big transition and schools are still in the process of understanding how "digital assistants" fit into the learning environment. Equally important is the need to think through the home side of these powerful tools/toys. The 1-to-1 device is different from other computers and technological devices in the home; it's meant to serve several different functions. Thus, *before* students bring their 1-to-1 device home, parents must understand exactly how and why the device is being used. Just as laptops or tablets change the way kids learn at school, these devices will also change the culture of your family. In other words, the presence of these interactive devices in your home will call for you as parents and your children to find some new ways of communicating and agreeing on responsibilities.

This section is designed to get your family prepared for a 1-to-1 program. Even if your family is already part of a 1-to-1 program and the 1-to-1 device is already brought home from school and stays over every weekend, it's not too late to go back and get everyone on the same page.

The objectives for this chapter are to accomplish the following:

- Understand the vision of 1-to-1 learning.
- Get clear on the school's responsibilities and the family's responsibilities.
- Sign the 1-to-1 parent, child and family agreements.

After you and your child have achieved these objectives, you will understand how to set appropriate boundaries for using the device at home that fit with your family's values and priorities, including your and your child's responsibilities!

Understand the Vision of 1-to-1 Learning

Why would a school give a student a laptop or tablet that is a tool for learning as well as a toy for playing games and socialising? Why would many schools want to blur the line between schools' responsibilities and families' responsibilities?

Answering these questions is an important part of making the 1-to-1 program work for all members of your family.

In the following box, Scott McLeod, a leading thinker in technology in education, explains why schools are adopting 1-to-1 programs and his vision of 21st century learning.

Box 1.1 A Message from Scott McLeod

It's Not a Paper-and-Pencil World Anymore

Let's start with the recognition that digital technologies are transforming EVERYTHING.

This fact is unsettling to many parents and educators.

Why?

Simply stated, digital technologies are disruptive. They allow everyone to do work that is more powerful and complex with greater creative capability. For instance, the same technologies that allow us to have a voice, to find each other, and to work together have disrupted our sense of geographic boundaries and time barriers. As a result, we are seeing (to our dismay) that offshoring and outsourcing allow everyone, everywhere to compete with each other and with us. In addition to replacing jobs here with people overseas, jobs also are being destroyed by software. If the Industrial Revolution was about replacing humans' physical labour with machines, the Information Revolution often is about replacing humans' cognitive labour with computers. In short, these new tools are radically transforming every single information-oriented segment of our economy. As information institutions, schools will not be immune.

Schools that adopt 1-to-1 programs are taking a proactive stance to this disruption by providing students with the skills and attitudes necessary to take advantage of the opportunities that digital technologies provide.

Digital technologies allow for dramatic effects on learning. For example, students and educators now have access to all of the information in their textbooks – and an incredible wealth of primary documents – for free. They have access to robust, low-cost or no-cost multimedia and interactive learning resources – texts, images, audio, video, games, simulations – that can supplement, extend or even replace what is being taught in their classrooms. Via collaborative Internet-based tools, they can learn from and with students and teachers in other states or countries. They also can quickly and easily connect with authors, artists, business professionals, entrepreneurs, physicians, craftsmen, professors and other experts.

Continued

Box 1.1 A Message from Scott McLeod *Continued*

Students and teachers now can more authentically replicate (and actually do) real-world work through the use of the same tools and resources used by engineers, designers, scientists, accountants and a multitude of other professionals and artisans. Students can share their own knowledge, skills and expertise with people all over the world. They can find or form communities of interest around topics for which they are passionate and they can be active (and valued) contributors to the world's information commons, both individually and collaboratively with others.

Essentially, our students and teachers now have the ability to learn about whatever they want, from whomever they want, whenever and wherever they want, and they also can contribute to this learning environment for the benefit of others.

Workers in the real world (i.e. outside of school) use computers to do their work. Can educators really claim to be relevant to students and society while simultaneously ignoring the technological transformations that surround them? It's a digital, global world out there. Schools that are serious about preparing their graduates for a technology-suffused information society do everything they can to put a robust digital learning device into every student's hands instead of pretending that we live in a pencil, notebook paper and ring binder world.

Scott McLeod, JD, PhD
Associate Professor and Founding Director of CASTLE
University of Kentucky

For more information on Scott McLeod's work and on the Center for the Advanced Study of Technology Leadership in Education (CASTLE), see <http://leadership.uky.edu/centers-services/castle>.