

Chrome sweet Chrome?

New district initiative to bring school-issued laptops to every student on Jan. 11

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staff reporter

In January, all McCallum students are slated to get district-issued Chromebooks. The laptops themselves are touch screen and can be transformed into tablets. Students will be allowed to take these computers home and will be responsible for taking care of them. The initiative to give students access to computers at home stems from districtwide use of the program BLEND, which teachers have integrated into their classrooms since the beginning of the year.

BLEND, which is short for blended learning, was initiated in AISD high schools this fall in order to incorporate more technology in the classroom. The idea is to make student access to deadlines, grades and homework more streamlined, equitable and user-friendly. The AISD initiative that provided both BLEND and the new Chromebooks is called Everyone:1 and aims to spread internet access around the district.

Assistant principal Sophia Sherline is working to institute this program on McCallum's campus.

"The district was trying to go 3 to 1, which is one device for every three kids," she said. "We were able to do that about a year and a half ago; that's the Chromebooks that you see in classrooms, but not every teacher had them. Then, this past semester in the fall, half of Austin ISD high schools got the Chromebooks, and Mr. Garrison likes to wait to have the bugs worked out before we get them."

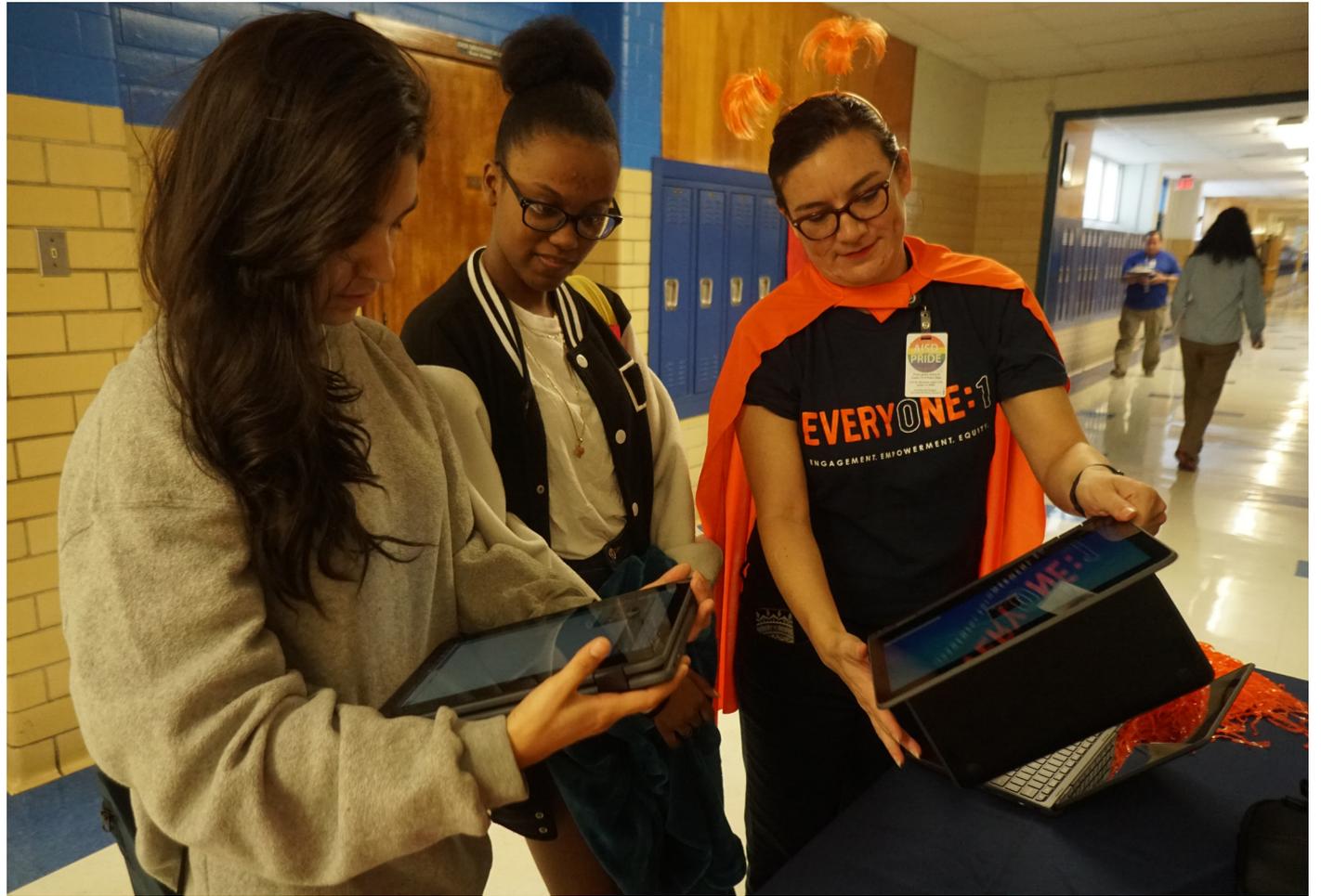
Even though these computers are available to all students, not all students are required to accept them. Students can also bring their own personal devices to school but still must follow the Acceptable Use Guidelines and Internet Safety Plan. AISD internet restrictions will still be placed on these Chromebooks even when they are taken off campus.

According to Sherline, students with signed permission slips will be given their computers on Jan. 11 during their fifth-period class.

"Everybody in your class that has permission is gonna go with an ID barcode to indicate you have permission" she said. "You're gonna go into the library, grab a Chromebook, then go to the guy with a scanner. You're gonna give him your ID, he's gonna scan it, scan the Chromebook, and then you're off to the next table to get the charger and bag. Then you're gonna sit down, open up your Chromebook and make sure it works with your student login. You're gonna get a name tag on to stick in your bag, then go back to class and learn appropriate use for Chromebooks."

Along with giving students Chromebooks, Sherline is also helping implement the schoolwide lessons about how best to use the new computers.

"While you're in class, teachers will have digital citizenship and digital literacy lessons to go over with the students," she said. "There will be two lessons for teachers to go over and make sure you understand what a digital footprint is and know that everything you put on the internet is there forever and know our responsibilities as young people using the internet."



Sophomores Desaray Trevino and Aaliyah Cruz talk to AISD technology design coach Rita Fennelly-Atkinson about the Chromebooks students will receive Jan. 11. During lunch last week, Fennelly-Atkinson demonstrated the new laptops and how to use them. Photo by Maddie Doran.

Even though the process of every student acquiring a computer will be cumbersome, members of the Everyone:1 program are prepared to celebrate the occasion.

"Apparently in the library, there's gonna be a big party," Sherline said, "with a disco ball and music and foam hands. They're gonna have a party in there while they hand out Chromebooks, so it's gonna be fun."

As a part of the requirements of the Everyone:1 initiative, teachers are encouraged to incorporate computer-based learning in the classroom and incorporate the new technology into their lesson plans. Science teacher Marion Jones is the campus innovation coach, which means she helps teachers implement the new technology in their classrooms.

"The district has several initiatives, one of which is being paperless by 2020," she said. "As we purchased the BLEND student access learning system, we want everyone to have access to it, all the time. Purchasing the Chromebooks gives everybody more equitable access to school materials."

As a classroom teacher, Jones is also excited to introduce the Chromebooks to her students.

"My hope is, specifically for my class, that everybody has access to a computer at home" she said. "Even though we do a majority of our work in class, if you don't finish it, you still have

access to it at home. You have access to my class calendar, seniors can work on college papers. It'll be nice that people can do research at home."

Other teachers shared Jones's enthusiasm but also expressed concerns. Biology teacher Nicole Sorto is both excited and apprehensive for the Chromebook rollout.

"I think it's a pretty cool idea" she said. "My worries are that kids will forget them, and how do you deal with that? So there are some logistical issues as far as I'm concerned, but I like the idea. There's so much technology right there at your fingertips."

As a part of her biology class, Sorto has her students create an interactive notebook in order to engage the material.

"I've been trying to figure out how to do our interactive notebook using the computer," she said, "and I'm not sure yet because the interactive notebook is based around actually physically writing and drawing, which is a really important aspect of learning."

"I'm gonna try to figure out how I can do notes on the computer, and do drawings in the notebook, but I'm not sure how I'm gonna balance that. I'm excited about it; I think it will be really cool [using the Chromebooks]; I just have to figure it out. I think it's important to use your senses."

Science teacher Amy Shin is also concerned

about the implementation of Chromebooks in the classroom and how teachers will incorporate the new technology.

"I think it's a weird gear shift in the middle of the semester," she said. "You have to change the curriculum a little bit, and focus on a different kind of engagement. When they [students] have computers, it's like managing another entity almost because we used to have to fight for them to put their electronics away, but now it's an essential part of the classroom."

Around the school, students are divided on whether or not personal Chromebooks are a good idea. Junior Piper Wiest isn't completely in favor of the initiative because of its move to make McCallum paperless.

"I really prefer actual textbooks and hard copies of assignments" she said. "The whole introduction of Chromebooks makes me a little worried that we're for sure moving away from paper completely, and I really hope we don't."

As the district moves forward with this new initiative, McCallum staff and administration remain open to the new opportunities that all students having access to technology will bring.

"For me, that's the biggest benefit I see," Jones said. "It's opening up more possibilities to kids who didn't have them before."

To read Kristen Tibbett's column about the new Chromebooks, please see page 24.