

A Notebook for Every Student

How Hershey Public School District Leveraged Technology to Build a Community of Communication



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The mission of the Hershey Public School District, located in central Nebraska, is to provide a safe and futuristic learning environment that empowers students to develop into responsible citizens in a global society. This forward-thinking school district wanted to put notebook computers into the hands of every high school student and teacher. They turned to a trusted technology partner, GovConnection, to help them fulfill their specific IT needs for the initiative.

The Right Ratio for Success

In 2007, Hershey Public School District launched a technology program called the 1:1 Learning Initiative. The focus of the program is to provide all of their high school students and faculty with Lenovo X131e notebooks with Windows 7 to use during the school year. Kort Smith, Network Administrator for Hershey Public School District, works with GovConnection each year to fulfill, maintain, and refresh their notebook inventory for the program. Smith said, "The 1:1 approach means 'one notebook for one student.' We decided to launch this initiative to better connect the staff with parents and students and to enhance learning."

Keeping IT Fresh

Smith joined Hershey Public School District at the implementation stage of the program and remains at the helm today. "After going through the planning

process, which I believe took around a year, the district realized that they needed more staff to implement the 1:1 Learning Initiative," said Smith. "They hired me during the summer so that I could manage and roll out this program to the students and teachers for the upcoming school year."

The program is now in its seventh year. Smith commented, "We are in our third refresh, and we refresh every third year. On average, we deploy notebooks to 250 high school students and approximately 60 faculty members."

A Partner That Makes the Grade

Hershey Public School District needed a partner that could offer the service and support to keep the 1:1 Learning Initiative rolling smoothly each year. They've partnered with GovConnection to requisition the notebooks since the very first year of the initiative.

Smith speaks highly of the relationship and the consistency of the staff. "One of the advantages of working with GovConnection is that we don't get a new rep every few months. I have had two Account Managers in the seven years that I have been here. The nice thing about that is that they know exactly what my IT needs are at the end of each year and exactly what I need to get going for the upcoming year."

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Worry-Free Device Selection

Choosing the right technology for Hershey Public School District's needs took careful planning. The district needed to consider not only the performance of the notebooks, but also the TCO and durability—key factors for a notebook fleet that sees demanding use. GovConnection offered the product selection and expertise to help Hershey Public School District make the right selection for their unique environment.

"We chose Lenovo ThinkPad X131e notebooks with Windows 7 for a few reasons," said Smith. "First, the durability and overall quality of the Lenovo notebooks was excellent for what we need in our educational environment; they hold up better to student use."

Smith continued, "We have used Lenovo notebooks every year for seven years, and they stand up to student-use very well. We have had a few notebooks that the students damaged quite a bit. But, the Lenovo warranty is great—basically I just send the damaged notebooks in and they come back fixed. We have had notebooks that have been left on top of cars and damaged to the point where they were in pieces; I ship all of the pieces back to Lenovo and within a week I have a new notebook in my hands, no questions asked."

Putting Technology In Everyone's Hands

Hershey Public School District's 1:1 Learning Initiative has brought more than powerful performance and increased mobility to the students and teachers. "The biggest advantage is that the initiative connects the whole community," said Smith. "We have a small population; our town only has about 600 people. These Lenovo notebooks with Windows 7 really help the parents, students, and faculty connect. Before we started the 1:1 Learning Initiative, the students very rarely logged in to check their grades. With the program, I believe approximately 95% of the kids log in to make sure they have all their assignments turned in and to check their grades. Parents can also log in, interact more, and know what their kids are doing."

The success of the initiative relies on strong communication between Hershey Public School District, the community, and GovConnection. To keep the program running, the district formed a community committee. "We have some parents and some people from the town that might not necessarily have kids in the system involved. We also have teachers and students on this committee and we get their feedback about what we can do better and what new technology products to consider. We take that feedback and use it to plan our next refresh and to plan what we are going to do in the years to come." Having a partner that listens to those concerns is key. "It has been great to work with GovConnection," said Smith. "I don't ever have to worry about where I am going to get my new technology. It's awesome; I would give them an A+."

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—Kort Smith, Network Administrator,
Hershey Public School District



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