

Education - Portable Computers

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**MARCH 2, 2000
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

KING UNVEILS BOLD PLAN TO PROVIDE PORTABLE COMPUTERS TO MAINE STUDENTS

AUGUSTA – In a bid to conquer the “digital divide” and take a giant leap forward in the computer literacy of Maine students, Gov. Angus King today outlined a bold proposal to provide every seventh grader in Maine with an Internet-ready, portable computer, forever.

The \$50 million plan, unveiled at two news conferences Thursday, would give each incoming seventh-grader a portable, personal computer to use while in school and at home. The students will carry the computers with them as they progress through the upper grades, and it will remain with them after graduation from high school. The initiative will also provide portable computers and training for Maine schoolteachers.

“The jobs of the future, in every area – manufacturing, services, healthcare, retail, government, education, everywhere – all will involve computer and Internet literacy,” said King, “and those individuals and societies that are the most competent and at ease with this technology will be the most successful. This initiative will move Maine students to the head of the class – the forefront of the world – in access to technology.

“This is a bold step for Maine,” he continued, “and any such attempt involves risk. But the returns – to the state, our economy, and especially to our children – are immeasurable. For good or ill, this technology is with us and will transform us. If we resist it, we will decline; if we accept it, we will survive; if we embrace it, we will flourish. The question is, why shouldn’t Maine be first?”

Under the plan, an endowment fund will be established using a one-time appropriation of \$50 million from the unallocated state surplus and a match of \$15



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million from federal or private sources. Income generated from the fund will create a permanent source of money to buy the portable computers for every seventh grader in Maine, forever. The proceeds from the fund would be administered by a public-private foundation, which would decide the technical aspects of the computers, negotiate the purchases, and manage the distribution.

The fund would also pay half the cost of purchasing the computers for every teacher in the state (K-12) over five years. An additional \$1 million per year will be provided for ongoing support for professional development for teachers in the area of integrating technology and the Internet into the curriculum.

King envisions students using the computers in the classroom, at home – even on the school bus – doing research on the Internet, discussing assignments with their teachers and fellow classmates via e-mail, preparing reports using word processing and graphics programs, and maintaining class and after-school schedules. The exact type of computer will be determined by the foundation that administers the fund, and would likely change as technology advances from full-featured laptops to small, handheld appliances like the Palm Pilot.

“Simply undertaking an initiative of this size and scope will put Maine on the national technological map,” King said. “It’s a huge step that will make headlines around the world – and place us in the front rank of the states in terms of education and integration of this absolutely essential technology into the everyday lives of our students. This step will also be a huge boost to our ongoing and critically important efforts to build a high-tech economy.”

King met yesterday with Legislative leaders and education officials to outline the plan, and received support from educators and business officials. Chris Toy, principal of the Freeport Middle School, said many middle-school students do not have computers at home.

“Access to technology is analogous to access to information in today’s age,” said Toy. “This is a good idea, one that will put this information and technology directly into the hands of Maine students.”

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LUNCHBOXES TO LAPTOPS: GOV. KING'S SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE

WHAT IS IT? This program will provide every seventh grader in Maine with an Internet-ready, portable computer, forever. They will use it in their classrooms and in their homes through high school, and it's theirs to keep after graduation.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST? An endowment fund will be established using a one-time appropriation of \$50 million from the unallocated state surplus and a match of \$15 million from private and/or federal sources. Income generated from the fund will provide the necessary money to give every entering 7th grader a portable computer beginning in 2002.

WHAT ABOUT THE TEACHERS? The endowment fund will also provide half the cost of purchasing a computer for every teacher in the state (K-12) over the course of five years. An additional \$1 million per year will be provided for ongoing support for professional development for teachers in the area of integrating technology and the Internet into the curriculum.

WHY DO THIS? This initiative will prove crucial in bridging the "digital divide." Currently in Maine, too many families do not have a computer at home to allow their children access to this critical technology into their learning process. The key idea is to move computers and the Internet from the lab into classrooms and homes. Students won't have to wait for a machine in the lab that's open only during school hours; they can research topics on the Internet, work on ongoing projects or do homework with these machines in the classroom, on the bus or at home. Essentially it puts technology necessary in today's and, more important, tomorrow's world in the hands of Maine students whenever and wherever they need it.



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From Lunchboxes to Laptops

Q. and A. on Proposal for an Endowment Fund to Purchase Computers for School Children

- 1. Why should we buy all these computers? The schools already have computer labs and it's an awful lot of money.**

It is an absolute certainty that the jobs of the future, in every area – manufacturing, services, healthcare, retail, government, education, everywhere – all will involve computer and Internet literacy. Those individuals and societies that are the most competent and at ease with this technology will be the most successful.

The fundamental purpose of this initiative is to make computers an integral part of our educational process – and our students' way of thinking and working. The key idea is "integral part"—to move the computer and the internet from the lab – down the hall and once a week – to the backpacks – for use every day in every class and every home.

This is the boldest initiative in the country in terms of student access to technology.

- 2. What exactly does the program involve?**

The concept is simple: we set aside \$50 million of the unallocated surplus created by the recent upward revenue reprojections and place it in a permanent endowment fund, the income from which will be used to buy laptop computers for every 7th grader in Maine, forever. In this way, at the end of five years, every student in Maine above the 6th grade will have his or her own computer. The State's contribution to the fund will be matched by \$15 million from private and/or federal sources. The first round of purchases will begin in the fall of 2002. A publicly accountable board of trustees will manage the fund with the goal of returning 8-9% annually.

The income from the fund will be administered by this public-private foundation (on the model of the Maine Development Foundation), which would decide the technical aspects of the computers, negotiate the purchases, and manage the distribution.

3. Why portables and not desktops?

The big advantage of laptops is that they can go home – and at a stroke, we will have gone a long way toward eliminating the “digital divide” – the growing gap between those connected to technology and those who are not. In addition, laptops – which can operate in school on batteries charged at home – won’t require extensive rewiring of classrooms in order to function on every desk. Portables will enable computer – and Internet – based research assignments and exchanges with teachers and fellow students.

4. What about access fees for the Internet? Who pays? And what about preventing kids from gaining access to adult oriented websites?

Schools get Internet access for free through the Maine School Libraries Network. Students will also be able to use MSLN from home to gain access to the Internet. The MSLN system currently has filters installed to prevent kids from gaining access to improper sites; additional filters can also be installed on the individual computers.

5. How about the teachers? Are we just going to drop all these computers on the kids and expect the teachers to catch up?

Absolutely not. A key component of this initiative will be to empower the teachers to lead this transformation. First, the fund would pay half the cost of purchasing the computers for every teacher in the state (K – 12) in a five-year phase-in (with replacement every five years, as the technology develops). The approximate one-time cost to the participating districts would be \$250.00 per computer.

Second, and perhaps more important, Governor King has proposed in his supplemental budget request an additional \$1 million per year in ongoing support for professional development for the integration of technology and the internet into the curriculum. These funds would be over and above the \$2 million already proposed for professional development for implementation of the Learning Results.

6. If we give computers to the kids, won't some be broken, lost, sold, or otherwise abused?

Sure – some loss or breakage is inevitable in a program of this magnitude (approximately 21,000 computers will be given out each year – 17,000 to students and 4,000 to teachers), but the computers will be manufactured to be as durable as possible. The risk does not seem overwhelming, given the huge benefits. Besides, right now thousands of our kids are doing a pretty good job of keeping track of their Game-Boys – which are nothing more than handheld computers.

7. But what if they do break – who pays to maintain them?

We would do it ourselves, building on the capacity the state has already developed in our correctional system to repair and upgrade machines for the current computers-for-schools program. We have already refurbished and upgraded over 1,000 donated computers under this program – creating more access to technology for our schools and valuable job skills for our medium security inmates. The system to provide efficient, low-cost maintenance is already in place.

8. But won't these computers be obsolete before 7th graders reach the end of high school?

In some ways, yes, but in a general sense, no. We envision three basic functions: word processing, math (spreadsheets, data manipulation), and, perhaps most important, e-mail and access to the Internet. There are certain to be improvements in technology (and price) within any period longer than a couple of years, but the machines will still perform these critical functions. Advanced operations – graphics, for example – will still require the larger, more powerful machines in the computer lab.

9. What if a future governor and legislature want to raid the fund?

That could happen, but if the program is running well, it would be unlikely. Remember, the beauty of this plan is that it does not require a commitment of ongoing spending – once the trust fund is set up, it runs indefinitely on its own income. This is a powerful legacy for this generation of political leaders in Maine to leave to our children and grandchildren.

10. It still seems like a lot of money – are there any other benefits beyond those to the kids themselves?

Absolutely. Simply undertaking an initiative of this size and scope will put Maine on the national technological map. This is a huge step that will make headline news around the world – and place us in the front rank of the states in terms of education and the integration of this absolutely essential technology into the everyday life of our students. This step will be a huge boost to our ongoing and critically important efforts to build a high-tech economy.

Everyone is going to do this eventually (many colleges already require incoming students to have laptops); why shouldn't Maine be first?

11. But aren't there other important things we could spend this money on?

Sure, but as far as education goes, we're well on our way to providing significant multi-year state commitments to improve school subsidy and school facilities. And remember this is a one-time investment. We're not going to have this \$50 million next year or the year after – for tax cuts, elderly drug assistance, aid to education, job training, or any other ongoing programs. Viewed in that way, it's hard to imagine any single investment or group of investments matching this idea in long-term impact.

12. Why can't we just take this \$50 million and add it to GPA, or use it for much needed repairs and renovation?

The short answer is that we have already spent the future value of this reprojected in the significant commitment to increased GPA we have already made. We are now facing a "structural gap" of almost \$200 million in the next biennium – even including the recent upward rejections.

The critical point is that GPA is an on-going expense – and current revenue projections and spending commitments mean that any increase beyond the 5% currently proposed would simply not be sustainable in future years. This proposal, however, is an important way to help our students on an on-going basis, but uses one-time money to do so.

It's important to put recent education spending into context. In the budget passed last spring, we increased GPA 6%; if we increase it by 5% this year (the Governor's supplemental budget proposed to add 2% to the 3% already passed last year), this means a cumulative increase in GPA of over \$100 million during this biennium. This is in addition to \$43 million already allocated to school renovation (the Governor has proposed an additional \$20 million for this purpose in the Supplemental) and almost \$200 million being released for school construction this year, provided the proposed increase in the construction bond cap is approved.

Although we still have a ways to go in school renovation and construction, we have made tremendous progress in the last several years, and we will continue to address this problem. An initiative of this magnitude should not necessarily come first, but it should not have to wait until the last window is fixed, either.

13. **OK, OK, but can you guarantee it will work – that the price will be affordable, that the investment returns will be adequate, that the kids will take care of the machines?**

Of course not. All we can go on now are best estimates of how it could come together – and those estimates are that it will work. And if it doesn't work, we still have the money. If we find that we can't raise the private match (or find it within our own future resources) or that the price of the computers we need is too high, or that the machines prove nonfunctional in the classroom, we can reallocate the fund and the only loss, if any, is the income expended.

This is a bold and exciting step for Maine, and any such attempt involves risk. But the returns – to the state, our economy, and especially to our children – are immeasurable.

For good or ill, this technology is with us and will transform us. If we resist it, we will decline; if we accept it, we will survive; if we embrace it, we will flourish.

Why shouldn't Maine be first?

SEYMOUR PAPERT COMMENTS ON LUNCHBOXES TO LAPTOPS

"THE KING PLAN FOR TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS"

With the technology initiative announced today, Maine has made three historic firsts in bringing education into line with the twenty first century:

Maine is the first state to make a formal commitment to the concept that owning a personal computer is the right of every student.

From the year 2001 onwards every student who leaves a Maine elementary school will go not only with the skills needed for the knowledge century but also with a computer to exercise these skills though the remaining years of study.

Maine is the first state to equip all local schools to undertake a comprehensive, integrated enhancement of curriculum to fit the needs and take advantage of the opportunities of the twenty first century.

The policy of issuing personal computers to all students makes possible for the first time the design of curriculum based on the assumption that every student has access at home, as well as at school. As the wave of students in the computer program goes through successive years of school, the wave of new curriculum will follow. By the year 2003, it will touch all students in the middle school grades, well known to be the critical period of greatest educational risk.

Maine is the first state to complement its recently adopted assessment of standards with the conditions of ubiquitous access to digital technology.

Maine has committed itself to a rigorous assessment of the highest educational standards of any state. The presence of ubiquitous computation will allow schools to meet these standards at a high level and provide students with the skills to fit new requirements in the workplace and new learning opportunities in the schools.

Widely known as one of the world's foremost experts on helping children learn with computers, Seymour Papert has long recognized and articulated how computers could fundamentally revolutionize learning and education. Papert has authored several books on this subject including "The Children's Machine: Rethinking School in the Age of the Computer" and "The Connected Family: Bridging the Digital Generation Gap." He holds the Lego Chair for Learning Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is the co-founder of the MIT Media Lab and the MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab. (Courtesy of www.papert.org)

Walter J. Taranko
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J. Gary Nichols
State Librarian

MEMO

FEBRUARY 29, 2000

TO: Ed Gomes
FROM: Cheryl Ramsay
RE: Computers for Schools and Libraries Program

Ed, I just had a phone call from Brown Memorial Library in Clinton. The librarian, Louella Bickford, is desperate for computers. She said she had students lined up yesterday desperate to use their only computer. They had been told to get their assignments off the Internet and, as there are so many in that community who cannot afford computers at home, the public library is their only resource.

Brown Memorial Library is connected to the MSLN but that doesn't do much good if there aren't enough computers to access the information. She said there they do have plenty of room so space is not a factor.

She would greatly appreciate it if you could advise her what steps to go through to acquire new computers or even used ones, for that matter. [REDACTED]

Thank you for your attention to this matter.



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Maine's King seeks to give all 7th-graders computers

By Kate Zernike, Globe Staff, 3/2/2000

Maine Governor Angus King, trying to bridge the "digital divide" in one of the nation's poorest states, will today propose giving all students in the seventh grade laptop computers to keep as their own.

King's proposal, the first of its kind in the nation, would provide laptops and Internet service to 16,000 seventh-graders beginning in fall 2001, and to all seventh-graders in the years following, so that within six years, every student in the seventh grade and up will have a computer.

The proposal also calls for paying half the cost of new computers for teachers above the sixth grade, with districts paying the other half.

The ambitious plan reflects a world in which computers are no longer seen as just an accessory, but as a necessity. A month ago, Ford Motor Co. said it would give its 350,000 employees desktop computers, printers, and Internet access for \$5 a month. Some individual school districts are providing students with computers. And increasingly, colleges require students to bring a computer along with their other dorm furnishings.

Such mass distribution of computers is not without critics, who question whether students will use the technology for anything more than sending e-mail to classmates. Anticipating the criticism, King's plan also includes \$1 million to train teachers in how to tie technology to the learning of the state's new academic standards, which are measured by a statewide test.

"If we don't do this, someone else is going to, and why not Maine?" said Dennis Bailey, the governor's press secretary. "We can really leapfrog into the forefront of computer literacy with this, and the governor's convinced that that's where everything's going. It doesn't matter what field you're going to go into today, if you're not computer- and Internet-

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literate, you're going to be left behind."

Those left behind tend to be those in poorer rural and urban areas. A US Commerce Department study in July found that households with incomes above \$75,000 are 20 times as likely to have computers as those with lower incomes.

And Maine lags behind many states in classroom technology. According to the state's department of education, there are 1.8 Internet-ready computers for each seventh-grade class, and 10.3 for each high school class.

Those computers tend to be in labs. King's plan, administration sources said, is to make them a more integral part of learning - not just something down the hall, but in the backpack, at home, and in class.

Ideally, aides to the governor said, teachers would put homework on Web sites and integrate Internet research into classroom projects. From home, students could log on and ask their teachers or peers questions about their homework. As part of the Internet service, students will have access to the Maine School Libraries Network - which, administration sources note, filters out pornographic Web sites.

The governor would set up a \$75 million trust fund that would generate income to pay for the computers, using \$25 million in private and federal money and \$50 million from the state's estimated \$300 million surplus.

"If we don't do this now, we may not have this opportunity again," Bailey said.

The King administration admits there are details to be worked out, and a significant hurdle to jump in a Legislature with its own ideas on how to spend the surplus.

One question is what kind of computers the plan will buy. The plan aims to give every student e-mail, word processing, and spreadsheet capability, but officials say that might mean newer technology that pairs Palm Pilot-size screens with keyboards, or more common laptops. The administration is predicting each computer will cost \$500, which even their technology consultants admit is low for laptops. But through the consultants, the state has talked to IBM, Compaq, and Hewlett Packard about getting computers within that budget.

"Based on where technology is trending right now and where prices are trending, they think it is going to be feasible to do what the state wants to do," said Eric Smith, a consultant to the state and vice president of Inacom, a computer reseller. "I think [administration officials] are being very realistic in what they want to do."

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Some educators also question the wisdom of giving seventh-graders delicate laptops, which may not survive adolescent rambunctiousness or trips home on the bus. But the state already has a program where companies donate used computers that are then retrofitted as Pentium-class computers by the state's prison inmates. And administration officials note dryly that seventh-graders seem to be able to take care of their Game Boys, which are hand-held computers.

Still, critics have a host of other concerns, from young hands developing repetitive stress injuries, to a lack of socialization among children who spend their afternoons staring at a screen.

"There is the concern about the digital divide, and what this does in one fell swoop is eliminate it from urban and rural schools - that's a real plus," said Larry Cuban, a professor of education at Stanford University who has written about technology in the classroom. "But people confuse availability with use, and that raises a number of very complex questions."

Promises that teachers will be trained, he said, are "too glib."

"It's how you train them and toward what ends. For test scores to go up you have to have a lot of connections between what a teacher does on a daily basis that's connected to the academic standards, that are connected to the tests and textbooks. It's that connective tissue that people generally don't take into consideration. They get carried away with the glamour of just spreading the computers around."

This story ran on page A01 of the Boston Globe on 3/2/2000.

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