



# Ensuring equitable student technology access

Grand Haven Area Public Schools transformed the classroom experience for both students and teachers within one school year



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*Doug Start, Director of Instructional Technology,  
Grand Haven Area Public Schools*

## Customer profile



**Company** Grand Haven Area Public Schools  
**Industry** K-12 Education  
**Country** United States  
**Employees** 865 (6,300 students)  
**Website** [www.ghaps.org](http://www.ghaps.org)

## Business need

Grand Haven Area Public Schools sought a rugged, 1:1 technology platform to transform learning both inside and outside the classroom.

## Solution

Mobile technology is helping students take more active roles in their learning experiences, while teachers act as guides at students’ sides.

## Benefits

- Increases student access and engagement
- Provides a single client platform for 1:1 student computing initiative
- Saves more than \$450,000 compared with competing Chromebooks
- Simplifies device procurement, management and support

## Solutions at a glance

- Client Solutions
- Mobile Computing

“Technology will never drive student achievement, nor will it make students smarter,” says Doug Start, director of instructional technology, Grand Haven Area Public Schools. “But it can drive student engagement, and that’s what will drive them toward greater academic achievement.”

Start’s observation echoes the philosophy behind the 1:1 technology access initiative he launched with Brian Wheeler, the district’s director of information technology, for more than 4,000 students in the fifth grade and higher.

“We’re focused on giving students equitable access to technology while creating student-centered classrooms, moving teachers from the front of the classroom,” Start explains. “So instead of being the ‘sage on the stage,’ they’re trained in using technology to become more of a mentor — ‘the guide on the side.’”

For example, he notes that math teachers can now check the progress of each student in their classrooms as the students work on an assignment. The teachers can then offer real-time feedback to each student, providing more personalized instruction.

### Growing Dell relationship

The Michigan school district chose Dell Chromebooks as an affordable device for student use in classrooms and at home. “They’re easy for students and teachers to learn and operate and for us to manage,” he says. “And they reflect our growing Dell relationship.”

Counting the Chromebooks, the district maintains more than 10,000 end user devices — plus a few hundred more for the Grand Haven city government and library. That includes not only 5,300 Dell Chromebooks, but also more than 1,300 OptiPlex 3020 desktop computers and 900 Dell Latitude 13 Education Series laptops. The desktops are used in offices as well as in classrooms, where they are

on “smart carts” to facilitate interactive whiteboard sessions. Laptops can be checked out by students, teachers and staff.

Wheeler and Start evaluated Chromebooks from other makers, but decided on Dell for reasons of cost, battery life and durability. Wheeler says, “Another Chromebook source had rugged units, too, but each cost about \$100 more than Dell’s model, weighed more and had less battery life.” He says that, given the number of Dell Chromebooks the district bought, the savings added up to more than \$450,000.

Ruggedness is especially critical in the Chromebooks, which students handle roughly in the classroom, at home and everywhere else they might go. “The rubber bumpers and 180-degree screen hinges on the Dell models really reduce our breakage rates,” Wheeler notes. “Many districts report Chromebook breakage rates as high as 40 percent, but with Dell’s rugged design, ours is less than 10 percent.”

### Comprehensive, sole-source approach

To help it maintain such a huge number of end user devices, the district set up Dell TechDirect, a global, self-service tool for 24x7 service and parts requests. Wheeler considers TechDirect a key way to improve his team’s efficiency in resolving support issues quickly.

Start sees the reliability of the Dell PCs as vital to learning and the classroom experience in ways that many might not otherwise consider. “If technology isn’t working because it’s hard to use or broken, then teachers lose faith in it and revert to more traditional ways of teaching,” he says. “So technology has to be easy to use and always work.”

Wheeler also found that sole sourcing with Dell simplified procurement, management and support. “We saved weeks in procurement by being able to buy Dell equipment off

## Products & Services

### Hardware

Dell Chromebooks

Dell Storage PS4100E storage arrays

Dell Latitude 13 Education Series laptops

Dell OptiPlex 3020 desktops

Michigan’s master state contract,” says Wheeler. “And our Dell account team’s responsiveness has been excellent. Due to a Chromebook shortage, we worried about getting ours in time, and the team got all of ours delivered at the same time on the day we needed them.”

### Transforming the classroom experience

Accompanied by their Dell account manager, Start and Wheeler visited the Dell Solution Center in Chicago for a daylong briefing on the company’s future portfolio plans and to learn more about how the district might take advantage of that. “We’ve put two small storage area networks into our data center for our district and city using Dell Storage PS4100E arrays, which are connected to both of our VMware environments,” Wheeler says. “Being able to sit down with actual Dell engineers and draw out a robust data center to meet our goals was most helpful.”

Almost 2,000 hours of district-provided, teacher technology training during the summer was a critical factor in the success of the 1:1 program, Start believes. “They don’t have the school year’s time pressures and can really play around with it,” he says. “Today, in less than a year and with a lot of hard work by staff both in and out of the classroom, we’ve changed the way teachers teach and students learn — helped in great part by the rugged Dell Chromebooks that always work when they’re needed.”

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