



# DeSoto County Schools Digital Learning Initiative



Dear Parent:

During the spring semester, our students will have the opportunity to utilize additional technology to enhance the instructional experience through the DeSoto County Schools Digital Learning Initiative. Here is some information about this program:

## **Information from the Mississippi Department of Education:**

**Mississippi Connects** is a program to provide every public-school student in Mississippi with technology. The unexpected need for distance learning provided Mississippi with an opportunity to reimagine the digital learning experience and create an innovative approach to getting students what they need to learn. Mississippi sees the urgent need for technology and is ready to meet that need to ensure every student can succeed.

## **Background**

The Mississippi Legislature allocated \$200 million for Mississippi Connects through two laws, the Equity in Distance Learning Act (SB 3044) and the Mississippi Pandemic Response Broadband Availability Act (HB 1788).

Mississippi students' academic achievement is growing at the fastest rate in the U.S., surpassing many of the goals of the Mississippi Succeeds Plan. Mississippi was able to exceed expectations by closely partnering with district leaders, educators, parents and students, and state legislators.

In every area of focus for improved public education - early childhood education, reading, advanced courses, and career and technical education - we are challenging students to reach higher, and they have surpassed goals. Now it's our turn to ensure they have the resources they need to excel in a digitally advanced workforce. It will take time to roll out the initiative - but we can't think of a more worthy cause than the futures of our students.



# Information from DeSoto County Schools

## **What is the DeSoto County Schools Mission for Digital Learning?**

The availability of unprecedented funding and flexibility has created an opportunity to advance digital learning and create a lasting benefit for our students and teachers. Providing teachers and students with improved access to technology to enhance instruction will benefit all. DeSoto County Schools is committed to continued student academic achievement and growth. Benefits of transitioning to digital learning include access to high-quality instructional materials, easy transition from in-person to distance learning if needed due to an emergency closure, preparation for digitally advanced careers, increased equity by narrowing the digital divide, and access to social/emotional resources for emotional health.

## **What type of devices will be given to students?**

In Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, students will be issued iPads. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, students will receive either an iPad or a laptop. In all other grades, students will be issued laptops. DeSoto County Schools will issue the existing inventory of devices that are less than three years-old plus the inventory received through the Mississippi Connects program to launch the Digital Learning Initiative.

## **What is the timeline for issuing DCS devices to students?**

Over 25,000 devices will be distributed to students during the 3<sup>rd</sup> 9-weeks. The majority of students will receive their devices in early February. Elementary students (K-5<sup>th</sup>) will keep their devices at school. The only exceptions will be if an emergency closure occurs or if a student is quarantined.

Secondary students (Grades 6-12) will be allowed to use the DCS devices "at home" if the DeSoto County Schools Usage fee is paid. School-specific information will be shared by individual schools when students return to school for the second semester.

## **Are these devices being issued so DeSoto County Schools can go 100% virtual?**

No. There are no plans for DeSoto County Schools to go 100% virtual. These devices could be used if there is a shutdown, but there are no plans for a district-wide shutdown of schools in DeSoto County. District leaders plan to continue for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year with the same model as the fall semester. Parents have the option of in-person instruction and virtual instruction.

## **What is the usage fee for the devices?**

There is a \$12.50 non-refundable usage fee for each student in grades K-5 and a \$25 non-refundable usage fee for each student in Grades 6-12.

For the spring 2021 semester, the usage fees will be prorated to \$6.25 for Grades K-5 and \$12.50 for Grades 6-12.

The usage fee will be used to help off-set such costs as hardware, software, certain repairs, networks, infrastructure, security, filtering, tech support, and certain digital resources.

Students who paid a usage fee through the Virtual Instructional Program (VIP) program will not be assessed another annual usage fee. Students transitioning to the VIP program for the third nine weeks, will be assessed a prorated at-home usage fee of \$12.50.

### **If K-5<sup>th</sup> grade students are not taking their devices home, why is there a usage fee?**

Students will be assigned a device of their own for use during the school day. This is different than the normal elementary procedures of using a computer periodically in a lab. The students' computers will actually be in their classrooms. The goal is to introduce and teach students how to use and care for the devices throughout the elementary years, so they will be prepared to transition to the "at home" responsibilities during their secondary years. Also, the elementary fees will help ensure sustainability in the Digital Learning Initiative and ultimately continue to benefit students through all of their years in education.

### **Why is it important for students to use a DeSoto County Schools device instead of a personal device?**

District-issued devices are maintained by district personnel, and all devices are updated with the latest software when available. The Digital Learning Initiative is about teaching and learning. It is most beneficial for students when the devices and software are the same for all students.

### **Additional Information:**

- This is the beginning of the Digital Learning Initiative. School leaders are developing a sustainability plan that will allow students to continue to use technology throughout their educational careers in DeSoto County Schools. This is an ongoing process.
- An orientation presentation will be shared through our district's learning management system, Schoology, at the beginning of the second semester.
- For more information, including the DCS Digital Learning Handbook, please visit our district website, [www.desotocountyschools.org](http://www.desotocountyschools.org).

