

8) Provide adequate technical support

“Each student using a laptop for real time classroom instruction and taking it home to continue school work requires a substantial increase in the amount of technical support required and also the times when it must be provided. Technical support is one of the more expensive elements of providing technology in K–12 education.”
(Florida Senate Interim Project Report)



In reviewing some fifty laptop initiatives across the country, the Task Force found a remarkable range of experience with technical support.

In the worst of cases, an inadequate response to equipment failure or virus attacks can begin a downward spiral in which the laptops are used less frequently. This leads to less interest in and respect for the equipment resulting in the need for additional repairs. Technical support personnel can then develop a siege mentality, locking down the machines in ways that make them less useful as an educational tool and restricting student access to the laptops by not allowing students to take them home.

In the best of cases, technical support is considered an integral part of the overall program beginning with the initial planning. Students and teachers are taught how to care for and respect the machines. A sense of ownership is encouraged and students and teachers alike are expected to problem-solve minor difficulties they encounter to the best of their ability. Many schools have found success in programs that identify certain students as tech assistants. The tech assistants receive additional training and are able to free up school personnel to concentrate on more serious technical problems. Such programs can provide opportunities for success to students, who may not have fared well in a traditional classroom environment. They also help to create a culture of respect for technology tools, thereby reducing mistreatment of equipment and the need for repairs.

Each school should also have a site-based tech support person to handle more difficult problems and there should be a plan in place for laptops that need extensive repairs to be sent to a central district location or otherwise outsourced for repair. A loaner laptop should immediately be made available to the student or teacher. The policy at some schools is that no student or teacher should be without a laptop for longer than one hour.

“If technical problems arise frequently and teachers have to wait hours, days, or weeks to get them resolved, they will abandon their efforts to incorporate technology.”

*Singh and Means
DOE 1994*

“I feel privileged to be trusted with the computers and with the knowledge I need to fix them. I also like knowing there are some things I know more about than my teachers!”

*Adriana Huerta, eighth grader
South Gate Middle School*

□ Guiding principle: Tech support procedures and planning must be adequate to prevent disruptions in laptop availability. Support should be handled at the lowest level practical.

- The end-user (teacher or student) should be taught to exercise problem-solving skills in handling routine maintenance.
- A school-based support staff should be able to handle the majority of technical issues.
- District support or other outsourcing should be available to handle major repairs.