

PRESTONSBURG — Students entering Floyd County's fifth and ninth grades in this first year of the digital conversion project will be receiving new laptop computers, aimed at bringing them a world of educational possibilities—along with a world of responsibility.

Educators in charge of the project say they understand the gravity of the decision, and have been making serious efforts to ensure that from the outset, students will understand the importance of maintaining their device and being accountable for its use.

To begin with, district employees preparing the laptops have programmed them not to allow students to install new software. The team has set them up with Windows 7 and Microsoft Office, while the Dell Latitude model chosen features a fold-flat hinge, tough screen, and sealed keyboard.

In addition, the Board of Education has approved a 35-page Digital Conversion Handbook, an addendum to the regular Student Handbook that outlines details of the programs and new rules for students with school-provided laptops.

Among the information provided, it is made clear that the laptops remain the property of Floyd County Schools, though they will be made available for purchase by the students after their years of use.

The handbook stresses that students will be required to bring the devices to school, charged and ready to use, every day. They must not be used around food and drink, must not be exposed to extreme temperatures, and must be securely locked away when not in use, among other stipulations.

The handbook also states that the school system will be monitoring network traffic for appropriate usage, and disciplinary action will be taken if students do not follow the rules or do not bring their device to school, just as they would be reprimanded for failing to bring books and other learning tools.

Along with the handbook, students will be required to obtain a “digital driver's license,” or DDL. The DDL is a program run by the University of Kentucky in which students take courses, watch videos, and complete assessments on appropriate use of technology, online etiquette, cyber-bullying awareness, and more. Students must complete the DDL program before they can take their laptops home.

Technology Innovation Coordinator Courtney DeRossett says that in the past, students trying to escape blame for inappropriate use of technology could try the excuse that they did not know any better. She says the DDL gives them proof positive that every student knows what is and is not acceptable online behavior.

Guidelines are also outlined in the handbook for costs associated with devices that are lost or damaged due to student neglect or intentional misuse. To help protect the devices, every student receiving a laptop will be issued a backpack with a cushioned compartment designed to transport it safely.

Superintendent Dr. Henry Webb says that response from students, parents, and teachers has been enthusiastic. He says their goals of bringing Floyd County classrooms into the 21st century through the new opportunities opened up by the digital conversion is on track.