

January 23, 2009

Dear Students, Parents and Guardians:

We are in the opening days of the second semester and this is the first time this year I have felt the need to write a letter, so I am grateful to God for the blessings of this school year and especially the blessing of having full-time principals. This letter is not about a crisis or loss, but instead an attempt to provide families with additional information about an exciting improvement in our school's educational offering, the high school one-to-one computing program. To do that, I am going to rely on a common technology tool, the frequently asked question.

Who will get a computer in the 1-to-1 program?

Beginning next August, every freshman will receive an Apple Macbook as part of their education at Faith. Freshman in subsequent years will also get Macbooks, so that by the 2012-13 school year, every high school student will have one.

Why did the school begin with freshmen? Shouldn't the seniors be the 1st beneficiaries?

There are a number of reasons. First, our funding model is built on using each computer for four years. Second, we wanted each student to get a new computer at the start of the program and ideally, be able to retain the computer upon graduation. Starting with any class other than freshmen would mean we would have to recycle the machines through the program, which would have required more stringent guidelines on their use by our students. Third, many seniors do not have full loads, denying us maximum use of the machines.

So why not give everyone a machine and allow parents the option of buying it at fair market if it was not used for four years?

To fully implement the 1-to-1 program over the next four years the school will spend nearly \$1.3 million dollars. If we bought it all at once, parents would have seen a \$1000 bill. Even amortizing it over four years, tuition would need to increase by over \$250 just for technology. Most parents could not absorb that increase, and fundamentally, we need to keep our doors open to continue to do ministry. About \$75 of the increase in tuition for next year supports the funding for the 1st year of 1-to-1. We estimate that over four years, tuition will have to go up a minimum of \$262 to pay for technology improvements and at that level the 1-to-1 program should be self-sustaining. Of course, additional dollars will be needed to support other elements of the school program.

A second critical aspect of the decision to deliberately move in this way has to do with teacher preparation. We don't want the computers to become expensive paperweights, and so we are investing in additional teacher education. While our entire faculty has been engaged in workshops designed to improve their effectiveness in using technology, we will be providing an additional 30 hours of training in Macbook specific training. Apple has an excellent reputation for staff development, but it is very expensive. We could not afford to train all of our teachers to the standard we believe necessary if we had to do it all at once.

So if my student isn't a freshman, aren't I paying for something my student won't be receiving?

There are several ways to answer this question. First, your tuition dollars support the school's entire program, which includes many things your student may not personally participate in or use. Similarly, every student eats in our student center and only a few current parents pledged to the capital campaign that supported its construction and since it now paid for, everyone enjoys its benefits. But most importantly, there will still be 425 tablet PCs and 35+ computers in the Koerwitz Resource Center available for student use, now with 200 or so fewer students who need to use them. Our non-freshman teachers will still be using technology in the classroom through the cart program. Our administrators will still have high expectations for teacher use of technology in the classrooms.

Will there be additional costs for the parents of freshmen?

Probably. Parents will have to buy insurance on the machines or pay a significant damage deposit. Parents will also have to provide a school approved protective covering, case or bag for the laptop.

Why did the school switch to Apple when most of the world uses a PC?

Certainly the demise of our original PC provider, Gateway/MPC, encouraged us to look around. While other companies could have provided tablets, that feature significantly increases the cost per unit. But for most uses, the tablet function was not required and moving away from it made moving to 1-to-1 more financially viable. Apple is solid company with a strong reputation and growing share of the K-12 market. Its staff development model is superior. Apple's pricing structure is now much more favorable than it was a few years back. Teachers who need the tablet function (particularly in math and science) will still be able to use a PC machine and Apple does make an accessory that functions as a tablet.

What about classes where freshmen are intermingled with other grades?

We will provide a cart or two with Macs on them so that teachers in those circumstances can work with a uniform group of computers. For instance, imagine a Spanish I class with fifteen 9th and twelve 10th graders. Here the teacher could reserve a Mac cart and hand out the Macs to 10th graders and then conduct the lesson. In subsequent years of the 1-to-1 program, this becomes less necessary. Even so, in most cases the work students do is web-based, so platform (Mac or PC) doesn't really matter. Teachers could, depending on the nature of the activity, teach students with PCs, Macs or Linux machines at the same time.

Can I buy a Macbook for my non-freshman student and can they use it is school?

No. When students are at school they connect to a network. In order to provide security for that network, it is important that the computers are imaged the same and that everyone in the 1-to-1 program understands the rules and protocols. Rolling out 1-to-1 according to our plan will enable us to appropriately educate both student users and their parents about what can and cannot be done with these machines. And while I just noted that much of what students do is platform neutral,

it certainly is easier on our teachers when they look out at a classroom where everyone has the same computer.

When will my freshman student get his/her computer?

We are developing plans to roll out this program. Sometime this spring, we will have a parent meeting to present an overview of the 1-to-1 program. Next August there will be several “pick-up” dates which will require the presence of your 9th grader and at least one parent.

Will students continue to use textbooks?

Yes. While we are working to equip our students with 21st century skills, books will continue to play an important role in our students’ education. We will certainly be looking for textbook providers that include digital alternatives.

I hope this helps some. I realize that there may be some disappointment that your 9th-11th grade student will never participate in the 1-to-1 program. In this case it is not possible to make everyone happy. We believe the decision-making process took the needs of all families into account when choosing this course and now that you have better information you can better understand why we did so.

As always, I stand ready to answer more questions either via email (dunningk@faithlutheranlv.org), phone (804-4444) or my blog (<http://faithlutheranlv.blogspot.com>).

In His Service,

Kevin M. Dunning
Executive Director