STEP 3

BUDGETING
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DEVELOP A BUDGET FOR ONE-TIME AND RECURRING EXPENSES.

What types of expenses will districts face?

Developing a budget for a one-to-one initiative is complicated. First, expenses related to one-to-one will be a mix of initial “start-up” costs as well as recurring expenses. Not only will districts have to invest money to get the one-to-one initiative started, but they will also need a long-term funding strategy in place to pay ongoing bills and subscriptions as well as replace equipment. Second, expenses related to one-to-one vary wildly. This variance in cost is not just a function of the wide array of available products and education technology vendors; even the exact same product or service is likely to vary in cost between districts, impacted by everything from the geography of a given school district to the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL).

MDE’s Digital Learning District Guidance document includes a Questionnaire and Budget Form, which districts may find useful for estimating a total cost, though this tool does not entirely account for the variance in cost and does not clearly differentiate one-time expenses from recurring ones. To understand the difference in one-time and recurring expenses for the four core budget components—one-to-one devices, internet connectivity, device security, and a learning management system (LMS)—as well as how these expenses may vary, we compiled estimates from MDE, held conversations with education technology vendors, and conducted an informal survey of school districts with established one-to-one initiatives. Based on a synthesis of this information, we advise that districts budget the following amounts for these core components of a one-to-one initiative:

**One-to-One Devices**

$500 per pupil upfront, plus $166.66 per pupil per year

$500 is the MDE estimate for the cost of a laptop or tablet, though certain tablets and Chromebooks can be purchased in the $250-$400 range. 12 Because most warranties expire after three years, and because some devices will need to be replaced after three years, we recommend budgeting one-third of the initial cost each year thereafter.

The biggest determining factor in cost will be what specific product the district desires, but the price tag on individual products will also vary by vendor and whether you are purchasing with a bulk-pricing discount. (See Step 4 for more details.)

**Internet Connectivity**

$28.56 per pupil per year for in-school broadband, plus $180 per year per hotspot

According to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) data collected by Connect K-12, $28.56 is the median yearly cost for one megabit per second (Mbps) in Mississippi school districts, which is the minimum recommended bandwidth per student. 13 This expense will vary based on many factors. Larger campuses with multiple buildings will require higher bandwidth, no matter the student population. Districts may also opt for additional bandwidth per student (some recommendations call for as much as 4.3 Mbps per student), which will increase the cost. 14 Costs will range by internet providers, with some providers offering only standard levels of bandwidth (e.g., 1,000 Mbps is the standard package offered by Comcast) rather than customizing the level to a given school’s need. See Step 5 for more information about ensuring adequate broadband and wifi capacity.

Taking advantage of the E-rate program can substantially minimize the expense of in-school internet connectivity: depending on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, districts can qualify for up to a 90% discount on these expenses.

For out-of-school connectivity, $180 per year is the low-end MDE estimate for a hotspot with filtering and 200MB of data (they estimate $480 for a separate model with unlimited data but no filtering). 15
In addition to these four core components, districts may have to pay for increased staff capacity related to one-to-one. This may include everything from providing salaries for additional staff members to paying for professional development and training for existing staff. However, because the need for additional staff capacity will vary tremendously from district to district, and because salaries are also variable depending on the district, we have chosen not to give an estimate for this budget component. Districts should nonetheless give careful consideration to the cost and importance of creating additional staff capacity.

Can schools utilize COVID-19 relief funds to finance their one-to-one initiative?

As a result of multiple COVID-19 relief bills enacted by Congress in the past year, schools around the nation have been able to access billions of dollars worth of relief funds. Most prominent has been the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, which the American Rescue Plan Act boosted by an additional $122.8 billion ($1.63 billion for Mississippi, to be primarily disbursed to districts in proportion to Title I funding). Among the eligible expenses for these funds is educational technology. This is in addition to $150 million in federal funds disbursed by the state through the Equity in Distance Learning Act (SB 3044), which allowed Mississippi school districts to order nearly 390,000 one-to-one devices with only a 20% co-pay (which could be paid with ESSER funds), and the Mississippi Pandemic Response Broadband Availability Act (HB 1788), which distributed an additional $39 million for the purpose of expanding broadband access.

These funds have created a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for schools to finance the implementation of one-to-one technology initiatives, but districts should recognize that this funding is temporary. So while districts may utilize COVID-19 relief funds for many of the initial start-up costs associated with implementing a one-to-one initiative, there needs to be a longer-term plan to cover the recurring costs of maintaining such an initiative.