

A DYNABOOK CASE STUDY

TECHNOLOGY REFRESH DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC



Orange Unified School District Successfully Deploys 14,000 Dynabook Laptops to Support Distance Learning

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything for schools across the nation, including Orange Unified School District (OUSD), one of the largest districts in California with nearly 28,000 students.

During a recent conversation with Tam Nguyen, Director of Information Technology for OUSD, we learned how close collaboration with Dynabook and Microsoft enabled zero-touch deployment and district-wide success in the wake of an ongoing pandemic.

BACKGROUND / THE CHALLENGE

What was OUSD's history with Dynabook laptops?

Several years ago, we standardized on Portégé® Z30 devices (from Dynabook) for our 3,000 staff members. We found that the Portégé Z30 laptop had the feature set we wanted, the thin and light form factor we wanted, and from an IT perspective, we liked that Dynabook was nearby in Orange County and offered very responsive support. Everyone has been pleased with the program, and we continue to use Dynabook to refresh staff laptops year after year.



What was driving OUSD's need for new student laptops this year?

Because of the success of our staff laptop program, we were considering expanding to student devices, as well. Before the pandemic, we were very close to achieving a 1:1 ratio (one device per student) but some stakeholders weren't convinced that technology for every student was a critical need. The COVID-19 pandemic definitely changed that.

How did COVID-19 disrupt your district's plans?

On March 13, we got the notice that students were going home immediately. They needed to grab any available device and go home. With distance learning now a requirement, having a device wasn't a "nice to have"—it was a necessity.

Our district realized we didn't have enough devices, and the 1:1 ratio that we nearly had was not sufficient because many of our devices were 5-7 years old. They weren't able to keep up. Student devices now needed to support Zoom calls and needed lots of bandwidth for video—very difficult on a 7-year-old Chromebook. We needed to invest in new devices.

What student devices were currently in use, and what were some of the drawbacks?

As a district, we had a mix of Chromebooks (about 60-percent of our fleet), iPads and Dynabook PCs (making up the remaining 40-percent).

Going through the pandemic, however, we saw that Chromebooks were not performing; and we saw that the iPads were very limited in what they can do outside of grades K-1. Students in 2nd grade and up prefer more of a clamshell laptop; the keyboard is a necessity. So iPads were out. And the Chromebooks weren't really performing—it was pretty taxing to do live video with 30 people and have a lot of interactive tabs open. Plus, Chromebook manufacturers simply couldn't produce enough devices to keep up with demand.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT STUDENT DEVICE

Why did you choose Dynabook Tecra® A40 laptops over Chromebooks and iPads?

We had previously vetted the Dynabook Tecra C40 as a student PC device, so we knew we had very responsive local IT support from Dynabook, both for the instructional side and the support side.

We also got an excellent deal on the Tecra A40 laptops. Compared to other PC manufacturers, the device was very cost-effective. Chromebooks are outright the cheapest, but if you consider that we already had PC management purchased, the overall price differential between the two devices was only about \$50 more for the Dynabook laptops.



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-Tam Nguyen, Director of Information Technology, OUSD



With Dynabook, that \$50 gave us more RAM and storage, which was a big deal since storage is very limited on Chromebooks. We would often run out of resources on Chromebooks because students were using them for Zoom calls, in addition to all these multimedia programs, so that was a big factor—the risk of devices crashing or simply not performing.

Additionally, we loved the A40 laptop's larger screen size. Of course, students can get by with an 11.6-inch screen, but a 14-inch laptop is more substantial, and perceived to be more conducive to spending longer hours in front of a computer than a tiny screen.

Finally, the supply chain—being able to get our devices quickly. Our devices started to trickle in within nine business days of placing the order, which was a huge selling factor—especially during the pandemic.

Considering all of this, the value of these Tecra A40 laptops was definitely worth the extra \$50.

What about ease of deployment and manageability?

Part of our successful deployment was Dynabook's partnership with Microsoft Intune and Microsoft Autopilot, which simplified configuration and settings management. So when we received our devices, they had the right operating system and drivers, and automatically pushed out the right software and policies to the devices. Configuration required minimal time and minimal interaction—making these student devices deploy almost like Chromebooks.

So while other districts were still waiting for their devices, we had our 14-inch Dynabook HD devices in the hands of students, being managed in a safe environment with firewalls, content filtering and antivirus. People are very happy with them.

Feedback and Results

Everyone seems to be extremely happy with these PCs and the proof is in the pudding. I'm seeing iPad and Chromebook devices come back every day to swap out for Tecra A40 laptops. There's a huge want for these devices and zero negative feedback so far that I've heard. Students, parents and the community feel like we are providing them with a device that's conducive to their success in remote learning.

What advice would you give another school district weighing its options?

The biggest thing I would say is this: You can make PCs work for K12 students. A lot of K12 schools may think it's just not feasible—there's too much overhead, not enough IT staff, and Chromebooks are simply easier. But Dynabook and Microsoft have made it easy to successfully deploy PCs to students in mass and sustain it – we proved that it really can be done. I would challenge other school districts to look at the PC option again – technology has come a long way.



Microsoft Intune: This software manages apps and settings on all Windows and iOS devices easily with a simple unified web-based console. It enables everyone from IT professionals, to part-time IT support, and even teachers to get classroom devices up and running in minutes so teachers and students stay productive and school data remains secure.

Microsoft Autopilot: A collection of technologies used to set up and pre-configure new devices, getting them ready for productive use. This solution enables IT departments to configure devices with little to no infrastructure to manage, with a process that's easy and simple.