

A New Approach to Ensuring Tech Access and Accountability

Based on interviews with Duncanville ISD (TX), Davidson College (NC), University of North Alabama (AL), Alameda County Library (CA)

Automated laptop dispensing kiosks from LaptopsAnytime are a win-win for students and institutions, creating more equitable learning opportunities without burdening administrative staff

Technology is a powerful—and often essential—tool for learning in today's modern learning environments. With a laptop, tablet, or other internet-connected device, students can access software and videos that allow them to learn at their own pace, connect with subject matter experts from around the world, collaborate with their peers using shared online platforms, and create and publish original works.

When students don't have access to a digital device, their opportunities for learning are severely limited. For this reason, K-12 schools, public libraries, and higher-education institutions have tried a number of approaches to ensure that students have access to technology when and where they need it.

Shared workstations in libraries or computer labs have their uses, but being tethered to a machine is not always a convenient way to work. Students want to be able to work in groups with their peers, or sit in a more comfortable chair, or take a device with them to class, or move to a quieter area to focus on their studies. What's more, many institutions would prefer to reclaim the space they have carved out for shared workstations and use it for other purposes.

Mobile device lending programs can address these concerns, but they raise issues of their own. Checking devices in and out, and making sure they're fully charged and in good working condition between usage, can take up many hours of library or IT staff time if these chores are handled manually.

LaptopsAnytime's fully automated dispensing kiosks solve these challenges. Like a vending machine that dispenses laptops, the company's



“Every time I visit the library, the kiosks are empty—which tells me the laptops are being used.”

~ Shawntee Cowan,
Chief Technology Officer for the
Duncanville Independent School District

OVER 2.5 MILLION
ANNUAL CHECKOUTS AND GROWING

2,500,000

solution allows students or library patrons to borrow nearly any type of laptop or tablet device at all hours of the day, without the overhead required by a manual checkout desk.

This self-service approach is transforming technology use in K-12 schools, libraries, colleges, and universities, leading to more equitable learning opportunities for everyone.

Here's a closer look at how both students and administrative staff are benefiting from this innovative approach across a wide range of educational environments.

Duncanville High School Supplements BYOD Program With Laptop Kiosks

At Duncanville High School in Texas, a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program allows students to use their personal laptop, tablet, or smart phone for learning. But there are some students in this school of nearly 4,000 pupils who don't own a digital device. And for students whose only device is a smart phone, writing an essay or producing other content can be challenging.

“It's much easier to use a laptop to create content,” says Shawntee Cowan, chief technology officer for the Duncanville Independent School District.

The Duncanville High School library has laptop carts that teachers can borrow for instruction, but district leaders wanted to give individual students the opportunity to borrow laptops to complete their schoolwork as well. A few years ago, they installed a 12-bay

laptop dispensing kiosk from LaptopsAnytime in the high school's library. The kiosk proved to be so popular with students that the school has since added a second 12-bay kiosk to meet the demand.

From August 2018 through April 2019, the two kiosks seamlessly handled nearly 3,000 laptop checkouts. “Every time I visit the library, the kiosks are empty—which tells me the laptops are being used,” Cowan says.

Students can borrow a laptop by scanning their ID badge and typing their network password into the console. The kiosk takes a picture of them in case there is a problem, and it requires them to read and agree to the terms of service. Once students promise that they will use the device responsibly and will return it by the end of the day, the kiosk dispenses a laptop.

Students return a laptop by simply inserting it into one of the empty bays. The kiosk automatically recharges the device and returns it to its original state.

Duncanville has stocked both of its kiosks with rugged Dell laptops. *"I was a little hesitant at first," Cowan says, "but I'm proud to say that we haven't had any broken, lost, or stolen laptops." Administration of the kiosks has been simple as well, she observes, noting: "This has not been one of my pain points."*

The initiative is meeting its goal of increasing students' access to technology, and Cowan is thinking about adding kiosks at other Duncanville schools as well. "It has been very successful," she says.

Davidson College Gives Students 'A Great Mobile Computing Experience'

Davidson College, a private liberal arts college north of Charlotte, had several stationary lab machines for students to use, but that computing model "didn't fit our vision for the future," says John McCann, user success manager for the college.

To accommodate students' needs in a mobile computing world, Davidson College piloted the use of a six-bay laptop dispensing kiosk from LaptopsAnytime a few years ago. The kiosk distributes three MacBook Airs and three Dell laptops.

Like Duncanville High School, the college soon added more devices to meet student demand. It now has two 12-bay kiosks in addition to the original six-bay unit. Even though Davidson is a small college, with only 2,000 students, "we have thousands of device checkouts per year," McCann says.

"Our overhead and maintenance is pretty low, given that we have 30 devices being checked out multiple times per day," he observes. "It's time-saving for our IT staff, but it also gives our students a great mobile computing experience."

~ John McCann,
User Success Manager for Davidson College

In placing the kiosks strategically around campus, the college turned to students for their input on where the kiosks should go. One kiosk is located in the library, one is located in the student union, and the third can be found in one of the college's academic buildings. "We placed them in convenient and accessible locations where students tend to get together and study," McCann explains.

Students often borrow a laptop if they don't have a robust enough device to handle the task they are looking to accomplish, or if their own personal computing device is broken. "Athletes sometimes use them when they go on weekend trips," McCann says, "and some people check out a laptop for a few minutes just to print something."

The typical loan period is six hours, he says, because "we don't deploy chargers with the computers." But students aren't penalized if they return a device late; the goal is to help students meet their academic needs.

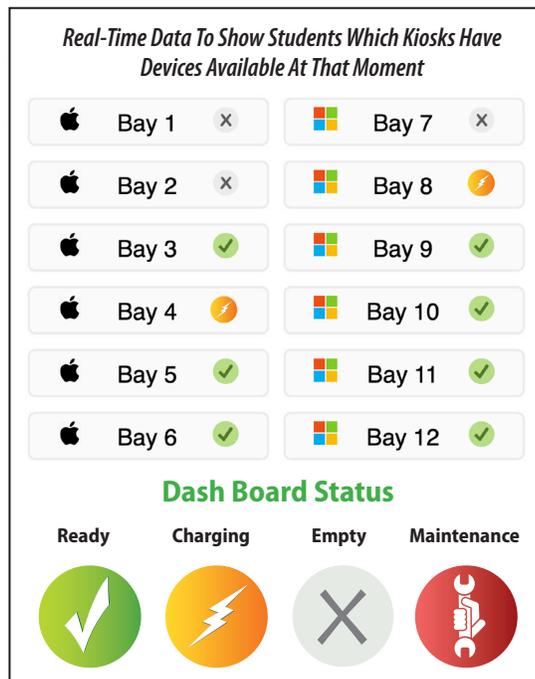
If a student doesn't return a device on time, the library receives an automated alert. If the device hasn't been returned within a few days, then someone from the library will send a reminder to the student to return the device.

"We also use this program to identify the students who have recurring needs and offer them a better solution," McCann says. For instance, if a student is borrowing a laptop dozens of times per semester,

the college will lend that student an older laptop to use for the entire semester, so that he or she doesn't have to keep using the kiosks.

As an added convenience, Davidson has created a website (<https://laptops.davidson.edu>) that pulls real-time data to show students which kiosks have devices available at that moment.

With this automated solution, management of the devices is largely hands-off. "Our overhead and maintenance is pretty low, given that we have 30 devices being checked out multiple times per day," he



observes. "It's time-saving for our IT staff, but it also gives our students a great mobile computing experience."

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UNA Automates Its Laptop Checkout Program With A Time-Saving Solution

The University of North Alabama, which serves about 7,600 students, operated a laptop check-out program from the library circulation desk, but the program was time-consuming for staff to manage. Every time a device was returned, library staff had to reset the machine, charge the battery, and make sure it was in good working order. The university has found a simpler solution with LaptopsAnytime kiosks, which fully automate this process.

UNA started with a 12-bay kiosk and quickly added an 18-bay companion to meet student demand. The kiosks, which dispense HP laptops, are located in the library and are connected to the library's circulation system.

"I worked in a library that distributed laptops manually to members, and I remember how cumbersome the process was," Sica says. "We've come a long way with this technology. Our staff love LaptopsAnytime. It's essentially a service that serves itself."

~ Deb Sica,
Deputy County Librarian
Alameda County Library

"The system works like a champ," says Ethan Humphres, executive director of IT services. "It's very simple, and it saves us time."

At UNA, students can check out the devices for a three-hour period, although this rule is not strictly enforced; like Davidson, the university wants students to be able to accom-

plish what they need. "So far, students have been good about returning them on time," Humphres says.

Students have been very receptive to checking out laptops through an automated kiosk, he says, noting that usage is especially high around exam time. As for Humphres, he appreciates that the kiosks are manufactured in the United States—something that's important within his campus culture.

"We have been extremely pleased," he says of the LaptopsAnytime system. "It has worked well for us. We're looking at possibly adding a kiosk in our student union, and maybe offering power blocks for students to check out as well."

Alameda County Library Helps Close The Digital Divide With A Self-Service Option

Using LaptopsAnytime kiosks to lend digital devices to users is a key strategy in the Alameda County Library's push to give all stakeholders equitable access to technology.



With its East Bay location near San Francisco, Alameda County might be mistaken for a technology-rich area. But the truth is that it's a very economically diverse region, says Deputy County Librarian Deb Sica—and a significant portion of the county's 1.5 million residents lack access to a computer at home.

"We are north of Silicon Valley and east of the San Francisco tech bubble," she says. "The divide between the haves and have-nots here is huge."



out when it exceeds the minimum battery life established by the institution.

Automatic notifications help administrators manage the laptop dispensing program as needed. For instance, an administrator can receive notification for late returns, bays that fail, or devices identified by end users as requiring service. Administrators can also visit LaptopsAnytime's website to view usage reports and logs of every event that has occurred at a kiosk. All transactions are recorded by a camera that is built into each kiosk, so administrators can identify users by face if there are any problems.

Another unique feature is that the kiosks will distribute laptops to users on a rotating basis, so that all devices receive similar usage. This helps prevent some devices from receiving more wear and tear than others.

To help close this divide, eight of the county's 10 library sites contain a kiosk for dispensing laptops to anyone with a library card. "We wanted to offer a service that wasn't taxing on our staff," Sica says. "And we've had excellent member feedback. They love the ease of use, and they love that it gives them the freedom to work where they are comfortable."

In concert with LaptopsAnytime, Alameda County Library has set up an on-screen survey that comes up at end of every laptop return. The survey gives librarians better insight into their patrons' technology needs. What's more, the county has collected data on who is using the kiosks. The information reveals that users range from grade-school students to older adults, proving that the kiosks are helping students learn more effectively.

"I worked in a library that distributed laptops manually to members, and I remember how cumbersome the process was," Sica says. "We've come a long way with this technology. Our staff love LaptopsAnytime. It's essentially a service that serves itself."

A Win-Win For Students And Administrators

As these examples show, the kiosks can be programmed to fit whatever local policies that institutions desire. They integrate with an institution's authentication database to verify the identity of users, and administration on the back end is minimal.

When a laptop is pushed back into an empty bay in the locked position, it is docked to a power source so that it can recharge automatically. What's more, institutions can opt to license Deep Freeze or a similar program for restoring the laptop to its initial state.

The laptops communicate their presence through an RFID card reader built into every bay, and they also communicate their battery life to LaptopsAnytime's central server. A laptop will only be checked

LaptopsAnytime kiosks can accommodate enterprise-quality laptops from all leading vendors, as well as select Chromebooks and iPads, and Android tablets. Institutions are responsible for purchasing the devices, and LaptopsAnytime will deliver kiosks that can handle whatever many of the popular devices an institution deploys—complete with customized graphics, oftentimes in the same system.

All of the schools, colleges, and libraries in these examples have employed custom kiosk graphics to help brand the service to their institution, and all do a great job of promoting the self-service program to their students and patrons. User surveys and data from usage reports suggest the programs are transforming users' computing experience—giving them easy access to flexible, mobile computing tools without creating an additional burden for administrators.

"Students love the freedom and convenience that the solution provides. It's an innovative option for giving our students a mobile learning experience," McCann concludes. "It has been a real success from both our perspective and our students!"

About LaptopsAnytime:

LaptopsAnytime is "shaking up" the Public Access Computing Market by taking self-service laptop/tablet/portable 110V power charger lending loans, checkout and borrowing to the next level. LaptopsAnytime's Automated Laptop Dispensing Kiosks are modular, configurable and custom branded stations that are used to dispense wide range of laptop models to students on-demand. Kiosks track, recharge and reset devices back to pre-set state to enable institutions to set up successful self-service tech access programs the way they want.

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