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School Districts Are Going Into Debt To Keep Up With Technology.

In Silicon Valley, cash-strapped schools are selling bonds to buy student laptops

SAN JOSE, Calif. — At James Lick High School the slate-gray Chromebooks are ubiquitous. Rolling cabinets stocked with dozens of the laptops sit in classrooms where teachers assign them to students for everything from researching hereditary DNA to writing essays. In this majority-Latino school of 1,100 students, 84 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, a federal measure of poverty, school principal David Porter says making the devices readily available is a significant part of an effort to develop digital literacy for students who might otherwise be left behind.

Nationwide, one out of four teenagers from low-income households lacks access to a home computer and, overall, Latino students have less access than their black and white peers, according to a 2018 survey by the Pew Research Center. “We’re doing a disservice if we’re not teaching the next generation how to use technology. Students being able to access it is critical,” Porter says.

Using computers and online resources in the classroom is part of a growing trend in education. What’s unusual about James Lick’s Chromebook program isn’t the laptops themselves, but how they were paid for. In this school on the eastern edge of Silicon Valley, just a 20-minute drive from Google’s Mountain View headquarters, the district has put these laptops into students’ hands by going into debt, authorizing a \$16.2 million sale of general-obligation bonds intended almost exclusively for the laptop purchases.

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