District Response to the PTA Council of Howard County
Technology Survey Findings

The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) recognizes the significant value that technology brings to teaching and learning when used intentionally and purposefully. Digital tools have expanded opportunities for students to access content, collaborate, create, communicate, and demonstrate their understanding in ways that support diverse learning needs and prepare them for a technology-rich world.

At the same time, HCPSS is committed to continuously evaluating the student experience and ensuring that technology use reflects the latest research, best practices, and feedback from students, families, and staff. As part of this commitment, HCPSS is actively collaborating with the Howard County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTACHC) and other stakeholders to examine current technology practices and explore recommendations that promote healthy, balanced, and effective technology use in schools.

To ensure technology use remains strategic, developmentally appropriate, and impactful, integration must align with the following instructional goals, guidelines, and supports:

- **Instructional Intentionality and Balance**
    - Focus on a defined balanced approach where technology is used only when it demonstrably enhances the lesson.
    - Training on when to return to paper and pencil for tasks like math problem-solving and deep reading comprehension, which respondents feel promote better retention.
        - **Resources:**
            - TIM Framework - purpose is to help educators evaluate and plan for technology integration that fosters student-centered, meaningful learning rather than simply using devices for the sake of it. It centers planning around technology as a tool for learning, not as an outcome.
            - Technology Strategic Plan - outlines how technology empowers learning through thoughtful integration, details the foundational principles and strategic actions that guide implementation, and illustrates direct alignment with the HCPSS Strategic Plan.
- **Standardizing the Digital Environment (Canvas)**
    - Establish a standardized framework for Canvas to eliminate "confusing workflows" caused by assignments being scattered across multiple apps and links.
    - Centralize resources to ensure students and parents can easily navigate different subjects and grade levels

- **Active Monitoring & Classroom Management (Lightspeed)**
    - Provide professional learning (PL) on using active monitoring tools (e.g., Lightspeed) to identify and redirect students who are off-task or working around restrictions to play games or watch videos.
    - Train staff on physical classroom management strategies, such as screen positioning, to prevent students from hiding non-academic device use.
    - **On-Site Device Management (Chromebook Pilot):** By keeping devices in school-based carts, the district can mitigate the "loss of control" parents reported when school-issued devices enter the home.
        - This model supports the 60% of respondents who want to reduce screen time and addresses reports of students sneaking devices or using them to bypass home internet restrictions late at night.
        - PL can focus on the transition from a 1:1 take-home model to a cart-based model, emphasizing that devices are tools for the lesson only, which aligns with the community's desire for devices to be used only when needed.
- **Restoring Meaningful Feedback Protocols**
    - Address concerns that electronic submissions lead to "zero detailed feedback". Mandatory PL will establish protocols for providing detailed comments on digital work to help students identify gaps in understanding.
    - Encourage workflows that allow teachers to assess student thinking more effectively than simple grade-only submissions.
- **Required Training Tracks**
    - Foundational training on district safety tools, usage risks, and current research on the impacts of technology on student well-being.
    - Leadership training on evaluating a teacher's ability to maintain a balanced, safe, and focused digital learning environment as part of the formal evaluation process.
- **Curriculum**
    - Instruction in Elementary School
        - School Librarians and Instructional Technology Teachers provide instruction teaching students to be able to:
            - Identify ethical implications of AI (bias, privacy, intellectual property) and respect others' work by giving credit when sharing work online.
            - Assess the accuracy and validity of information sources.
            - Collaborate on interdisciplinary projects and generate products that illustrate learning.
            - Identify strategies for keeping their information safe and secure online.
            - Explain the permanence of digital content.

        - Technology Teachers provide instruction that teaches students to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to become computational thinkers who can harness the power of computing, robotics, and coding to innovate and solve problems.
    - Instruction in Middle School
        - Students develop and employ strategies for understanding and solving problems in ways that leverage the power of technological methods to develop and test solutions.
        - Select a variety of credible resources in different formats relevant to personal interests and academic needs to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts, and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.
        - Strategies to help students self-regulate their screen time and focus
    - Instruction in High School
        - School librarians collaborate with teachers to provide instruction on teaching students to use technology specifically for verifying information for accuracy and reliability in a world of probabilistic AI
        - PL on teaching students about AI biases, copyright law, and "cognitive surrender" (the tendency to immediately Google an answer rather than think)
        - Strategies to help students self-regulate their screen time and focus as they transition to college or professional environments
- **Parent/Student/Family Resources**
    - Lightspeed Parent Portal - provides near real-time information on a student's HCPSS Chromebook internet activity, and offers the ability to pause web browsing when not on the HCPSS network.
    - Google Additional Services including YouTube Restrictions - YouTube access is blocked on the HCPSS network for elementary students. For grades 6-12: families must provide access through additional services. If consent is not provided, students will still be able to watch YouTube videos embedded in teacher resources on Canvas. Parent/guardian consent is for students' direct access to the YouTube website.

HCPSS is committed to aligning our practices with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) guidance and ensuring AI and all instructional technology are used responsibly, ethically, and in ways that support student success. Families who would like to learn more are encouraged to explore MSDE's AI Family Resources and AI Webpage.