



Developing Effective and Affordable Break/Fix Policies

Policy Options, Funding Sources, and Damage Mitigation Strategies

District Technology Leadership Forum

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1) Overview

Student Fees

Rising Educational Costs per Student Cause Financial Strain for Families and Districts

Providing quality education is expensive for school districts. From 1970 to 2010, annual public school expenditures for K-12 students increased approximately \$6,000 per pupil after adjusting for inflation.¹ In order to account for these increased costs, public school districts often attempt to offset program expenditures through student fees. Administrators may charge a small fee for students to complete laboratory assignments or participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., band).² Though individual fees may be small, they add up—fees can exceed \$1,000 per student in some cases.

Specifically, 1:1 technology initiatives (i.e., programs through which schools provide students with technology devices) can impose large financial burdens on school districts. Beyond the initial purchase of the laptops—which can cost districts tens of millions of dollars—school districts must pay to repair broken or lost laptops and other equipment (e.g., chargers). The technology director at the [Lawrence Public Schools](#) in Lawrence, Kansas estimated the district spent between \$121,781 and \$135,011 to replace lost iPads for middle school students, MacBooks for high school students, and accompanying accessories (e.g. chargers) in 2018.⁴ High school students at **Lawrence Public Schools** lost 650 MacBook chargers in the 2018 school year alone. It cost the district \$31,200 to replace the lost MacBook chargers.⁵



\$4,446.50

In total student fees for a family with three children at [Medina Senior High](#) in 2011³

Often, administrators will charge all students in the district a technology fee to cover repairs, but some states in the US prohibit public school administrators from charging these fees. In addition, mandatory technology fees may hinder low-income students' access to technology and create an administrative headache for principals, who must collect fees from parents who may be unable to pay. This report profiles fee-free policies and other strategies administrators can adopt to help cover the costs of laptop repairs while minimizing the financial burden on families.

Research Methodology

Consider State and District Regulations Before Developing Break/Fix Policies

This report profiles break/fix policies at school districts that forgo mandatory technology fees. This report also profiles break/fix policies from districts that provide students with fully functioning computers (e.g. Windows laptops, MacBooks), rather than districts that rely on Chromebooks or tablets. Fully functioning Windows laptops

1) Stephanie Simon, "Public Schools Charge Kids for Basics, Frills," *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2011, sec. US, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703864204576313572363698678>.

2) Tawnell D. Hobbs, "Parents Face a Growing Barrage of Fees as Students Head Back to School," *Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 2019, sec. US, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/parents-face-a-growing-barrage-of-fees-as-students-head-back-to-school-11566639001>.

3) Simon, "Public Schools Charge Kids for Basics, Frills."

4) Ariel Rothfield, "Lost Laptops Costing Lawrence Schools Thousands," *KSHB*, August 14, 2018, sec. Region Kansas, <https://www.kshb.com/news/region-kansas/lost-damaged-laptops-costing-lawrence-schools-thousands-each-year>.

5) Rothfield.

This report does profile one school district that distributes iPads to students: **Sweet Home Central School District**. Administrators can benefit from **Sweet Home's** tiered repair fee structure that helps mitigate further device damage. The Forum could not identify policies from districts with Windows laptops or MacBooks that incorporate tiered repair fees.

and MacBooks cost more to initially purchase and maintain than tablets/Chromebooks and impose a greater financial break/fix burden on districts that choose to use them. Finally, this report prioritizes break/fix policies and strategies from districts that operate 1:1 learning initiatives. Students at districts with 1:1 learning initiatives often must bring their laptop to complete mandatory schoolwork. With that restriction, some tactics to mitigate potential damage (e.g., taking away a student's laptop) will not work in 1:1 learning districts. The Appendix of this report (**page 17**) contains a summary of each break/fix policy profiled in this report.

Administrators should consult district and state regulations before implementing break/fix policies or funding strategies. While some states allow schools to charge students "fees" (i.e. required financial expenditures), others may not permit districts to charge fees for instructional materials or may define "fees" differently. For example, Texas state policy prohibits districts from charging fees for students to use instructional materials (e.g. laptops) necessary for participation in an instructional course. Texas' policy does allow districts to charge fees to students who fail to return instructional materials in an acceptable condition.⁶

6) "Charging Students for Instructional Technology" (Texas Association of School Boards, 2019), <https://www.tasb.org/services/legal-services/tasb-school-law-esource/business/documents/charging-students-for-instructional-technology.pdf>.

2) Policy Options

Insurance Plans

Offer Optional Insurance Plans to Mitigate Financial Burdens on Poorer Families

Administrators commonly offer optional insurance plans to students and their families to at least partially offset repair costs. Optional insurance programs neither force families to pay a fee to cover damages for all students nor do they place a financial burden on poorer families. That said, most optional insurance plans do not cover the cost of the full repair. Additionally, families who do not purchase the optional insurance plan often pay for the full cost of the repairs. The graphic below profiles four optional insurance plans from school districts across the country.

Example Optional Insurance Policies

- 1** **Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District**
- Administrators offer families the option to enter a repair pool (i.e. insurance pool).
 - Families pay \$75 to enter the pool.
 - Students must pay to enter the pool to take their laptops home.
 - The insurance covers accidental drops, electrical surges, and broken screens.
 - The district self-insures laptops.
 - Families can pay by cash or money order.
 - See [here](#) for the policy.

- 2** **Park Hill School District**
- Administrators offer families the same insurance policy at two prices.
 - For \$50, students receive coverage for the full year.
 - Students who qualify for free and reduced lunch receive the same plan for \$25.
 - The policy charges a \$50 deductible per damage incident and \$150 for a stolen or irreparable laptop.
 - The district self-insures laptops.
 - Families can pay by check, with cash, or apply the fee to their student's account.
 - See [here](#) for the policy.

3

Salisbury Township School District

- Administrators offer a protection plan for a \$50 premium.
- Families pay a \$50 deductible for laptop damage and a \$250 deductible for a stolen or lost laptop.
- Families can pay the premium in three installments over three months.
- Students who qualify for free or reduced lunch can waive the premium, but still must pay the deductible if a student damages or loses the laptop.
- The district self-insures laptops.
- Families can pay by check or cash (not recommended) brought to the student's school.
- See [here](#) for the policy.

4

Southwest Allen County Schools

- Administrators rely on a third-party insurance provider to cover:
 - Theft
 - Fire and floods
 - Natural Disasters
 - Power Surges and Vandalism
- The policies do not cover accidental damages or liquid damage.
- Prices for plans vary depending on the laptop.
- The district employs [Worth Ave. Group](#) to insure laptops.
- Families can pay through third-party website via credit card, debit card, PayPal, or eCheck.
- See [here](#) for the policy.

Administrators may face low family enrollment in insurance plans at initial rollout. To encourage families to enroll in insurance, administrators can advertise that families will pay full repair costs if they do not purchase optional insurance plans. The fear of paying full repair costs may compel families who can afford to do so to purchase the optional insurance plan without administrators forcing all families to pay a fee.

Not all families can afford optional insurance policies. Administrators can offer subsidized premiums or develop payment structures to assist poorer families. For example, administrators at **Park Hill School District** discounts their premium from \$50 to \$25 dollars for students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Administrators at **Salisbury Township School District** waive the entire \$50 premium for students on free or reduced lunch. Administrators at **Salisbury Township School District** also allow families who do pay the insurance premium to pay the premium over three months (i.e., a payment plan). Though a family might not qualify for free or reduced lunch, a \$50 premium may still pose a financial challenge. Allowing payment over three months helps family divide the costs into more manageable payments.

Security Deposits

Require Families to Pay Security Deposits to Ensure the District Can Access Funds to Repair Laptops

Administrators can require families to pay a fully refundable security deposit and take out repair fees from the deposit if a student damages her laptop. The security deposit payment structure ensures districts have the funds to cover potential damages but allows families to recover all their funds if their student does not damage her laptop. Security deposits also reduce the number of individual parents whom school principals must contact to collect repair fees throughout the year.

Administrators at **Klein Independent School District** require families to pay a \$350 fully refundable security deposit if families do not purchase a \$60 insurance plan. Families receive the remaining amount of the security deposit minus any damages at

the end of the year. For example, a student who breaks her keyboard pays \$78.12 (cost of a keyboard for a HP EliteBook Revolve 810) from her security deposit for repairs. At the end of the year her family receives \$271.88 back. See **Klein Independent School District's** policy [here](#). Administrators who wish to impose fully refundable security deposits should consider providing alternative coverage plans (e.g., optional insurance plans mentioned on **pages six to seven**). Not all families can set aside \$350. Also, some repair costs exceed the \$350 security deposit (e.g., shattered or broken screens).

Administrators can also provide a subsidized security fee option for students on free or reduced lunch. For example, administrators can require a \$350 fully refundable security deposit, but only require \$150 for students on free or reduced lunch. All students must pay full repair fees, but a smaller security deposit (perhaps supplemented with a payment plan) can help poorer families meet repair costs without untenable hardship.

Tiered Repair Fees

Establish Tiered Repair Fees to Discourage Students from Repeatedly Damaging Equipment

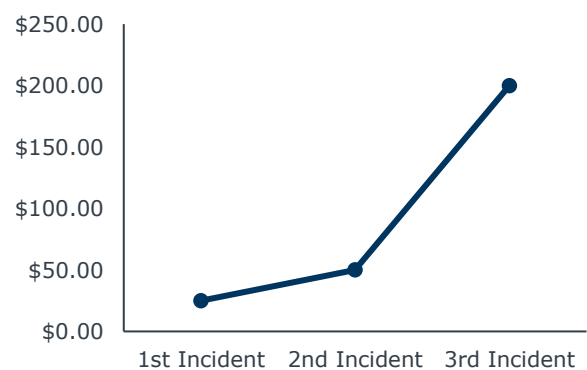
Tiered repair fees (i.e. a repair fee structure in which fees increase after each incident) can encourage students and families to take better care of school issued laptops. Fixed and increasing repair fees do not severely punish students—including low-income students—for their first offense but discourage repeat offenders with dramatically increased repair fees. This tiered fee structure may encourage parents of careless students to enforce stricter device care rules.

Administrators at **Sweet Home Central School District**

implemented a tiered repair fee policy. Regardless of the repair, administrators charge students \$20 after the first incident. The fee then increases 150% for the second incident. The third incident costs ten times more than the initial \$20 repair. While administrators at **Sweet Home Central School District** provide iPads to their students, administrators at districts with more expensive devices can replicate **Sweet Home's** fee structure and increase the initial repair fee. For example, administrators can charge \$40 for first incident for a MacBook, \$100 for the second incident, and \$400 for the third incident. See **Sweet Home Central School District's** policy [here](#).

Administrators can subsidize tiered repair fees for students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. For example, administrators can charge most students based on the following tiered repair fee structure: \$40 for the first repair, \$100 for the second repair, and \$400 for the third repair. Administrators can then subsidize the fees for

Sweet Home Central School District Tiered Repair Fees⁷



7) Sweet Home Central School District, "iPad Policy, Procedure, and Information Handbook," accessed April 2, 2020, <https://sweethomeschools.org/files/user/3/file/iPadPolicyHandbook.pdf>.

students on free and reduced lunch: \$20 for the first repair, \$50 for the second repair, and \$200 for the third repair. This subsidized fee structure still encourages students to take care of their laptops but eases the potential financial burden of repairs for poorer families.

The Forum could not uncover any policies from districts that use Windows laptops or MacBooks and implement clearly defined, tiered repair fees. It may be that administrators at districts with more expensive devices may fear the financial consequences of setting tiered repair costs too low to cover repairs to more expensive devices.

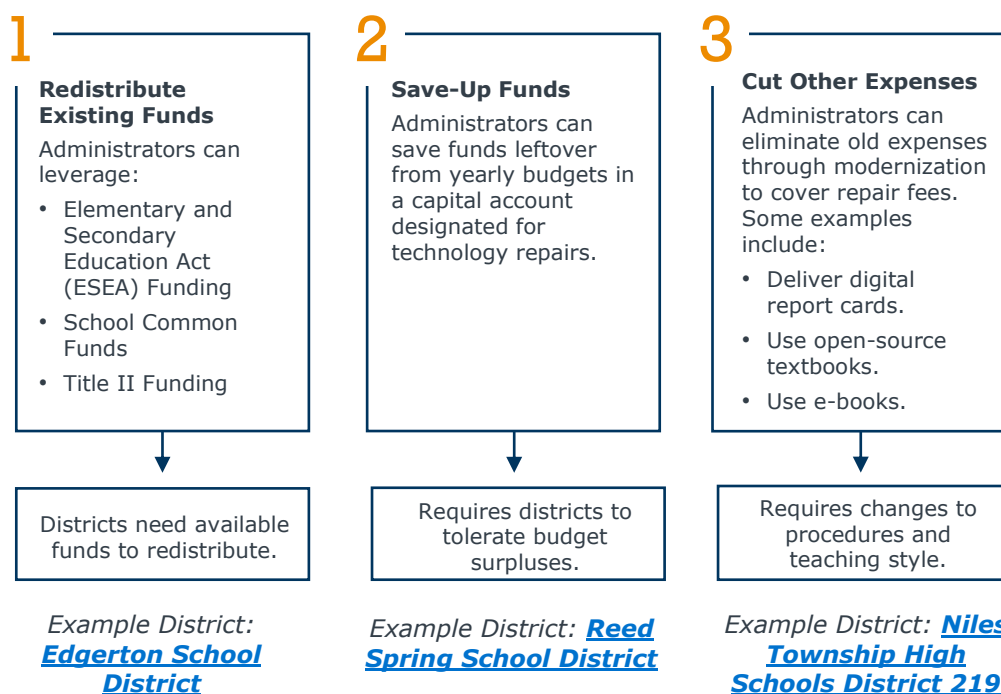
3) Funding and Damage Mitigation

Funding Strategies

Prioritize Existing District Funds for Laptop Repairs to Avoid Charging Repair Fees

Administrators who do not wish to charge families any repair fees (optional or mandatory) still must pay for inevitable repairs. Ellen Ullman—an education technology reporter—outlines ways administrators can budget and pay for 1:1 learning initiatives, including repairs.⁸ The below graphic highlights three of Ullman’s funding strategies to cover repair costs along with the district she interviewed that employs each strategy. Administrators can pursue one or more of the below funding strategies to cover technology repairs in lieu of repair fees.

Internal School District Budgetary and Financial Options to Fund 1:1 Initiatives⁹



Consider Avoiding Bond Initiatives to Fund 1:1 Initiatives and Repair Cost¹⁰

Administrators at [Clear Creek Independent School District](#) and [San Diego Unified School District](#) passed \$367 million and \$2.1 billion bond initiatives, respectively, to pay for of student computers. While school bonds may help cover the initial costs, eventually taxpayers must cover the cost of the bond, plus interest. Ross Rubenstein, a professor of education policy and public finance recommends that school district administrators should reserve bond measures (i.e., long term debt) to purchase assets that appreciate over time (e.g., property, a new building).¹¹ Computers depreciate within a few years—thus, administrators should consider alternative funding strategies for 1:1.

8) Ellen Ullman, "Funding Your 1:1," *Tech & Learning*, June 24, 2013, <https://www.techlearning.com/news/funding-your-1-1>.

9) Ullman.

10) Amadou Diallo, "Cash-Strapped Schools Are Selling Bonds to Buy Education Technology," *The Hechinger Report*, April 22, 2019, <https://hechingerreport.org/school-districts-are-going-into-debt-to-keep-up-with-technology/>; Ullman, "Funding Your 1:1."

11) Diallo, "Cash-Strapped Schools Are Selling Bonds to Buy Education Technology."

Leverage Outside Funding Opportunities if Districts Cannot Afford to Pay for Repairs from Their Current Budget

Administrators who cannot rely on existing district funds to fully finance, or subsidize, repair fees can apply for outside funding to cover costs. The Office of Education Technology (OET) at the Department of Education provides general advice on how to fund educational technology initiatives. The OET explains how districts can employ Titles I through IV funds to support school technology use. The OET also highlights that administrators can use discount programs (e.g., FCC e-Rate program) to cheaply purchase technology and related services. Lastly, the OET highlights some private grant opportunities.¹² The table below identifies some outside grants that can help school districts cover the costs of educational technology initiatives. The table includes private micro-funding suggestions from OET and other private grant suggestions from [Kajeet](#), an educational technology company.

Private Grants that Support Education Technology Initiatives¹³

| Grant | Amount | Description |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Adopt-a-Classroom | Varies | Helps administrators fundraise via crowdfunding, school grants, and corporate sponsor donations. |
| Class Wish | Varies | Helps administrators collect donations for classroom materials, which can include laptops. |
| Donors Choose | Varies | Helps administrators collect donations for classroom materials, projects, and field trips. |
| Computers for Learners | Donations in the form of computers | Helps administrators collect computers for student use. |
| Pitsco Education Grant | \$350 | Helps administrators purchase STEM related materials. |

Damage Mitigation Strategies

Pair Repairs with Protective Peripherals to Prevent Students from Repeatedly Damaging Laptops

If students damage their laptops, administrators can structure repair protocols to help prevent another incident. Administrators at **St. Lucie Public Schools** developed a three-step system to address students who damage laptops multiple times. The first two steps require students to purchase a laptop safety tool to reduce the likelihood the student will damage the repaired laptop again. Though **St. Lucie Public School** does charge a \$25 non-refundable security deposit (i.e., fee), administrators who cannot or do not wish to charge a universal fee can still implement a similar repair protocol. The below graphic outlines **St. Lucie Public Schools'** damaged computer policy. See the policy [here](#).

While administrators at **St. Lucie Public Schools** do not charge students a fee to fix their laptops, the increasing cost of protective peripherals acts as a pseudo-financial deterrent (similarly to tiered repair fees). Administrators can consider implementing

¹²"Funding Digital Learning," Office of Educational Technology, accessed March 29, 2020, <https://tech.ed.gov/funding/>.

¹³"Funding Digital Learning"; Kajeet, "10 New Grants for 2019-20 Ed Tech Initiatives," accessed March 29, 2020, <https://www.kajeet.net/extracurricular/10-new-grants-for-ed-tech>.

both tiered repair fees and mandated protective peripherals to both discourage students from using laptops carelessly and protect laptops from damage.

St. Lucie Public School's Damaged Computer Policy¹⁴

1. Laptop Case

After the first incident*, administrators require students to purchase a school approved laptop case (\$25). Administrators contact the student's parents before the student receives the fixed laptop.

2. Screen Protector

After the second incident, administrators require students to purchase a screen protector (\$50). Administrators contact the student's parents before the student receives the fixed laptop.

3. Laptop Revoked

After the third incident, administrators take away a student's laptop and administrators schedule a parent conference.



Administrators who cannot take away a student's laptop (third incident) may instead institute a financial or non-financial consequence. For example, administrators may require students to attend a laptop care training during a student's lunch or study hall period. For more possible non-financial consequences see **pages 12-13**.

*Incidents include cracked screens, damaged laptop bodies, or any other damage or alteration that can hinder laptop performance.

Consider Imposing Non-Financial Consequences to Ensure Equity Across Student Socio-Economic Groups

The EAB report [Behavior Management and Disciplinary Strategies](#) profiles ways to manage and discipline student behavior with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Justice. Administrators can extrapolate these general behavior management practices to address students who continually damage their laptops.

Universal, non-financial consequences for students who damage their laptops can both discourage student carelessness and encourage families who avoid repair fees to pay. In her article on the inequity of student fees, Foster outlines typical sanctions imposed on students who do not pay school fees.¹⁵ Rather than reserve non-financial consequences for those who cannot pay repair fees, administrators should apply non-financial consequences to all students who damage their devices. This approach deters laptop damage without promoting inequities between students of different socio-economic status. The below list outlines potential non-financial consequences. This report includes other non-financial consequences not mentioned by Foster that can also deter students from damaging their laptops.

- Prevent a student's participation on class or grade field trips.
- Require a student to work or volunteer to "pay off" repair fee costs (e.g. cleaning, tutoring younger students).
- Require a mandatory laptop care and maintenance training session.
- Give students who repeatedly damage their laptops older, less valuable devices.
- Require students to leave laptops at school unless they need the laptop for a specific homework assignment.

¹⁴ St. Lucie Public Schools, "Student Laptop Usage Policy," 2019, <https://schools.stlucie.k12.fl.us/fpw/files/2019/08/FPWA-Student-Laptop-Usage-Policy-2019-1.pdf>.

¹⁵ Holly J. Foster, "School Fees in Public Education," *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal*, no. 1 (1993): 149, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/aef2/ff1a0cc5cc4622bd6e7623d5766c64648db7.pdf>.



Allow Students to Use Their Laptop for Personal Activities to Mitigate Potential Damages

Some administrators note that students will take better care of their laptops if they attribute personal value to them (i.e., use the computer for activities beyond schoolwork).¹⁶ Administrators should not restrict most laptop functions for all students. Rather, administrators should consider allowing students to use their laptops for games outside of school hours or consider allowing students to personalize their laptops and/or cases. As a potential non-financial consequence for student laptop damage, administrators can restrict a student's laptop use to only educational applications and functions.

¹⁶Doug Johnson, "8 Ways to Reduce Device Damage in 1:1 Programs," *ESchool News*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.eschoolnews.com/2019/01/22/8-ways-to-reduce-device-damage-in-1-1-programs/>.

4) Project Sources

Works Consulted

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5) Appendix

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Report

| District | State | Approximate Enrollment | Free and Reduced Lunch |
|--|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District | Ohio | 5,300 | 70.7% |
| Park Hill School District | Missouri | 12,000 | 26.4% |
| Salisbury Township School District | Pennsylvania | 1,500 | 30.3% |
| Southwest Allen County Schools | Indiana | 7,500 | 14.4% |
| Klein Independent School District | Texas | 53,300 | 40.6% |
| Sweet Home Central School District | New York | 3,300 | 48.3% |
| St. Lucie Public Schools | Florida | 41,400 | 65.2% |

Summary of Profiled District's 1:1 Technology Break/Fix Policies

| District | Laptop Type | Fee | Insurance Plan | Security Deposit | Tiered Repair Fees | Policy |
|---|--|------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|--|
| Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District | Dell Netbooks | ✖ | ✔ | ✖ | ✖ | See page six and here . |
| Park Hill School District | HP ProBook 360 | ✖ | ✔ | ✖ | ✖ | See page six and here . |
| Salisbury Township School District | High School - MacBook Pros | ✖ | ✔ | ✖ | ✖ | See page seven and here . |
| Southwest Allen County Schools | Elementary - Lenovo Yoga 11E; Middle School - HP ProBook G2; High School - Lenovo T460 | ✖ | ✔ | ✖ | ✖ | See page seven and here . |
| Klein Independent School District | HP EliteBook 2760p; Fujitsu T734; HP EliteBook Revolve 810; Fujitsu T726 | ✖ | ✔ | ✔ | ✖ | See pages seven to eight and here . |
| Sweet Home Central School District | iPads | ✖ | ✖ | ✖ | ✔ | See pages eight to nine and here . |
| St. Lucie Public Schools | Dell Latitude 3390 2-in-1 | \$25 | ✖ | ✖ | ✔ | See pages 11-12 and here . |