



PM#0040007682

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2011

# ETSB laptop program gets passing grade

'Colour me proud' – Michael Murray



CORRINNA POLE

Grade 4 Lennoxville Elementary School students were quietly working away Wednesday morning as a study from Université de Montréal researchers was officially unveiled revealing the impact and hurdles of the hotly debated laptop deployment strategy.

By Corrinna Pole  
LENNOXVILLE

An increase in motivated and independent students means the integration of laptops in the classroom is well worth the costly investment, according to researchers from the Université de Montréal (UdeM).

Wednesday morning at Lennoxville Elementary School, UdeM Canada Research Chair in ICT and Education Dr. Thierry Karsenti presented the findings of an April 2010 to January 2011 independent study on the Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) laptop deployment program.

In the report titled "Benefits and challenges of using laptops in primary and secondary school: An investigation at the Eastern Townships School Board", Karsenti and his colleagues examined the challenges and benefits associated with the Enhanced Learning Strategy (ELS) integration of technology as a teaching tool.

"The preliminary results indicate the one to one laptop strategy contributes to student academic success at the ETSB,"

said Karsenti. "This innovative initiative to provide one laptop per child has produced incontestable gains in both teaching and learning, and for the future social and professional lives of the students involved."

### Benefits

With data compiled from surveys, interviews and videotaped observations of 2,432 students (from the 3rd to 11th grade), 272 teachers, 14 educational consultants and three school principals, researchers found more positive impacts than negative ones associated with the program.

Karsenti pointed to the decreased drop out rate of from 39.4 per cent in 2004-2005 to 22.7 per cent in 2008-2009 and the ETSB's jump from 66th to 23rd position, out of 70 provincial boards, in five years.

Researchers went on to list a dozen benefits associated with laptops including facilitation of schoolwork with greater access to current and high-quality information.

Improvements to student attentiveness, autonomy, interaction and development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) giving students more future opportunities.

In his study Karsenti showed technology already had a wide spread presence in the ETSB with the students surveyed, 92 per cent of students having a home computer, 63.3 per cent possessing a cell phone and 67.7 per cent stating they used a portable digital reader such as an MP3 device or iPod.

Murray stated the scope of available tools posed a challenge for educators to integrate even more technology such as iPods, video and still cameras, into the classroom.

"We have the potential to do more," he said. "Kids can be energized to experience creativity with these tools and create videos that they can post on sites like youtube. Those are collaborative projects that get students working together."

### Controversy

When the ETSB became the first school board in the country to launch such a wide scale project with the deployment of close to 5,600 laptops, it also shouldered a considerable and widely criticized financial debt close to the tune of \$12.5 million.

The board was required to take out a loan, with the Ministry of Education's approval, which ETSB Chairman Michael Murray says was close to \$8 million at its peak. That loan is now hovering around five million.

After pointing out a substantial investment is made in various projects aimed at encouraging learning that teachers and students may be completely unaware of that yield modest results, Karsenti pointed out the ELS fully engaged teachers and students across the board with an impressive effect.

"We shouldn't look at the cost so much," he said. "What else do you want,

teachers like it and students like it and it is getting positive results. It's a question of equality in Quebec. Without the technology and access to the Internet you are excluding students from having opportunities for the future."

### Challenges

Despite financial obstacles, Karsenti pointed out additional technical and pedagogical challenges associated with the deployment of technology in the classroom.

When it came to education laptop breakdowns and malfunctions were among the most aggravating barriers with less interesting educational Websites, which also contributed to student distraction, being a pedagogical stumbling block.

Interestingly the study also found that students were not distracted by recreational or social use of the technology but developed a 'techno-educative maturity' with the perception that using their laptop for activities that were not educational was considered a waste of time.

### Recommendations

The researches included ten key recommendations including allowing the board to continue and expand its work, development of a online site for video teaching resources and continued research on the strategy including a long term assessment.

"We suggest they continue to assess the impact and see what's happening with their graduates as they go on to CEGEP and university," said Karsenti. "Are they experiencing success or are they finding themselves with less access to technology."

Researches did note that having the Internet and technology at school was imperative for 11 per cent of the students who did not access at home and encouraged the ETSB to find ways to make the same in-class tech tools available outside of the school.

With the independent third party study containing more acclamation than criticism, Murray was unable to contain his delight at the lustrous results.

"You've got to be pretty pleased after eight years and dealing with a lot of criticism to get a report card like this," he said. "It reinforces our intention to continue integrating technology into the classroom and push the envelope even further."

A digital copy of the study can be found online at [etsb.karsenti.ca](http://etsb.karsenti.ca).



CORRINNA POLE

Simon Collin and Dr. Thierry Karsenti from the Université de Montréal with the Eastern Townships School Board's Director General Chantal C. Beaulieu and Chairman Michael Murray announced the results of a study on the boards laptop deployment program.



CORRINNA POLE

Wednesday, Université de Montréal Dr. Thierry Karsenti revealed that Eastern Townships School Board students are succeeding with the integration of laptops into the classroom.