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Technology Meets Education

Davenport Group provides Dell laptops to the Top 10 Marshall County High School seniors as they head off to college.

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Marshall County High School Top 10 Seniors with Davenport Group President Paul Clifford

Laptops Awarded to Top 10 High School Seniors

When students and faculty say they have a good school, they're saying it's a place where students and educators truly want to be. The way a school looks, how achievements are recognized, and the way people treat one another are all unmistakable.

About an hour south of Nashville in Lewisburg, TN, the students, faculty, and staff of Marshall County High School (MCHS) have a shared understanding of what a great school values: merit, community, honor, and service.

For MCHS a positive school atmosphere is the foundation for education. However, several years ago, this focus on a positive school atmosphere proved to be a challenge. With low test scores, a high percentage of drop outs, and academic need, the community of MCHS decided to join the Renaissance program. This nationally recognized incentive program blends innovative ideas with practical solutions for high school communities.

"Relationships come before everything," says John Bush, principal of MCHS, who upon becoming principal in 2013, thought the program to be a great fit. "Building a positive environment in individual classrooms and throughout the school is a matter of cultivating and maintaining relationships. To do this, it takes commitment and consistency from the whole team—students, administrators, teachers, and support staff."



A Relationship Philosophy

Of the 734 high schools in Tennessee, more than half are public schools. Many of those are in rural areas like Lewisburg. Currently, MCHS ranks 41st in the state. The high school has over 800 students in grades nine through 12 and is the 158th largest public high school in Tennessee with a student/teacher ratio of 16 to 1.

Appointed MCHS principal in 2013, John Bush had previously been an administrator and principal in the Coffee County schools for the preceding nine years.

Accepting the position of principal of MCHS meant accepting a challenge. "Five years ago, MCHS was ranked at Level 1* in school-wide literacy and in academics," says Mr. Bush. "The school was in the sixteenth percentile in the State and only offered two Advanced Placement (AP) classes with 11 AP exams given in May 2013.

The faculty and administrators found they were spending time focusing on the problem areas of a small percentage of their students, while overlooking the efforts and successes of the majority.

The graduating class average for the ACT was 17.7; today the average is 20.3 and the 2017 senior class earned \$9.7 million in scholarships, the highest in the history of the school.

What brought about the turnaround? Mr. Bush credits the school community and their participation in the Renaissance program that recognizes the need for students' educational enrichment, and is customized for each school community.

Known simply as 'Renaissance', the program seeks to encourage and reward students as they work to boost their GPAs, increase attendance, improve school pride, and grow graduation rates. School administrators and students have found participating in this program works to recognize and reward top performers, while building relationships.

Renaissance Meets Rotary

Mr. Bush laughingly calls himself a Rotary Club "delinquent"; however, recently he was able to attend and give a presentation on the changes at MCHS.

"Usually, once people hear of the school's Renaissance program, most give some sort of financial support, whether discounts in the community or further academic incentives," says Mr. Bush. "Sonia St. Charles and Paul Clifford let me know how Davenport Group could help these graduates. Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather."



Soon, Mr. Clifford called Mr. Bush and offered the top ten graduating seniors computers, bags, and warranties, with what Mr. Bush refers to as having "all the bells and whistles."

"The school has become an exciting place," says Mr. Clifford. "And Davenport Group wanted to reward their Top 10 for their achievements."

In 2017, Davenport Group donated 10 Dell XPS 13 / 2-in-1 laptops to the top ten graduating students. This year, Davenport Group donated these exceptional students exceptional laptops.

"This is a huge commitment," says Mr. Bush. "A yearly gift to our top ten is essentially a form of scholarship for these graduates."

In partnership with MCHS and their Renaissance program, Davenport Group is seeking to make visible the accomplishments of students in rural Marshall County. To date, Davenport Group is MCHS's largest donor, and seeks to inspire other businesses in the community.

Creativity and Collaboration

Whether a student is in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) classes or digital arts (graphic design, video, and photo editing), chances are computer performance will matter a great deal with downloading and running certain programs as part of their majors that are specific to certain laptops.

As incoming college freshmen prepare for their first semester, they know they must look for ways to cut costs before they open their first book. Since 1988, the [tuition](#) alone of a public four-year academic institution has tripled. And a computer can be a hefty first-time expense, with most students hoping it will last them the full four years.

"I refer to my gift of the laptop as a scholarship because it is an investment in my education and future," says David George, graduating senior at MCHS. "To many [at school], the laptop package may have been viewed as a perk of finishing high school in class rankings; but Ms. St. Charles and Mr. Clifford see it as enabling young minds ... [They] were innovative enough to recognize this, but also caring enough to act."

Ranked number one by college students by [TechRadar](#), the new 8th generation Intel® Core processors offer increased performance with 4 cores, especially when students multitask. The new 8th generation processors deliver up to 44% improved performance over 7th generation processors.

"I was able to graduate in the top ten of my class, having found my niche in mathematics, and I really pushed myself in all the other categories to keep myself well rounded. I absolutely love my Dell XPS 13. I've been using it to finish out the school year and I can imagine how much use I will get from this thing at UAH this fall."

Caleb Estes | The University of Alabama-Huntsville, Class of 2022



Realizing the effect of receiving a laptop as a gift, a parent recently shared this note: "I can tell you that most students in our region struggle to afford college costs even with the tuition-free benefits of the Tennessee Promise... I speak with students all the time whose grades have fallen because they are working 30+ hours per week to afford books, computers, supplies, and transportation costs. Your gift to reward the top ten students not only rewards those students that have worked so hard over the last four years, but also offers a leg up to ensure their success at college. You would be surprised to learn of the number of students without computers that cannot use the cyber labs at a college when they are open due to their work schedules. The fact that you also included the four-year service contract and warranty to ensure success and graduation rates amazed me.

"On a personal note, your gift will help my family immensely. Our family received two of the computers as my twins, finished #4 and #5 in the class. They plan to attend a college in a nearby state this fall; and while they received full tuition scholarships, we still will have room, board, fees, and book costs (times 2). Receiving these computers has made a huge difference in our college startup costs and I want you to know how much my daughters and I appreciate your generosity."

Relationships built between MCHS and Davenport Group have brought together conversations to find out what the school already does well and what they seek to improve upon. Technology ages quickly, and many schools are ready to shift and grow. Currently, Mr. Bush and the school board are looking at a 1:1 initiative with Chromebook carts at Marshall County.

"I can't tell you how proud I am of all graduates," says Mr. Bush. "They are exceptional people who have a lot to look forward to in the years ahead. It's rewarding to me to see their hard work and dedication inspire their fellow students."

*Today with the combined efforts of their participation in the Renaissance Foundation, Tennessee Promise; the community mentoring program Tennessee Achieves; and the Marshall County community, Marshall County High School (MCHS) has seen an increase in school-wide composite scores (Level 3); literacy (Level 2); and offers 15 AP courses, plus college credit bearing dual-enrollment, and dual-credit courses. In 2017, MCHS was ranked 41st within Tennessee. Students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement® course work and exams. The AP® participation rate at Marshall County High School is 18 percent. In 2013, MCHS had received a Level 1 Composite School Growth Score as measured by the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS).

"Ms. St. Charles and Mr. Clifford's generosity enables me to put my best foot forward when I begin school in the Fall. The Dell laptop is a fast, reliable laptop, already loaded with some of the software we will need; this is a gesture that I can only hope to pay forward one day."

Davis George
Furman University
South Carolina
Class of 2022

