The Spring Valley School District is currently involved in many initiatives, all designed to make positive impacts on student learning, helping students to become “college and career ready.” At Spring Valley Elementary this fall, each student in grades 1-5 is assigned an iPad for classroom use. Additionally, our 4-year-old and 5-year-old kindergarten classrooms each have multiple iPads for general classroom use.

As teaching and learning continues to evolve, the portability and flexibility of tablet technology will play a central role. Technology in the hands of students is a powerful tool. As we continue in our journey toward academic excellence and personal growth for all, our instruction and character education efforts need to help prepare students for a world that doesn’t yet exist. Along with the basics, students need to become fluent in new sets of skills, allowing them to safely, confidently, and continuously learn and grow with the changes in their world.

Why the iPad? The iPad is a tablet device that is designed to complement, rather than replace, desktop or laptop computers. Testing and feedback to this point suggest:

- iPad’s compact size, ease of transportability and design means it can be used in almost any learning situation
- long battery life will allow it to be used all day at school without recharging
- it is instantly on, simple to use and manage, and very easy to read
- files are automatically saved and can be stored in the ‘cloud’ and shared in various ways
- students are using a wide range of different smartphones and are already acquainted with touch screen technology
- tactile elements – using fingers to zoom, rotate in, pinch close, or swipe across - as well as increasingly interactive and immersive apps, facilitate hands-on learning
- the level of interactivity and highly diverse modes of use will support innovative learning opportunities
- iPads are capable of providing enhanced eBooks featuring images, video and audio
- iPads (and almost all tablets) fit in with students lifestyles. Their light weight, portability, and ease of use makes them much easier to take and use anywhere in the classroom than even a laptop or a netbook
- iPads support essential skill areas — complex communication, new media literacy, creativity, and self-directed learning
- iPads provide a limitless amount of information through wireless technology. Students can have filtered access to tons of reference apps for facts, questions, statistics, articles, dictionaries, data and many more. It provides a variety learning activities at a moment’s notice
- According to Neilson Survey, as reported by www.digitaltrends.com, 35% of tablet owners said they used their desktop computers less often or not at all now, and 32% of laptop users said the same. Most telling, more than 75% of tablet owners said they used their tablet “for tasks they once used their desktop or laptop for.”
Our Answers to Frequently Asked Questions:

Question #1: Why is the district implementing an iPad learning initiative at the elementary school?
A: This mobile learning initiative is part of our overall goal of creating a 21st Century environment of learning that promotes the traditional “3R’s” of Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic along with the “4Cs” of ”21st Century Skills” :
1. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving,
2. Collaboration,
3. Communication and
4. Creativity and Innovation.

Question #2: How will this “technology learning initiative” benefit my child academically?
A: Children learn in different ways and at very different speeds. Within a single classroom, teachers often identify that student skills, abilities and comprehension can often range the equivalent of four to six grade levels, depending on the skill or subject. Without the appropriate tools to “meet the student needs where they are,” it is becoming increasingly difficult to effectively “differentiate and individualize” learning.

Teachers utilizing technology say students are now more interested in learning because it’s happening where they want to be—on the cutting edge of technology. According to the most recent School Technology Action Report from eSchoolMedia Inc., educators say students who use touch-screen devices for class appear to be more engaged in their studies. Students have the ability to view their schoolwork anywhere and e-mail their teachers anytime.

Question #3: Will the students be using school email?
A: We’ve created a “school” email account for each student 3rd Grade and up. These follow the same form as staff email accounts (last name followed by first initial then @springvalley.k12.wi.us). Using email appropriately for learning (especially their school email account) is one of the life skills digital natives must learn to manage.

Question #4: Can students take the iPads home to use each night?
A: Not yet. While there may come a time, we need to master the in-house routine of utilizing the iPad for “learning and growing” before taking our act on the road (and school buses).

Question #5: Are you no longer teaching children to write?
A: No, students are still learning to write. Consider, though, that a child starting school this year will not leave until 2028. If we think about how much many of us hand-write today compared to ten years ago, imagine how much less we’ll be writing in 2028.
Question #6:  Are you no longer having students read books?  
A:  Reading is an essential skill that students will continue to build on throughout their lives.  We’re not throwing out textbooks nor are we throwing out library books.  We expect to be experimenting further with eBooks and report back on how that goes.  Today’s students are “digital natives” having been born at a time when technology isn’t something “new” to them.  Many printed materials for education are not yet available in electronic form so, even if we wanted to do away with the paper book, it will take a great deal of time.

Question #7:  Won't the children lack "proper" computer skills?  
A:  We first need to agree on definitions of ‘proper’, ‘computer’ and ‘skills’.  When we do, we then need to try to re-define them as they might commonly be understood in the year 2028, which is when students starting today will leave school.  If it is accurate that we treat things as “technology” if it was invented after we were born, consider the annual summary of what appears “normal” to incoming college freshman as the “Mindset List” for 2016 (SVHS students who began school in 2003) at:  http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2016/

Question #8:  Will the school district’s wireless network handle all of these devices?  
A:  The SV Elementary wireless network was upgraded this summer to allow significantly increased overall speed and capacity.  All students may now access our wireless network to use mobile computing devices.  Our wireless network runs through the same filters the “hard-wired” student computer network always has and all our Acceptable Use Policies apply to the use of the wireless network.

Question #9:  What is the cost for a family for this iPad pilot?  
A:  Just as there is no cost to students for textbooks unless lost or damaged, there is no cost to students for using the iPad unless lost or intentionally damaged.  The iPads will access digital textbooks offered free on the internet for the 4th and 6th grade pilot classes.

Question #10:  We understand the intent is for the iPad to be used as a “tool for learning.”  Won’t it provide too much of a distraction?  
A:  Technology as a potential distraction is a reality for today’s youth.  Teachers are using a number of strategies to make sure students are engaged and on task while they are in class, but like any other class we need to continue to monitor.  We recognize the need to teach students to use technology responsibly.  In order to build capacity in the use of a new technology, people need to be able to use the tools for both tasks and leisure.  There are games on the iPad, such as solitaire, that are free and age appropriate.  We believe that there’s value to teaching students that there is a time to be on task, and there’s a time for relaxation.  We want them to learn these important self-discipline skills while under the supervision of parents and teachers, not when their job is on the line as an adult.