NEWS RELEASE
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SPS Families Can Now Access Free Tech Support

Volunteer Collaborative Helpline Launched to Support Students and Families During School Closures

SEATTLE – Seattle Public Schools (SPS) students and families who need technical assistance with computers or other devices used in the continuity of learning outside of school during the Covid-19 crisis can now access a team of dedicated volunteers who will provide customized support over the phone.

The Family Tech Support Center began operations this week with staffing 12 hours a day – from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

• During staffed hours, callers can speak with a volunteer who can provide immediate support.
• Outside staffed hours, a message can be left and it will be followed up by a tech volunteer at the first available opportunity, usually the next day.
• Alternatively, families have the option of submitting a tech form, which will be followed up by the Support Center team via email or phone call. The tech form is available on the SPS website at www.seattleschools.org/family-tech-form.

Support Center calls are answered by a network of volunteers working remotely to provide the technical expertise. Approximately 115 volunteers, many who are parents of SPS students,
come from Google, Microsoft, Amazon, sea.citi (a consortium of large and small tech companies in Seattle), the Alliance for Education and Seattle Public Schools.

“We are so grateful for the outpouring of support from our community and these great corporate citizens,” said JoLynn Berge, SPS Chief Financial Officer, who oversees the school district’s technology department. “The Covid-19 pandemic created extraordinary challenges to keep the teaching and learning going. Being able to solve technical issues for our students means they’ll be able to stay focused on learning.”

***PLEASE NOTE – THE TECH CENTER WAS A TEMPORARY SERVICE THAT WAS DISCONTINUED AND IS NOT OPERATIONAL.***

Covid-19 and the Need for Tech at Home

The extra focus on computers and other devices used outside of school buildings is a result of the mid-March closure of all SPS school buildings in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Computers and/or internet access are a vital part of remote learning – also known as continuous student learning.

The closure triggered an effort by the SPS Department of Technology Services to work toward ensuring that all SPS students have computer access at home.

Around the same time, Amazon and the Alliance for Education announced an extraordinary donation, by Amazon, of 8,200 Google Chromebook laptops to SPS elementary students who don’t have access to a device at home.

With the growing deployment of equipment, many students and families were using computers and devices for learning at home for the first time, or in new ways, and the need for support quickly became apparent.

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From Idea to Operational in 15 Days

Berge said the effort to establish the **Family Tech Support Center** came from broad-based community interest in supporting students during this time.
It started with a simple phone call to the school district from a parent, Rachel Lazar. Ms. Lazar recruited another parent, Julie Forcum, and soon after, connections were made with Amazon, Google and Microsoft.

“At the same time, I reached out to Nick Merriam at sea.citi and he jumped on board,” said Ms. Berge. “We scheduled another call with all the players, including the Alliance for Education and the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, and the Support Center idea really started to take shape.”

With tech line staffing and training materials provided by the tech companies, Amazon Connect call center technology deployed by Amazon Web Services, and a generous donation from the Maritz Family Foundation to provide a coordinator, SPS families are now able to receive tech support, including translated support for the Amazon-donated devices, as well as other personal devices.

“Tech is playing an important and impactful role during this crisis. Providing students and families technical support is crucial to digital learning,” said sea.citi’s Nick Merriam. “As we established the Family Tech Support Center with Amazon Web Services, Google immediately deployed a team of Googlers to answer families’ questions about the Chromebooks as the machines started to get deployed to SPS students – a true collaborative effort.”

The Family Tech Support Center provides assistance to any SPS student or family member who needs help with any technical question about any type of personal device.

Community members interested in supporting remote learning for SPS students can contribute to the Alliance for Education’s “Education Equity Fund” (www.educationequityfund.org). The Fund was created in April of this year to support SPS in providing students and families with the resources, technology and training – despite school closures – that they need to continue learning during the Covid-19 crisis.

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