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Harvest Middle School in line for tech grants

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The Napa Valley Unified School District is hoping to secure a grant for Harvest Middle School to help purchase digital devices for every student.

The “School2Home” project uses technology to help improve student achievement and increase the involvement of parents who do not often participate in the school life of their children. Grant funds for this project target low-performing schools.

According to the Napa school district, Harvest has approximately 700 students and more than 55 percent are low-income. The middle school also is in Program Improvement, which — as designated by the federal No Child Left Behind legislation — requires schools to take corrective measures for failing to make enough progress on standardized tests.

School2Home is a three-year project that will cost \$775,000 to implement at Harvest. Grant money would come from the California Emerging Technology Fund, which would contribute \$155,000 and seek a partnership match of \$620,000.

For Napa, the matching funds would most likely come in the form of federal grants, said Sunne Wright McPeak, president and CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund. The status of those funds should be known by the end of the year, she said. If the federal grant money is approved, Harvest students can expect to have digital devices by the start of the 2014-15 school year.

Harvest would be one of only seven schools in five California counties that would be included in this technology grant. The other schools are located in Oakland, West Contra Costa, Los Angeles, and Fresno school districts.

Wright McPeak said it was the “commitment” and “leadership” from local education officials that

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made Harvest one of the priority schools. Barbara Nemko, in particular, who is the superintendent of the Napa County Office of Education, is a leader in classroom technology statewide, Wright McPeak said.

With School2Home, every student would be provided a computing device — most likely a Chromebook — to use in class and at home. The devices, however, will not be allowed home until at least one parent completes a 6-hour training program, according to the project summary.

The parent training curriculum is delivered over a three-week period in three 2-hour workshops.

“This gives parents the opportunity to develop relationships with other parents, teachers, and school staff, and to increase their learning by doing homework between workshops,” according to the project summary.

Harvest is the only middle school in the Napa school district that qualifies for the technology grant due its high number of students in need, district superintendent Patrick Sweeney said.

Students at the district’s four remaining middle schools — American Canyon, Redwood, River and Silverado — will also have their own computing devices, but those schools are receiving assistance from the New Tech Network and NapaLearns. Harvest is not part of the New Tech/NapaLearns group because it’s pursuing a magnet grant to become an International Baccalaureate school.

The International Baccalaureate program focuses on communication, intercultural understanding and global engagement. The curriculum model has already been adopted by Napa’s Bel Aire and Mt. George elementary schools, both of which exceeded the state’s goal on standardized tests last year and earned Academic Performance Index scores above 800, despite markedly different demographics.

Harvest earned an API score last year of 766.

In addition to curriculum changes and new technology, Harvest will also have a new principal — Carlos Flores, an educator from Southern California. Flores most recently served as vice principal at Chavez Middle School in San Bernardino. That school teaches the International Baccalaureate program and has demographics similar to Harvest.

Tags Napa Valley Unified School District, Harvest Middle School, Sunne Wright Mcpeak, School2home, Program Improvement, California Emerging Technology Fund

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