



21ST CENTURY LEARNING INITIATIVE

Device Buying Guide










& Frequently Asked Questions

2026 to 2027 School Year

A guide for families bringing or buying a device (BYOD)
for learning in the Louis Riel School Division

Updated June 2026 | © Louis Riel School Division

This information is updated from time to time. For the current version, visit your school's web page.

	What's inside	
	Start here: the short version	p. 2
	A note on 2026 prices	p. 3
	What to look for and the specs	p. 4
	Choosing the type of device	p. 5
	Buying used or refurbished	p. 6
	When and where to buy, and how to save	p. 6
	Frequently asked questions	p. 7
	Your shopping checklist	p. 9

No student goes without

If cost is a barrier, your school can lend your child a device, for a few weeks or for the whole school year. Please contact your school's office for more information on how to apply for a long-term loaner laptop.

Start Here: The Short Version

Every student needs a laptop or tablet that can connect to the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) network and run our online learning tools. Here is the quick version if you only read one thing:

Our quick recommendation

Aim for a Windows 11 laptop or a MacBook with at least **8 GB of memory** and a **solid-state drive (SSD)**, in roughly the **\$600 to \$1,000 CAD** range (before tax). 16 GB is a nice upgrade if your budget allows, but it is not required, especially with this year's higher prices.

An expensive laptop is not required. And if cost is a barrier, LRSD can lend your child a device. Just ask your school (see the FAQ).

What to avoid

4 GB laptops. Many bargain Windows laptops, often priced under \$450, come with only 4 GB of memory. They struggle with everyday schoolwork once a few apps and browser tabs are open. A low price is not a deal if the device cannot keep up. Insist on **at least 8 GB**.

Chromebooks and Android tablets. They do not run the software our learning environment is built around, so LRSD does *not* recommend them for this initiative.

A simple way to choose

If you would rather not compare specifications, pick the tier that matches your budget. All three are good choices for school.

Good Budget pick	Better Best value	Best If budget allows
<p>\$500 to \$700</p> <p>8 GB memory and an SSD. Handles everyday schoolwork. A solid budget Windows laptop. Still never 4 GB.</p>	<p>\$700 to \$1,000</p> <p>8 to 16 GB, more storage, and a better build that lasts longer. Our recommended range. <i>The MacBook Neo (\$799) fits here.</i></p>	<p>\$1,200 and up</p> <p>16 GB and a premium build for the longest life. A MacBook Air or a premium Windows laptop.</p>

About This Guide

This guide explains what to look for when you bring your own device (BYOD) or buy a new one for the 21st Century Learning Initiative at your school. It covers recommended specifications, realistic 2026 prices in Canadian dollars, where to find deals and student discounts, and answers to the questions families ask most often.

Windows 11 laptops, Apple MacBooks, iPads, and Windows tablets (used with a keyboard) all work well. **Chromebooks and Android tablets are not recommended**, because the software our classrooms rely on is not well supported by them.

A Note on 2026 Prices

If the prices in this guide look higher than you remember, you are not imagining it. Technology costs have risen over the past few years, and it helps you to know why before you shop.

Why devices cost more than they used to

Global costs have climbed. Currency, supply, and import tariffs on electronics have pushed retail prices up across nearly every brand.

The upside. Today's entry and mid-range devices are more powerful and longer lasting than the bargain machines of a few years ago. Spending a little more now usually means a device that comfortably lasts several school years instead of one or two.

What to Look For

A few factors matter more than anything else. Use these as your checklist.


The essentials

- **Memory (RAM):** 8 GB is the realistic, affordable choice and handles everyday schoolwork well. 16 GB is a worthwhile upgrade if your budget allows and helps the device last longer. **Do not buy a 4 GB laptop;** it will struggle once a few apps and browser tabs are open, no matter how low the price.
- **Storage:** Choose a solid-state drive (SSD), not an old-style hard drive (HDD). SSDs are faster and far more reliable. Aim for 256 GB; 128 GB is the minimum.
- **Portability:** The device should fit comfortably in a backpack without weighing a student down. A 13-to-14-inch laptop is ideal. Tablets should be at least 10 inches.
- **Battery life:** Aim for a device that lasts the school day. Six hours is the minimum; eight or more is better, since charging spots at school can be limited.
- **Cost:** A device in roughly the \$600 to \$1,000 range (before tax) is plenty for this program. A capable 8 GB laptop can often be found near the lower end. An expensive laptop is not required.

Minimum and recommended specifications

The minimum column will work for school. The recommended column is the better value over time, because it keeps the device useful for three to five years.

Component	Minimum (will work)	Recommended (best value, lasts 3 to 5 years)
Processor (CPU)	Intel N-series (N100 / N150), Intel Core 3, AMD Ryzen 3, or Apple silicon (M1 or A18 Pro)	Intel Core 5 / Core Ultra 5, AMD Ryzen 5, or Apple M2 or newer
Memory (RAM)	8 GB (do not buy 4 GB models)	8 GB is fine; 16 GB if your budget allows
Storage	128 GB SSD	256 GB SSD or larger
Battery life	6 hours	8 hours or more (a full school day)
Screen size	11-to-13-inch laptop; 10 inch or larger tablet	13-to-14-inch laptop
Operating system	Windows 11; macOS Sonoma (14) or newer; iPadOS 17 or newer	Windows 11 (latest update); current macOS; current iPadOS


 **Software is already covered**

You do not need to buy Microsoft Office or any other software. Every LRSD student can download the full Microsoft 365 suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and more) free of charge for up to five personal devices, for school and home. Students are shown how to install it at the start of the year.

 **Choosing the Type of Device**

There are three main categories to consider. LRSD does not recommend any specific brand or model. The examples below are just to give you a sense of what fits and what each typically costs in Canadian dollars.

Laptops	Tablets	2-in-1 Devices
<p>The best all-round choice for most students.</p> <p>Good options: Windows laptops or MacBooks</p> <p>Why: Reliable, full keyboard, works with every school system</p> <p>Avoid: Chromebooks (not compatible with LRSD systems)</p> <p>Typical price (before tax) Entry: \$550 to \$750 Mid-range: \$750 to \$1,100 Premium: \$1,200 and up</p>	<p>Light and portable, but a keyboard is required for schoolwork.</p> <p>Good options: iPad or Microsoft Surface</p> <p>Why: Lightweight, touch screen, works with Microsoft 365</p> <p>Avoid: Android tablets (limited software compatibility)</p> <p>Typical price (before tax) iPad + keyboard: \$700 to \$1,050 iPad Air / Surface: \$1,100 and up</p> <p><i>Tip: budget for the keyboard. It adds roughly \$150 to \$350.</i></p>	<p>A laptop and tablet in one, with a touchscreen that folds back.</p> <p>Good options: Windows 2-in-1 laptops (Lenovo Yoga, HP Envy x360, Dell 2-in-1)</p> <p>Why: Versatile, built-in keyboard, supports pen and touch</p> <p>Typical price (before tax) Entry: \$650 to \$850 Mid-range: \$900 to \$1,300 Premium: \$1,400 and up</p>

 **New this year: a lower-cost Mac**

In March 2026, Apple released the **MacBook Neo**, its most affordable laptop yet. It starts at **\$799 CAD**, or **\$679 CAD with Apple education pricing** for eligible students and school staff. It has a 13-inch screen, 8 GB of memory, and 256 GB of storage, and runs the current macOS.

For families who prefer a Mac, this is the first time a brand-new Apple laptop sits close to the price of a mid-range Windows machine. Like any entry-level device, the base model is built for everyday schoolwork rather than heavy video or photo editing, but for most students it is more than enough.

A note on operating systems

- **Windows:** Devices must run **Windows 11**. Windows 10 stopped receiving Microsoft security updates in October 2025, so it is no longer safe to use and will not connect to our school systems.
- **Mac and iPad:** Keep the device on a current, supported version of macOS or iPadOS so it stays compatible with our online tools. Apple devices receive these updates free for several years.

Buying Used or Refurbished

A good used or refurbished device is a smart way to save money, and it is often the best value of all. Keep these points in mind:

- It must run **Windows 11** (for Windows devices) to connect to LRSD Wi-Fi and our resources. A device that can only run Windows 10 is no longer suitable.
- **Check the battery.** Older batteries fade. Look for one that still lasts at least four to six hours.
- **Buy manufacturer-certified refurbished where you can.** Apple Certified Refurbished, the Dell or Lenovo outlet stores, and Best Buy Open Box all include a warranty and a return policy, which private resale does not.

When and Where to Buy, and How to Save

Timing

The best deals land during **back-to-school season (July and August)** and around **Black Friday (late November)**. Big-box stores such as Best Buy, Costco, and Memory Express, along with manufacturer websites, all run sales then.

Student and education discounts worth checking

- **Education pricing:** Apple, Dell, Lenovo, and Microsoft all offer student or education pricing directly on their websites. This is often the simplest saving.
- **Student discount programs:** Services like the Student Price Card (SPC), UNiDAYS, and Student Beans offer extra discounts at many retailers. ***Please read the user agreements for these discount services before using them to ensure you agree with their data privacy policies.***
- **Price matching:** Several Canadian retailers will match a competitor's advertised price. It never hurts to ask at the counter.

Antivirus: you do not need to buy any

Windows includes free, built-in antivirus protection that is all a student device needs. If your new laptop comes with a free trial of McAfee, Norton, or similar, you can uninstall it. There is no need to renew or pay for it and these extra free trial antivirus programs are probably impacting the overall speed of your new laptop.

Frequently Asked Questions

Cost & Support

Q. What if our family cannot afford a device? Will my child have to go without?

A. No. LRSD will provide a device for families who cannot purchase one.

This loaner can be for a few weeks or for the whole year, depending on your situation. Please speak with your school administrator to arrange it. No family should feel they have to go without.

Q. What happens if a student forgets their device at home?

A. Students are expected to bring their device every day, like any other school supply. Schools may have a small number of loaner devices for short-term use when needed.

Q. Is technical support available for student-owned devices?

A. The Division does not provide technical support for personal devices. Families are responsible for maintenance and repairs. Buying from a retailer with a Canadian return desk and warranty makes this much easier if something goes wrong.

Using the Device

Q. Will students do all their work on their devices?

A. No. We neither expect nor encourage device use 100% of the day. It is impractical for battery life, and many valuable classroom activities do not involve technology at all.

Q. Will students be able to charge their device at school?

A. Students should arrive with a fully charged device each day. Charging spots can be limited, which is why good battery life matters.

Q. Do I need to buy a special laptop case?

A. We do not recommend a separate laptop case. A backpack works well, ideally one with enough room and some padding to protect the device. Laptop cases tend to advertise their contents and can be more likely to be taken if left unattended.

Q. Can students print from their personal devices at school?

A. Yes. Students can print to our copiers from personal iOS, Android, ChromeOS, Windows, and Mac devices while on school Wi-Fi.

To set this up, go to lrzd.link/print from your device (or scan the code below). This works only on the LRSD-PSK Wi-Fi network, not from the wider internet. Sign in with your LRSD username and password, send your print job, then sign in at any LRSD copier to release it. Colour printing for BYOD is not available at this time.



Scan to set up printing (lrzd.link/print)

Q. Can students install their own apps or games?

A. Students may install personal apps, but the device must stay suitable for school use. Inappropriate content, or apps that interfere with learning, may lead to loss of access to the divisional network and other LRSD online resources.

Safety & Security

Q. Will students have open access to the internet?

A. No. LRSD filters its internet feed, blocking around 25 categories of content. Students connected to the school's wireless network use the same filters that apply to all school-owned devices.

Q. What if our device gets stolen?

A. Theft can be a concern anywhere with a lot of people, like in high school. Students should safeguard their property and never leave valuables unattended. The Division is not responsible for lost or stolen personal items, but it offers help to deter theft.

On request, LRSD will register a student's device in the STOP Security Plate program, which helps deter theft and identify lost or stolen devices. To take part, let your school know you wish to be registered. More information: computersecurity.com/stop

Your Shopping Checklist

Take this with you when you shop, on paper or on your phone. A good device for school should tick **every** box below.

- Runs **Windows 11**, or a current version of macOS or iPadOS
- At least **8 GB of memory** (never 4 GB)
- A **solid-state drive (SSD)**, 128 GB or more (256 GB is better)
- Battery life of **6 hours or more** (8 or more is better)
- A **13-to-14-inch laptop**, or a 10 inch or larger tablet with a keyboard
- Not a **Chromebook or Android tablet**
- Bought from a store with a **Canadian return desk and warranty**
- Budget for about **12% Manitoba tax** on top of the sticker price

Remember

Sweet spot: a good device sits in roughly **\$600 to \$1,000 before tax**. An expensive laptop is not required.

Can't afford one? Your school can lend a device. Just ask. No student goes without.

Handy links



Set up printing [Irsd.link/print](https://www.irsd.link/print)



Louis Riel School Division [Irsd.net](https://www.irsd.net)

Questions about this guide? Please contact your school office or visit your school's web page for the most current version.