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## Forget PTA; This School Goes PDA

By [Katie Dean](#)

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7:00 a.m. June 27, 2001 PDT

CHICAGO -- Gone are the days when school districts invested in stand-alone computer labs. The trend for schools these days is portability, the better to integrate technology into all classrooms.

This fall, [Forsyth Country Day School](#), a private school just outside of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is mandating that all of its high school students purchase a [Palm IIIc](#) and a portable keyboard.

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According to Palm, it's the first K-12 school in the country to require its students to use handheld computers in the classroom.

The school considered laptops, but decided that with PDAs, "we could do it at a lot lower expense and have a lot more flexibility," said Eric Peterson, an assistant headmaster and English teacher at the school.

"Technology for (students) is not something extra," he said. "They've grown up in a world where technology is omnipresent. I think it's going to make their

learning experience more interesting and effective."

"It hooks them."

The affluent student body -- about 300 high school students -- will purchase the devices this year, and next year the cost will be incorporated into the \$10,700 yearly tuition.

The Palms will cost about \$300 with a keyboard and software, including applications for word processing, scientific data collection, Web clippings, a graphing calculator, testing and assessment, flash cards, a gradebook for teachers and e-mail.

Teachers will be trained to use the handhelds in a short course this summer.

The school plans to purchase 100 additional Palms that elementary and middle school classes can check out for specific projects.

"We hope to get to the point where there are Palms in every classroom," Peterson said.

The PDAs will not connect to the Web, but ethernet cradles on campus will enable students to sync to Web folders and e-mail.

Peterson introduced Palms to his British Literature class in January in a pilot program, figuring that "if it's going to be useful in a British literature class, it's going to be useful anywhere."

The kids used them to organize their homework assignments, take notes, make vocabulary flash cards and take quizzes.

However, he admits "the level of utility in a literature class is going to be somewhat less than a science class."

School officials said they chose the Palm IIIc model because "the color is a nice addition and it's a relatively rugged design which is particularly suited for schools."

The school also opted for the rechargeable batteries because during the pilot program, "somebody was always having a battery issue," Peterson said.

Educators at the National Educational Computing Conference generally supported the idea.

"I think it's innovative. I think it could help students with organizational skills," said Mary Rehfus, middle school teacher at Norridge School District 80 in Norridge, Illinois.

Though she plans to buy a Palm for herself, she wasn't sold on the whole idea for high school.

"I think high school kids would get more use out of a laptop than a Palm," she said.

"If the expense isn't prohibitive, then it's probably a good thing," said Andrea LaForte, a second grade teacher at Belle Valley North School in Belleville, Illinois. "Those kids would probably have an edge on their peers out in the real world."

"I don't know if we'll ever get there in the public schools," she said. "My parents (of students) can't even afford a \$35 book rental fee."

One educator, who was tapping away on her Handspring Visor, said that she and her colleagues use PDAs, but for students, they opted for desktops.

"It wouldn't be practical for us," said Maria Thomas, a curriculum developer in Community School District 8 in the Bronx, which just purchased a number of iMacs for students to use at home. "It might be something for the future."

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