



## Executive Summary:

Use of iPads in MLN Classrooms to Support Student Learning (2013-14)<sup>1</sup>

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In March of 2014, Ivymount School and Programs conducted an online survey of iPad use in the Multiple Learning Needs lower, middle and high schools. The purpose of this program-wide study was to gather information on how frequently MLN staff use iPads to support instruction, emotion regulation, organization/executive function, and motivation/behavior reduction, and how effective the use of iPads is perceived to be in supporting student learning. Staff members were also asked to provide information on barriers to iPad use and need for additional training/support on use of iPads.

The survey was conducted online, and all MLN instructional staff members were invited to participate. Over the course of three weeks we received 42 responses, giving us an approximately 70% program-wide response rate. The scoring key for most questions was as follows:

- 4 = Almost always (multiple times a day)
- 3 = Frequently (once a day)
- 2 = Sometimes (once a week)
- 1 = Almost never (once a month)
- 0 = Never (less than once per month)

### Summary of Findings

We found that MLN program staff members frequently use iPads to support instruction and support motivation/behavior reduction. They use iPads much less frequently to support emotion regulation and organization/executive function. In spite of the fact that iPads are not yet being used as much as they could be, staff members are enthusiastic about the overall benefits to students of having iPads available to support learning, and listed numerous ways in which having iPads in classrooms improved student motivation and engagement. A significant number of staff requested additional training and support in using iPads.

**Instruction.** Overall, MLN instructional staff reported relatively high frequencies of use of iPads to support instruction (just less than 3.0 out of a possible 4.0, or almost once per day). Staff most frequently used iPad to support reading/language arts instruction. Other subjects where iPads were frequently used included daily living, science and social studies. Staff members were less likely to use iPads to support vocational studies and math.

**Emotion Regulation.** Staff members were significantly less likely to use iPads to support emotion regulation (approximately 1.5 out of 4.0, or between once per month and once per week). Staff members most commonly used calming apps, deep breathing apps, and/or relaxation/meditation videos to promote independent emotion-regulation.

**Organization/Executive Function.** MLN staff members were even less likely to report using iPads to support organization and executive function (approximately 1.0 out of 4.0 – or about once per month). Most frequently, staff described using graphic organizers, checklists, and timers.

**Motivation/Behavior Reduction.** As with instruction, staff members reported using iPads to support motivation and behavior reduction with relatively high frequency (overall scores of just over 2.5 out of 4.0 or between once a week

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<sup>1</sup> For a copy of the complete report, please contact Eve Müller at [emuller@ivymount.org](mailto:emuller@ivymount.org).

and once a day). Most commonly, staff described students earning minutes on their iPads as reinforcement (e.g., by demonstrating on-task behavior, participation and/or pro-social interactions), and using iPads as visual token boards.

**Overall Effectiveness.** When asked how effective the use of iPads had been in supporting student learning, staff members were almost universally enthusiastic. Staff frequently described their effectiveness in terms of motivating/engaging students, providing a wide range of supports for student learning, and supporting greater student independence. Typical quotes from staff included: *“Students are motivated to have access to the iPad, regardless of whether or not it is for academic or leisure reasons. It also increases students’ engagement in lessons and on-task behavior, and provides opportunities for students to socialize about what they’re doing on the iPad during break times,”* *“Students enjoy using the iPads, so it keeps instruction dynamic and interesting,”* and *“I think they are very lucky students to have access to this particular technology. I like that they can independently use them to create their own projects, instead of having to take turns on the computer.”*

**Barriers.** Staff members were asked if they had encountered any significant barriers to the successful integration and meaningful use of iPads with students. Approximately 35% reported that there had been one or more significant barriers. Most commonly they identified lack of adequate staff training on the use of apps to support learning, and insufficient numbers of iPads for students and staff.

**Training/Support Needs.** Staff members were asked if they felt they received adequate training and support to implement the use of iPads with students, and approximately 65% said “yes.” Staff members most commonly described the need for more information on the use of specific apps to support reading instruction, social learning, executive functioning, and/or communication; and basic instruction on use of iPads and dedicated time for staff to familiarize themselves with devices.

**Suggestions.** Staff members provided the following suggestions for how the use of the iPads in the MLN program could be improved:

- Provide more training on use of iPads and apps (i.e., including iPad basics, as well as an overview of apps that all students use across content areas – might also consider sending out “app tip of the month”).
- Allow staff to upload apps onto iPads without approval, or otherwise streamline process for uploading new apps.
- Ensure that there are enough iPads for all students and instructional staff.
- Use iPads more consistently throughout the day for both academic and non-academic purposes (e.g., graphic organizer templates, word banks, functional daily checklists, important personal information, conversation topics, calendars to record homework and important school events).
- Coordinate regular team meetings where staff can share strategies for using iPads with each other, and explore apps for solving problems students are having.
- Provide list/handbook/cheat sheet of useful apps (including diploma level academic apps and social thinking apps).
- Provide options for printing from iPads and/or allow transfer of data from iPads to computers.