Microsoft out to regain ground in schools with Surface Laptop

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Credit: Microsoft

Microsoft on Tuesday unveiled a Surface laptop and streamlined operating software in a move aimed at regaining ground in classrooms, where Google Chromebooks have taken hold.

Surface Laptop powered by a Windows 10 S operating system were shown off at an education-focused Microsoft event in New York City, and will hit the market next month in an array of countries with the hardware starting at $999.

Surface Laptop was aimed at college students and evidently intended to set a performance bar for partners, some of which will be coming to market with lower priced computers powered by Windows 10 S to entice students at all grade levels.

"Our goal with Windows 10 S is to develop the open vibrant partner-centric ecosystem we have today," Windows and Device group executive vice president Terry Myerson said in a release.

He gave a list of partners that included Acer, ASUS, Dell, Fujitsu, HP, Samsung, and Toshiba, and said Windows 10 S devices priced as low as $189 should be available in coming months.

Microsoft is taking orders for Surface Laptop, and planned to begin shipping them in mid-June.

Google Chromebooks that act as gateways to programs and services hosted in the internet cloud have become a hit in US classrooms, taking terrain once dominated by Microsoft and Apple.

Computers running on streamlined Windows 10 S will tap into online tools such as Microsoft Office 365 and will get applications that have been vetted at a Windows online shop, according to the Redmond, Washington-based technology giant.

"Windows 10 S is inspired by students and teachers, streamlined for simplicity, security and superior performance," Myerson said.

"I believe it best reflects the soul of Windows."

Microsoft also announced a partnership with educational company Pearson to integrate 3D and mixed reality experiences into higher level curriculum.

The alliance could lead to classroom content tailored for Microsoft HoloLens augmented reality headgear.

Among Microsoft's other education announcements:

— Microsoft is adding a coding feature to Minecraft Education, the offshoot of its wildly popular creator game. Called "Code Builder," the feature combines Minecraft with learn-to-code tools such as Tynker and a new one from Microsoft called MakeCode.

— A classroom version of Microsoft Teams will let students (supervised by their teacher) chat and work together online. In classroom group chats, students can listen to guest speakers, interact and even send emojis and GIF images. If it gets too rowdy, teachers can mute individual students or the whole class, or delete individual comments. Microsoft hopes the tool will serve as a digital hub for classrooms, where teachers can personalize learning and communicate with students and their parents.

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