

Education Week

K-12 Demand for Mobile Devices ‘Skyrocketing’ Due to COVID-19 Remote Learning



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The K-12 mobile device market is booming.

A [new report](#) from market research firm FutureSource Consulting forecasts that shipments of laptops, tablets and Chromebooks to the U.S. education market could jump by 27 percent this year, the product of districts and private schools buying mobile devices in bulk for remote learning in a COVID-19 era.

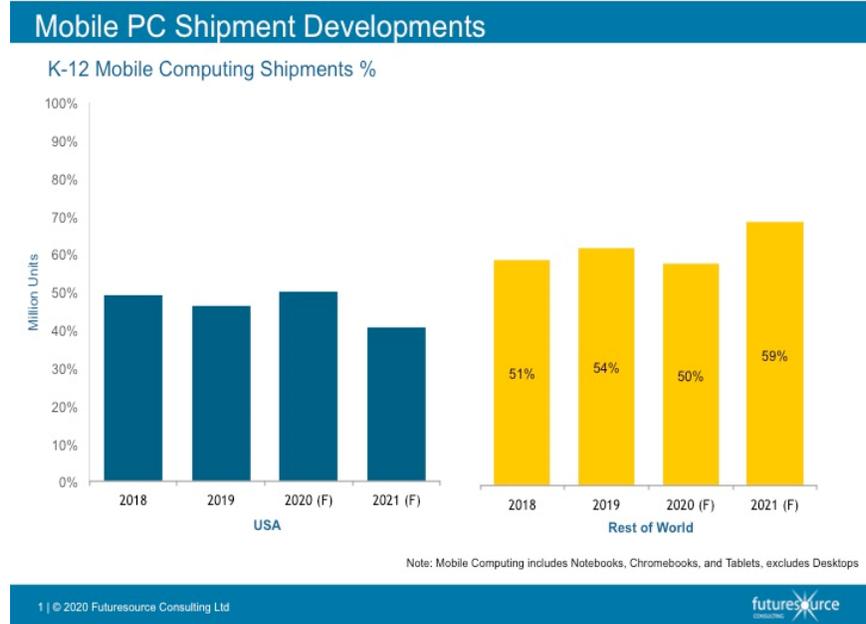
If the firm’s projections hold accurate, it would bring the total number of U.S. school device shipments to about 18 million for 2020, an uptick of roughly 4 million units compared to last year.

And U.S. schools’ demand is expected to stay robust through 2021 but will taper off a bit from this year’s volume, the report says. The firm is projecting 16.7 million shipments of mobile devices to the U.S. market next year. In comparison, annual shipments to the U.S. were about 14 million each in 2018 and 2019.

The FutureSource data is one of the first analyst projections to provide a window into quantifying the device rush among schools that kicked off this spring.

Sales of mobile devices to the education sector are not only outperforming expectations — they are “skyrocketing,” the report notes.

Since March, [district officials around the country have been competing for a limited supply of laptops and Chromebooks](#) — in some cases agreeing to deals for devices with no clear delivery date in sight. It’s the result of a spike in demand from coronavirus school closures coupled with a severely strained Chinese supply chain still recovering from its COVID-19 issues.



Emergency Spending Drives Demand

The same story of unprecedented demand for devices is unfolding globally as COVID-19 uncertainties linger and schools around the world put hybrid learning models in place.

And it “shows no signs of slowing,” writes Michael Boreham, a senior consultant at Futuresource Consulting.

A surge of emergency government spending in countries like Germany, the U.K., Kenya, and Japan, which is undergoing a major 1-to-1 computing program, is expected to continue boosting the international device market in the near future, notes Boreham.

Boreham also adds that the “market will also be sustained by OEM (original equipment manufacturer) stock build and device purchases ahead of a potential second COVID-19 wave during winter 2020/2021.”

FutureSource Consulting forecasts about 36 million mobile devices will be shipped to K-12 institutions worldwide this year, an increase of 18 percent compared to 2019.

By 2021, global K-12 device shipments are predicted to increase to 41.3 million. To put that in context, [the worldwide market for K-12 mobile devices reached 29 million shipments for the first time 2018](#).

But the overall U.S. market share for K-12 laptops and tablets shipments is set to scale back a bit next year. While half the global shipments this year are projected for U.S. schools, the U.S. market will make up only about 40 percent of global demand by 2021 as the rest of the world bulks up on device orders for distance learning.

“Although many countries and provinces have yet to reopen schools, many more are now moving to a hybrid model. This will see reduced-capacity classrooms being blended with temporary classrooms and home study, all equipped with mobile devices to connect the children to a single teacher,” writes Boreham. “Some schools are also bringing purchases forward, activating projects that may have been previously scheduled for 2021 and 2022. What’s more, some schools are adopting digital teaching techniques for the first time, further extending the addressable market.”

Supply Chain Getting ‘Back on Track’

During the first half of this year, never-before-seen global demand and an [already beleaguered supply chain led to depleted stock](#) and outstripped the ability of vendors to deliver devices to schools in many instances. There’s a bright spot, however, writes Boreham — things appear to be getting better.

Chinese factories are still not operating at full capacity and shortages of component parts remain an ongoing issue, along with extended order placement and delivery times due to a reliance on sea freight.

Even with those challenges in place, Boreham writes that “most shipments are expected to get back on track during Q3.”