

District workshop discusses potential of technology enhancement

By Thomas Franz

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP — A workshop during a Chippewa Valley Board of Education meeting Oct. 3 showed the potential benefits of providing technology devices for district students.

The district is considering seeking a new bond program for a wide range of improvements, and a program that would initially provide devices for high school students could be included as part of that plan.

Craig McBain, the district's director of technology, and Sarah Monnier-White, an instructional technology coordinator, led a presentation on what the devices could bring to the district.

Three students and a pair of teachers from the International Academy of Macomb, where a one-to-one device program has existed for eight years, also spoke extensively on their experiences with each student having a Dell Laptop.

"Every time I listen to the teachers and students talk, I learn more, and I understand the value more," Superintendent Ron Roberts said. "The realistic part is that it's just a different environment, because we're trying to do this tenfold."

To accommodate such a large technological enhancement, McBain stressed that it's not just giving students devices, but a large amount of professional development and infrastructure upgrades would also be required.

"It's a new paradigm, so you don't just add computers and do what you were already doing, you have to rethink a lot of different aspects around the classroom and around the school," McBain said. "You have to make sure that your internet and your networking are robust enough to support additional users."

A key goal to implementing the one-to-one system districtwide would be improving access to digital resources for all students to decrease the digital divide.

"No matter how you set up one-to-one, with all of the different options you can encompass, this means that students have equitable access to the same resources and information, not just within the classroom but at home as well," Monnier-White said.

When the concern of internet access at home was raised by board members, McBain noted that Comcast offers an essentials program for families with students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Those families qualify for a plan that provides internet for \$10 per month.

Another possibility would be to include wireless cards inside students' devices to ensure consistent internet service. The Clinton-Macomb Public Library system also provides wireless access.

In terms of benefits to instruction and learning, Bob Hrisoulis, a math teacher at the International Academy, and Rene Ribant-Amthor, an English teacher, provided several examples of how their work has improved with a one-to-one program.

"It seems like more and more students prefer the online textbook as opposed to the hard copy," said Hrisoulis, who said he gives his students the choice of digital or traditional textbook.

Ribant-Amthor said the devices have created more active learners, and have increased efficiency in her English classes.

"If there's a problem, I can immediately address it in that moment," Ribant-Amthor said. "It has cut down drastically on my corrections and re-corrections of my students."

The laptops have also allowed students to produce more personalized work as opposed to traditional essay responses, Ribant-Amthor said, and that has led to higher-quality work.

By always having computer access, she also said that students are not tied to scheduled computer research sessions, which are in high demand at Dakota and Chippewa Valley high schools.

"The students are owning what they're creating. They come in and they're excited about it. They're invested in it because it's them," Ribant-Amthor said. "For their generation, this is their tool. This is their pen, paper and textbook."

While McBain added that devices make it more difficult for passive students to opt out of participating in class because teachers can seek responses from all students throughout class periods, Ribant-Amthor said the devices also boost student inquiry.

"Inquiry within a classroom makes that classroom much more active, and then that activity continues outside of the classroom as students collaborate and further their inquiry outside of the learning environment," Ribant-Amthor said.

The district will continue to have discussions over the one-to-one possibility over the next several weeks. The program could be part of a bond that would provide between \$80 million and \$117 million for a broad range of school improvements.

The district would have to go before the Michigan Treasury Department in January in order to get an item on the ballot for this upcoming May election.

If the \$117 million bond option is selected and approved, residents would see a 1.00 mill increase, which equates to \$100 per year in higher taxes for a home valued at \$200,000.