

Computers for high schoolers could become reality this year

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Technology staff considering Chromebooks

For several years, District 20 officials and the technology staff have watched other schools implement one-to-one laptop initiatives.

One-to-one means each student receives a laptop computer to work on at school and at home.

“Until now, we never felt that option worked for us,” said school technology coordinator Jo Wiggins.

Wiggins and other integration specialists shared about school technology and plans for a one-to-one initiative at a Stakeholders meeting last Wednesday at Gothenburg Public Library.

Stakeholders is a group of community members who meet monthly January through April to learn about different topics in the school district. They are then asked to share what they learn with others.

Enter Chromebook, or a laptop with a Chrome browser, and where technology is at the school, and officials feel it’s time for a one-to-one initiative.

Data on Chromebooks is stored on a server accessed through the Internet rather than in files on each laptop.

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The technology staff and administration like Chromebook, and the model manufactured by Dell, which carries a price tag of about \$300 for educational purposes.

Wiggins noted that technology is mobile and Chromebooks would give teachers the ability to plan and design curriculum with technology rather than using technology as a special event.

“Lessons are being designed around technology rather than enhancing them through technology,” she said, adding that staff has been planning for a one-to-one initiative for several years.

Laptops, iPads and other mobile devices are available to students, she said, but it’s time to take the next step.

Personal laptops will also save time in the classroom.

Wiggins noted that carts with mobile devices are now rolled into classrooms and distributed to students which can take up to five to 15 minutes.

Although high school students have used cloud computing for four years through Google Docs, she said it’s time to integrate the technology more frequently.

Google Docs is a cloud computing document-sharing service that gives users the ability to run a program or application on many connected computers, through the Internet, and all at the same time.

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School technology director
■

The free, web-based office data storage service allows users to create and edit documents

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online while collaborating in real time with other users.

Gothenburg High School junior Amanda Kowalewski and senior Trenton Long touted the benefits of using a service like Google Docs.

Kowalewski said it allows students to prepare documents which other students and teachers can view and edit.

“They can see who’s edited and worked on the document,” she said, noting that she likes that aspect so that those involved in a group project are accountable for their work.

“And feedback can be shared instantly,” she added.

Both Kowalewski and Long said Google Docs also helps them with extracurricular activities, including working on homework while they’re on the bus going to or from an activity.

In fact, Trenton said he wrote his informative speech using Google Docs.

Long’s mother, Lori Long, said another student used the service to write a paper on his mobile phone.

Lori is a technology integration specialist and GHS librarian.

Kowalewski said she checks in with other FFA officers via Google Docs.

Wiggins said Google Docs allows students to prepare documents without Internet service and

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then synch them to devices when Internet is again available.

Providing students with devices such as the Chromebook may mean that textbooks, in some classes, could be eliminated, she said.

“Cloud-computing on laptops like Chromebooks and the sharing of storage of documents through services like Google Docs will encourage collaboration and sharing and extending learning beyond the school day,” Wiggins said.

Lori said Chromebooks and the use of new technology are great tools in preparing students to be great citizens in the 21st century.

“So when they return to Gothenburg, they are marketable and hireable to move the community forward,” she said.

District 20 school board members will need to approve the use and purchase of Chromebooks.

If that happens, Wiggins said they hope to have computers in the hands of students by the end of 2014.

Policies and procedures about the laptops would be drafted during the summer.

“And we’ll need a plethora of staff training,” Wiggins said.

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