

COVENTRY

Schools OK over \$1M for laptops

District will fund purchase of thousands of 'Chromebook' computers for students

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COVENTRY — The school committee approved a financing option Thursday night for the purchase of new chrome books to continue their one-to-one initiative in the district at a cost of \$336,000 a year for 3 years. Students at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School and Coventry High School have already been working with individual devices in the home and classroom for several years through a prior lease agreement from 2013, but now the district is ready to update their equipment to give teachers and students access to the most up-to-date technology.

Coventry Schools purchased its first round of devices in August of 2013 with the addition of 2,500 Acer c720 Chromebooks for middle and high school students. A technology committee led by Lynne Burke, the director of educational technology for Coventry schools, collected and analyzed data throughout those 3 years from faculty, students and parents to make sure they were providing the supports necessary to maximize learning.

The committee is made up of 25 parents, students, teachers and administrators, and they decided to select the February 2017 model of an HP device for \$195 per unit. They considered 4 different models of chrome books, including Samsung, Dell and Acer machines, but ultimately decided the HP would hold up the best with students.

Burke said that with several years of working with

chrome books under their belt, the committee knew what to look for in a new machine.

"We can see we are getting a much better product at a much more economical cost," she said.

At a school committee meeting earlier this month, a parent on the committee, Raul Rodrigues, dropped the HP unit on the floor to demonstrate its durability. Burke explained that it wasn't the first time the device had been dropped and passed it around for members to see for themselves that it was still in working order.

"This device truly has been dropped so many times," Burke said. "It will stand the test of the hands of our students."

The package includes professional development for staff and HP training certification for technicians who will be servicing the devices in-house. There is even a pathway for students interested in technology to also get the certification and work in an apprenticeship.

Students will be able to purchase sleeves as protection with pockets to hold chargers. The standard model will come with an 11-inch screen, but teachers will have the option to update to a 14-inch display. It can lay completely flat, closes like a tablet and comes with a stylus.

Rodrigues, who is also active on the Hopkins Hill PTA and a branch manager for Citizens Bank, said that the technology committee is looking at the district's device policies in light of the new

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round of devices being purchased, trying to determine whether a “bring your own device” policy will still be allowed.

“We think it’s time to put a limit to those, but we’re also facing new technology challenges, like a lot of students are using smart phones. We have to revise our policies around that as well.”

“The work has been so fruitful because we’ve had so many lenses on it,” Burke added.

Financing consultant Sarah Mangiarelli presented the school committee with the different leasing options, only one of which involved the district being able to keep the devices at the end of the con-

tract. They approved a capital lease with All American Investment Group and will be adding the leasing agreement to the town’s master agreement.

“It just so happened that All American came back with the lowest interest rate,” Mangiarelli said. The committee authorized the annual payment of \$336,665 at a rate of 2.975 percent. About \$58,000 is budgeted for insurance.

The next step is final approval by the town council for the attachment to their existing lease. Burke said that the technology commitment the committee made will be invaluable for the schools.

“It’s made a tremendous difference in all of our schools,” she said. “And I can only see us growing and getting better.”