

COVENTRY

Tech teacher gives high marks to laptop buy

By KENDRA LOLIO

klolio@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — The Coventry School Committee received an update on the implementation of Chromebooks in the middle and high school classrooms for their 1:1 technology initiative in the district. According to Coventry Schools Director of Educational Technology Lynne Burke, the district's faculty and students have made measurable progress in learning to effectively utilize the technology in the classroom.

The district purchased 2,700 Acer c720 Chromebooks for students at the middle and high schools in August of 2013 through a lease of \$300,000 a year for 3 years. Burke gave a presentation to the committee which

included data acquired through surveys administered to faculty in 2013, 2015 and in late 2016. She said that one of the more important findings is that student and teacher expectations did not necessarily align with reality.

"In 2014 we were looking at expectations and beliefs, but now the data speaks to the reality," said Burke. "It wasn't what they thought technology would do in the classrooms, but the data suggests we've shifted in the right direction."

Teachers grew in their ability to use the technology effectively, with some noting that they don't know how they ever taught without it. Burke noted that one teacher at the high school who was particularly resistant to the change is now fully convinced of the

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benefit of computers in the classroom.

"These three years have really sparked the learner inside of all of us," Burke said. "There was one teacher at the high school who really did not want to touch a computer and now is the biggest champion of this initiative. It's amazing to watch that kind of transformation."

Teachers in Coventry are now able to easily reach their students outside of school and can use the devices in the classroom to do things like screen share and use educational apps as well as provide timely feedback.

Despite the positivity of the implementation, Burke also highlighted some disadvantages. The devices can sometimes be distracting to students, and teachers have found it difficult to include parents on the work the students are doing. The applications in the Google Education Suite required constant updating which presented trouble for some faculty. Burke said the district's IT department responded to technology issues by "constantly re-thinking how we can make this more efficient." She also noted that repairs and Chromebook care will be something to pay more attention to going for-

ward.

Roughly 70 percent of the students at the middle and high school are now engaging in online digital content, which Burke said is a tremendous achievement especially on the part of the teachers.

CHS teacher Chuck Branchaud said that the use of technology in the classrooms has allowed him to customize his students' learning experiences in a new way.

"I think technology has enhanced learning," Branchaud said. "It's about teachers using technology to make their teaching more efficient and personalizing the classroom setting. The student learning experience has completely changed because I can now custom-craft something that makes more sense to them. It also makes my job more efficient as far as being able to collaborate with colleagues and manage a lot of things going on at the same time."

Superintendent Craig Levis said that the district could eventually begin to think about new devices, but noted that the discussion would be premature until kinks with the current devices are sorted out.

"We're trying to change the culture and we're going to make sure the decisions we make are informed and in the interest of being the best we can for students and families," he said.

Committee chairperson Katherine

Patenaude said that in the future she'd like to see more data from the perspective of the students.

"We haven't seen data from students as to how they feel about what's happening in their classroom," she said. "We need to hear the student voice in this."

Patenaude also said that the committee knew the transition would be bumpy, but Coventry students would benefit from the knowledge of technology.

"We knew it was going to be a process," she said. "You can't just snap your fingers. At the very least we're giving the kids and teachers here a head start."

Burke said there is a technology committee dedicated to this initiative in the district and they plan to administer a survey to students some time this year. Going forward the district will be focusing on more professional development for teachers, policy revisions and guidance with digital citizenship for students.

The trend toward putting laptops in the classroom has grown increasingly in Rhode Island. The West Warwick School Department purchased recently purchased 3,500 Chromebook and Chariho Schools distributed 1,100 MacBook Air laptops to students at the high school in 2014.

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