

Schools will allow students to use own digital devices

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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Instead of depending solely on computer lab, district looking to put emphasis on wireless solution

The Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board thought it had bought its last desktop computer, figuring future purchases would be laptops, iPads, notebooks, e-readers and devices not yet on the market.

But that changed last week when technology guru Anthony Summers recommended installing desktops in computer labs, purchasing droid-operated notebook and allowing students to use their own devices — laptops, smart phones, iPads and netbooks — to access information.

He even recommended smart phones for elementary students because they fit their hands, noting his children, ages 5 and 8, use them all the time.

Since a lab is stationary, the computers should also be stationary, he said.

“If you have laptops in a lab and one is gone, you don’t have a complete lab,” Summers said. “You can buy a basic desktop and e-reader or notebook for the same price as putting laptops in the labs.”

Rather than telling students to shut off and put away their devices, Summers said, they should be taught how to access accurate information with them. The school would provide devices for students who don’t have access to one, he said.

“One of the things that came up in the technology committee was to let the students use what they have, just like in the real world,” board member Chad Hoopman said. “That was a change for me because I thought we had to buy something for everyone.”

Middle School Principal Jeanne Courneene said the most frequent request teachers get from students is to be allowed to use their digital devices to look up information.

“We’re behind in that respect,” she said.

“We’re interfering with their abilities to use their devices.”

Courneene, a member of the technology committee, said elementary school teachers interested in using smart phones to enhance student learning would be the first to get them.

“We’re trying to target a couple of eager teachers,” she said. “It doesn’t make sense to give them to someone who won’t use them.”

Summers said he was quoted prices of \$700 to \$800 per desktop, but believes he can get them for less.

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Summers plans to install wireless connections in all three schools, beginning with the middle school this summer while it is being remodeled. Internet access will eventually be available in most areas of the district, but he recommended against including video wireless because it's expensive and requires a lot of maintenance.

Supt. Steve Shaw said he could provide a few technology-minded students to help Summers install the wireless connections.