BYOD Underway

Last fall, Citizens For Education (CFE) reported on CRSD's plans for a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) pilot program that was to begin in spring 2014 (see "Information Technology In Council Rock" at www.citizensforeducation.com => Special Topics=> Tech Corner). The "D" in BYOD refers to any portable electronic device (i.e. smart phone, laptop, tablet, iPad, etc.) used to augment the educational process. The goal of BYOD is to improve access to information technology by incorporating into the classroom the technological devices that students already use at home.

BYOD Concerns Addressed

As part of the preparation for BYOD, CR surveyed parents last spring. Parent's concerns were addressed by the district and responses to parental concerns are as follows:

1. For students who cannot afford a portable device and students who are not able to bring their portable device to school, the district will provide a device for them to use in school. Currently each high school has 12 carts, each containing 15 laptops, for use by teachers on a sign-out basis.
2. Concern about damage/loss/theft of devices is ongoing; however, the district has stated that it cannot be responsible for devices brought to school and the form that parents sign acknowledges that position.
3. Restriction of inappropriate websites is accomplished via a regularly updated content filter that prevents access to sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and others that are deemed distracting or harmful.
4. The district is investigating access to charging stations with a possible option of having a location with lockable cubbies where a student can leave a device, in a secure environment, while it is charging.
5. All types of devices and formats can be used, including Apple products such as iPhones and iPads; Google products such as Chromebooks and Android phones; Kindles and other e-readers; and Microsoft-based devices such as Surface Pro tablets and Windows-based laptops.

Before they can implement the BYOD pilot program, a teacher must have on file, for each student who is electing to bring in a device, a "Personal Electronic Education Device Agreement" that is signed by the student, parent and an administrator.

BYOD Infrastructure

Currently, a wireless cloud in each school provides access for all computers already purchased, but it is insufficient to accommodate the expanded technology usage of a fully implemented BYOD program. Although fewer computers will need to be purchased if students are bringing their devices to school, expenditures for expanding the wireless infrastructure are rising. One access point, costing approximately $1000, can support 20-30 devices.

Since any use of BYOD would be teacher-directed, the principals gave permission for teachers at both high schools to participate in the BYOD pilot which began in May 2014. Although some elementary and middle school teachers are experimenting with BYOD on an informal basis, with their principal's permission, improvements need to be made to the infrastructure (i.e. wireless access points) before BYOD can be fully implemented. The upgrades to the middle schools and the elementary schools will be phased in over the next few years.

Only three schools, the recently renovated Churchville, Holland, and Goodnoe elementary schools, are fully outfitted to provide wireless access in every classroom. When PTO's donate additional technology devices (i.e. iPads) for their school, they are also being asked to donate

$1,000 for each device purchased to cover the costs incurred to attain wireless access points in every other classroom. Without additional access points, the portable devices will have no use in school because the students will not be able to access the Wi-Fi they need to use those devices.

Since CR is about to embark on a major renovation and consolidation of the middle schools, increasing access points for more devices will be included in the building and/or renovation specs for Holland and Newtown middle schools.

Each high school currently has 72 access points, but more are needed to achieve wireless in every classroom. At the October 2014 Facilities Meeting, Matt Frederickson (Director of Information Technology) and Doug Taylor (Supervisor of Operational Services) presented a preliminary list of summer projects. This list included an expansion of the wireless infrastructure at an estimated cost of $197,000 for each of the high schools. This expenditure still has to be approved by the School Board.

BYOD Staff Development
Teacher training for BYOD implementation is done both in house and by bringing in technology specialists from sources such as the Intermediate Unit, and is expected to be ongoing. The district holds a "Deep Smarts Day" in-service every January where Council Rock teachers mentor other teachers in their area of expertise on best practices, including the integration of technology into the classroom.

CR previously had one Elementary and one Secondary Education Specialist with teaching and technology expertise who advised teachers on integrating technology into their classrooms, but they were cut from the budget several years ago during the economic downturn. As part of a CFE interview to find out about BYOD, Mr. Frederickson expressed, as part of his "wish list," the need to reinstate one or more Technology Education Specialists.

Citizens For Education is in full support of providing Technology Education Specialists and urges the school directors to support the expansion of technology access for all students in Council Rock.

Over the winter of 2014-15 a BYOD committee of about 40 CR staff members will be meeting to get feedback from those teachers, who have elected with the permission of their principals, to pilot BYOD in their classroom. Citizens For Education will continue to report on the progress and evaluation of BYOD implementation in Council Rock.