

LT devices policy gets hearing

Jacki 1/29/14

Lackawanna Trail School District fielded questions Monday night about a proposed devices use policy that was met with generally positive reception.

The school policies, blanketed under the name 'Bring Your Own Device,' aim to open the gates for the 2014-15 school year by allowing students to bring in any form of technology that may facilitate the learning experience.

Specifically, BYOD includes policies: #815, Acceptable Use of Internet, Technology, Computers and Network Resources; #237, Electronic and Personal Communication Devices; and #226, Search and Seizure.

The plan was drafted after a 'skeleton policy' provided to districts by the Pennsylvania School Board Association in conjunction with policies that other schools in the state like Lakeland and Old Forge have implemented.

Elementary Center Principal Tania Stoker led the discussion.

She pointed to Trail's mission statement, which reads, "The educational programs provided will enable students to become productive, responsible, technologically literate, contributing members of a global society who respond effectively to an ever-changing world."

Keeping students prepared for the real world should entail technological interaction, according to Stoker.

The basic idea is to offer wireless internet to every student in the school, which would have its own filtering and blocking options to maintain student concentration on the devices.

Students will register their devices with the school and sign user agreements that define exactly what the school's internet can be used for.

"If any wrongdoing comes to our attention, we'll treat it like a broken rule," Superintendent Matt Rakauskas said.

From there, activities with the devices would be mainly teacher-driven.

For the most part, the plan is a blank slate in terms of what actually will occur in the district once it is implemented.

The policy would act as a flexible sort of learning opportunity for the district and surrounding districts, as there are likely to be many obstacles that come with it.

Several main areas of concern were noted by those in attendance.

Some wondered what sense it was to send elementary students to school with expensive devices.

"This is strictly a bring-at-your-own-risk policy. You have to balance if you think they should be bringing it in – if they're responsible," Stoker said.

Several teachers in the audience said they would have no problem having an area in their room under lock where students could store devices throughout the day.

For the most part, teachers that were present expressed excitement at the prospect of being able to develop more interactive lesson plans and shared positive feedback on what problems they expect to encounter.

For example, one hot-button issue was what to do about students who have no access to technology.

Some suggestions were to allow sharing of devices within a classroom during a lesson plan, accepting donations of old, unused technology, and giving a fair notice of when technology should be brought to class for a lesson.

Another issue raised was whether or not the district expected to encounter server capacity issues when the policy is first implemented.

Stoker noted there was no easy way to test whether or not the district will be prepared once the devices begin to flood in, but that is somewhat the point of the policy.

"This policy gives us the ability to walk next year," Stoker said.

As with nearly all aspects of the policy, the district expects issues with server capacity to be a learning experience.

"We want to do this slowly, carefully, we want to have public input and, by this time next year, we want it fully-implemented," Rakauskas said.

At February's school board meeting, a second reading of the policies will take place, with more room for public comment.

Following February's meeting, a tentative adoption of the policies is set for March.