

Prepared Notes for Board Meeting
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We have two committee updates today, both technology related.

First, I attended a meeting of the impromptu bandwidth committee. The district is close to reaching an agreement that will dramatically increase the internet bandwidth available in our buildings. The decision points, and these would exist in any large, complex organization, revolve around how much bandwidth is required and are any outages acceptable, understanding that it can cost a fortune to get you from 99% uptime to 99.99% uptime. Among the challenges is that none of us have a crystal ball. Is Wifi even going to be the transport medium of choice for internet traffic in 5 years, or 10 years? Anyway, thanks to the magic of a competitive marketplace, we should be able to meet our foreseeable needs at a price point that meets the commitments we made during the bond issue. The economics of this market segment dictate that once the fiber is laid, the differences between “sufficient bandwidth” and “humungous bandwidth” (technical terms) are relatively inexpensive, so we’ll probably go with “humungous bandwidth”. The question of what we do with the bandwidth once it arrives will be partially answered by the district’s technology committee.

The technology committee had its first meeting last week and Mr. Schlarb has put together an excellent group of administrators, teachers, community members and two fairly outspoken students to guide the process. Technology must be in place to comply with the PARCC assessment requirements come 2014-2015, but that’s the easy part of the challenge. The tougher assignment is to figure out how technology can be integrated into the daily tasks of teaching and learning, given the reality that some teachers are going to be more comfortable with technology than others, that even the most technically astute teachers won’t have the time to provide technical support for the myriad of devices that a student may choose to bring into a classroom and that in our increasingly diverse district, despite the rather dramatic reduction in hardware costs, it is not a given that students have reasonable access to the Internet at home.

My personal opinion, for what it’s worth, is that we need to stop thinking about “technology” as something you teach but rather, something that you use to accomplish a learning task. Once our bandwidth problem is behind us and with Internet tablets now reaching into the low \$100 range on Amazon, we need to start thinking in terms of if, and how, teaching and learning is different if you assume that every student has fast internet access every minute of the school day anywhere in the school building. These are not easy questions. In a nutshell, we need to challenge our administrators, staff and our teachers to think about a world with no bandwidth constraints and where every student has Internet access all the time. What would you do differently? I look forward to seeing the many creative responses that are sure to follow.