

## **Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, April 2013**

### **Chromebooks**

The Board of Education's newly adopted Mission calls for our school district to *"provide rigorous and enriching experiences that prepare each student for success in a changing global society."* As a bold and innovative first step toward that mission, the Board has approved funding for a one-to-one Chromebook implementation for all students in grades 8 through 12, beginning in the fall of 2013, as part of their annual Technology Replacement Plan. Chromebooks are laptops that run Google's Chrome operating system and Chrome Web browser. Providing a total Web-based operating environment, all applications are downloaded from the Web, and although an Internet connection is needed, some applications may run offline as well. Chromebooks "boot up" in 8 seconds and require minimal configuration. Because they only run Web applications, it makes the device easy to update and maintain. Chromebooks are also one of the most secure devices available, so no antivirus software is needed, and applications from word processing and spreadsheets to video editing are available online.

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, Connecticut is placing far more emphasis on the development of 21st century skills that will enable students to be successful in our rapidly changing global society. A generation ago, teachers could expect that classroom instruction would last students a lifetime. But today's rapid economic and social change require that schools prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created, technologies that have not yet been invented, and problems that we don't yet know will emerge. While developing content knowledge and skills will always remain important in some disciplines, it has become increasingly more important in the 21st century that students develop the capacity to apply their knowledge from multiple disciplines to novel

situations. Education today also requires that students develop ways of thinking that involve critical and creative approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. It requires collaboration and teamwork as well as strong communication skills including reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

By providing students with the technological tools specifically designed to enable collaboration and tailoring our instruction to give students the skills to recognize the potential of new technologies while learning to avoid the pitfalls, we begin to level the playing field and allow every student the opportunities to become an active and engaged learner. Students will be able to locate information from multiple sources and in a variety of formats. They will build the skills necessary to interpret conflicting pieces of information, assess their value, and determine the reliability and validity of their sources. In the 21st century, literacy is more than just learning to read; it is about reading to learn and developing the capacity and motivation to identify, understand, interpret, synthesize, create, and communicate knowledge to a wide variety of audiences.

Finally, success in the 21st century requires that our students become versatile and adaptive in the ways they view learning. Continuously learning in a rapidly changing world will enable our students to meet the future demands of college and career, as new jobs are created and old jobs are eliminated. For our students, innovation, collaboration, and the ability to communicate and share ideas and knowledge will be increasingly important. Thomas Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*, contends that because technology has enabled us to act on our imaginations in ways that we have not been able to in the past, the most important global competition is no longer between countries or companies, but between ourselves and our imaginations.

Providing the Chromebooks to students is an exciting initiative that requires careful thought and planning. In order to insure that our students use individual technological resources appropriately, the Plainville Board of Education will be implementing a policy that specifies Chromebooks only be used to access educational information and to promote learning activities at home and school. We will stress with our students that these technology resources are a privilege and the district will carefully monitor that students are using them appropriately. We also recognize that many of our students also have their own devices with which they are familiar. This policy will also allow students to bring their own electronic devices such as laptops, Smartphones, Kindles, and Nooks to school, provided they follow the policy for the acceptable use of these devices. We will require parents and students to sign an agreement that outlines proper use. Students who do not comply with the policy and signed agreement may lose access privileges or face other disciplinary action. For replacement purposes, the Chromebooks will be treated as textbooks with the expectation that if the Chromebook is lost, damaged, or stolen, the student is responsible for the cost of repairs or replacement. The administration is also working on a plan to offer an insurance arrangement for interested parents as a safeguard.

Aligned with each of the Board of Education's Strategic Plan goals, the Chromebook initiative will provide a strong foundation for developing the 21st century skills our students require for success in their future. With any initiative of this significance, there will certainly be a few bumps along the way. However, with the vision provided by our Board, extensive planning by the administration, and preparation for instruction from our teachers, our students will absolutely benefit from this distinct learning advantage.