

District 99 says technological upgrades a success

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District 99 gave an overview of recent technological upgrades during the board of education's Nov. 2 workshop meeting.

Every student was issued a Chromebook in the fall, which district staff said improved computer access, as well as equal access to instruction and digital content.

Assistant Superintendent for Student Learning Gina Ziccardi said the goal of the program is to help students become more collaborative and empowered in their school work. She said the devices have allowed students to work in ways that weren't previously possible and to experience more authentic learning.

"They now have the opportunity to take learning to the next level," Ziccardi said.

During the meeting, North High's Joann Purcell, a math teacher and

technology coach, and Nader Najjar, a special services teacher, also discussed several of the technology tools and applications that are now available to students. They said Google classroom is the cornerstone of their classes, and explained that it allows them to go paperless, store documents, and collaborate with one another and with students.

Additionally, Purcell and Najjar said the tools allow them to adjust their teaching based on student performance.

South High's Cyndi Montero, a Spanish teacher, echoed the fact that Chromebooks allow her to differentiate her daily lesson plans and target students at all levels of understanding and help them be successful.

South High senior Sam Bates was one of several students who shared their experiences with the new devices. She said that the Chromebook has helped her pace her workload and collaborate with other students.

Ziccardi then discussed the professional development work being done by instructional technology coordinators Jon Orech (South High) and Lisa Lichtman (North High). All of the in-house training has been led by teachers, Ziccardi said, adding that Orech and Lichtman are cultivating best practices that will help students and teachers be successful.

Director of Technology Rod Rousseau said that this year has been a "massive year of learning" for everyone in his department. The district doubled its bandwidth and along the way, has encountered both successes and challenges.

Rousseau discussed some early home Internet connectivity issues, which were caused by an Internet content filtering tool. He noted that the issue has been resolved.

"It's important to hear that this has made a difference in how you learn—you are why we're here," District 99 Board of Education President Nancy Kupka said.