

GUEST EDITORIAL
WESTERLY SUN
Monday, October 20, 2014

I've heard some recent discussion and have read some commentary regarding Chariho's choice of a MacBook Air for its high school students, as part of the Chariho 1:1 Initiative. I believe that the 1:1 Computing Initiative Committee, Device Selection Committee, and the Chariho School Committee made the right decision on this.

Well over a year ago, a committee of approximately forty individuals, consisting of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and elected officials, came together to decide if moving to a 1:1 environment was right for Chariho. After much research, study, and debate, the 1:1 Computing Initiative Committee overwhelmingly agreed that the time was right to take full advantage of the potential of technology to transform the learning landscape. Shortly thereafter, a Device Selection Committee, comprised of the same stakeholders, made the decision that an Apple platform was the platform that could best support our goals. With vast experience in and service to the education marketplace, Apple was identified as the vendor of choice. Simultaneously, after establishing device selection criteria, interviewing multiple vendors, and 'sampling' a number of devices, it was decided that the MacBook Pro would be issued to teachers and the MacBook Air would be issued to students.

Let me provide you with just a few of the reasons for this choice. First, the MacBook Airs have solid-state drives, which mean fewer moving parts, fewer repairs, and greater longevity. Fewer repairs mean fewer technicians and greater longevity means lower replacement costs and longer replacement cycles. Second, a robust hard drive is necessary so that digital textbooks can 'sit' on the hard drive. We know that some of our students don't have Internet access, and we wanted 'a level playing field' so that all of our students can thrive. And, we want to take full advantage of the cost savings and enhanced learning characteristics that come with digital resources and textbooks. Battery life was also important; we wanted a device that would make it through the school day without a charge. There were certainly other factors.

I've also heard of comparisons to Westerly's choice of a Google Chromebook. It's simply good practice for a district to make its choice of a device (or any choice, for that matter) based upon its goals, needs and priorities. Westerly has no immediate plans to transition to digital textbooks and has adopted a Bring Your Own Device policy for its high school. Westerly's Chromebooks will be used for only math at their middle school; additional devices will be purchased in the future to expand to other areas. When cost and savings comparisons are made, it's important to include all costs, both long- and short- term, and to not omit costs and savings, like those related to warranty plans, labor, textbook purchases, other technology purchases like replacement of computer labs, paper and electricity use, copier costs, and other similar items. As an example, Westerly plans to enter into a lease for hardware for

computer labs; common labs no longer exist at Chariho High School and will not need to be replaced.

What most individuals do not know is that I would not have chosen an Apple product. Throughout the process, I advocated for a less-expensive Windows-based device. However, when the committees chose the Apple platform and devices, I had such respect for the process, effort, and knowledge of the individuals who volunteered a substantial number of hours to make this important decision, that I wholeheartedly supported the choice. Empowering a responsible, thoughtful, and skilled stakeholder committee to make a decision also means that any logical decision must be respected. After using a MacBook Pro for over a year and witnessing the transformative power of the MacBook Air at Chariho High School, it has become clear that I was wrong and the committee was right. The right decision was made for the right reasons.