

By Tom Marshall  
Senior Advocate writer

## Board Approves Purchase of Chrome Books for Students

The Montgomery County Board of Education approved the purchase of Chromebooks for students at its most recent meeting Oct. 28.

Purchase of the approximately 3,200 Chromebooks will cost the district more than \$1 million over three years. Several teachers and administrators addressed the board to voice support for the purchase.

The computers will be available to fifth through 12th grade students.

“I am elated that the board of education voted to provide this much needed technology for both students and teachers,” Superintendent Josh Powell said in a statement. “I am equally pleased that some educators were able to show up to the meeting and express their desire as well as inform individual board members regarding the education value of this initiative.”

Debbie Goldy, district technology integration specialist, answered questions about the devices and tried to dispel any misunderstandings about them at the meeting. Chromebooks look and feel like a laptop but are a new type of Chrome OS, which gives the best of Google Apps, has built-in security and allows for easy central management, according to information provided by the district. They are web-based, rendering them faster with no costly software or update management required, the district says. There had been some reservations expressed primarily by board members Alice Anderson and Sharon Smith-Breiner. Anderson said she was concerned about the financial investment at a time when the district has a limited bonding capacity and stands to pay back \$866,534 over six years as part of a court-ordered assessment through the Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust. Despite those concerns, Powell said the purchase will not derail the district financially.

“Our district has a substantial reserve (\$8,844.636), plenty of bonding potential (\$4,025,000) with an additional \$4 million in the next four years), a low tax rate (well below state average), and, most importantly, the appropriate educators and mind-set to successfully implement this initiative,” he said. Anderson suggested a pilot program in which teachers would become familiar with the Chromebooks before making a full-scale purchase. “Our teachers need to be the first learners,” Anderson said. Smith-Breiner, likewise, expressed financial concerns and suggested a pilot program among a select group of students. Several teachers who addressed the board said that would be unfair to the rest of the students and that the entire student body would be better served by having more available to them than what they have in current computer labs. “We’re behind this,” one teacher told the board. “We’ve been ready for this. We’ve been ready for this for a long time.”

Jeff Perkins, the district’s community education coordinator, said the Chromebooks initiative offered the board a chance to leave a lasting legacy going forward. Smith-Breiner, who said it might be a decision better made by the new school board that will be in place in January, reversed course based on what she was told about the cost per unit, which the district previously estimated at about \$325 or \$110 per student each year. Board member Kelly Murphy made a motion to approve the purchase, which passed unanimously. The district will be given training from the selected vendor and the district’s technology dept. will provide support to classroom teachers. The teachers, in turn, will work with students. The hope is to get the Chromebooks out right away, Goldy said. Students will return the devices at the end of the school year and get the same one back at the start of classes next year, she said. At school certain sites will be unavailable to students and parents would monitor students when they take them home, officials said. School officials will meet with parents to go over district policies

concerning their use, Goldy said. Fortunately, school officials said, the devices are not prone to viruses.