Brookfield Public Schools

"Create Your Tomorrow"

To: Mr. Steven Dunn, First Selectman

From: Dr. John W. Barile, Superintendent of Schools

RE: Rationale for Post COVID Technology Purchase

Date: July 1, 2020

As requested, please find the detailed rationale for the Board of Education to purchase Laptops and Chromebooks in response to the COVID19 Pandemic as we plan for the return to school for the 2020-2021 school year.

Faculty & Staff Laptops

Distance Learning:

As we started our distance learning in March, every teacher had a laptop they were able to take home and utilize. However, these laptops are 4-6 years old and starting to show their age. As distance learning expanded, teachers learned to do more, learning became more interactive and with more live instructional sessions, it was quickly realized that the laptops could not keep up with this increased usage. Our teachers are in need of newer, faster, more reliable laptops in order to meet the demands of distance and hybrid learning modalities. Teachers must have reliable technology in order to carry-out their professional responsibilities. During the spring, the district struggled to provide devices to support and all staff who required devices to work remotely. Purchasing new devices for our teachers will allow the older devices to be available for distribution to other staff who do not require the sophistication of technology required by faculty. Expanding accessibility, availability, and reliability of technology will ensure that all staff members in the district are able to conduct the business of the district. Additionally, equipping all staff will ensure equity, while providing continuous education to our students without unnecessary interruption.

Hybrid Learning Model:

In the likely event that we are in a hybrid learning model, all staff will need access to more reliable and powerful devices that can be used for both in-class instruction as well as classroom streaming needs for those students that opted for Distance Learning. The technology needs in this scenario are very similar to a full distance learning scenario. Reliable technology will be paramount for our faculty and support staff to balance between in-person and distance learning, and ensure we are meeting the needs of all students.

In-District/School Level Needs:

Prior to distance learning, the district demonstrated increasing reliance on technology each year. Our teachers are expected to utilize technology regularly. Teacher laptops are used in a variety of formats and for multiple purposes: 1) for instruction on a daily basis; 2) as a communication tool; and 3) to perform many administrative tasks, such as grading, evaluations, curriculum development, lesson planning, attendance, student record keeping and more. At our elementary level, we use a math curriculum program to support enrichment and remediation in a language-free environment, thus supporting all learners. This tool is completely technology-based and will be expanding up to eighth grade beginning next year. Purchasing the much-needed new laptops for staff will allow older laptops to not only be used by our support staff, they will also be deployed for use by our students as needed to support a digital curriculum.

Chromebooks

Distance Learning, Hybrid & 1:1 Program:

When the distance learning initiative started, it was quickly realized that the district needed to provide technology and technology support to families. We provided technology to families that did not have reliable or compatible devices, did not have sufficient devices to allow all their children to access distance learning, were unable to purchase personal devices, or were unable to access devices due to consumer shortage. It has been and will continue to the district's goal and responsibility to support all Brookfield students in the 21st century digital learning environment.

As distance learning extended throughout the spring, the district continued distributing Chromebooks to families in need. While the district technology staff did "work-arounds" and repairs to extend the usable life of our Chromebooks and to get as much use out of them as possible, (with many devices at Huckleberry literally being held together with tape), there are many Chromebooks in the district that have met the end-of-life status. These devices cannot be provided to families any longer as they are not reliable. With the loss of these devices, the quantity of devices available for distribution has diminished.

Newly purchased Chromebooks will replace our oldest models and will be available for the district to distribute for future distance learning needs. These Chromebooks will supplement and support the elementary level schools. The request in the 2020-2021 operating budget primarily supports our existing 1:1 program in grades 8-12.

In-District/School Level Needs:

Should instruction for 2020-21 resume in the traditional learning environment, we anticipate the need of all of this technology to support both hybrid learning and use in classrooms. Devices will be needed to support social distancing guidelines and if students are not able to travel between classrooms. For example, a teacher may be delivering instruction to students who are in another classroom via technology or to students who cannot attend class in the building. With our many digital curricular tool, such as the ST Math program, our core mathematics tools, and Open Court Literacy - to mention a few, more devices are necessary to support the learning requirements of the curriculum. Students who are learning in the buildings

will require a device throughout the day. Chromebooks in classrooms are communication tools for collaborating with teachers, staff, and other students both in the building and at home. The COVID experience highlighted the need to make use of the digital tool we have in our curriculum on a consistent and comprehensive basis. We were not able to take full advantage of what we had in digital learning tools because we lacked sufficient devices.

Currently Grades Pre-K - 8 have mobile carts available to them. However, we have too often found that our demand for devices far exceeds the number of devices that are available. The COVID experience has highlighted the fact that we can no longer function "doing without" as this lack of access denies students opportunities to utilize the curricular resources that would otherwise be available. With regard to our concerns and requirements for cleaning and sanitizing, we will not be able to have devices shared between classrooms or among students in a reasonable manner because of the inherent downtime necessitated by cleaning and sanitizing protocols In sum, students all need devices available to fully participate in their education.

cc: Board of Selectmen
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