

Select elementary students will get laptops in 3-year pilot

BY JENNIFER PLACINTO
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Walled Lake elementary students won't get laptops in January as proposed, and, for the most part, their parents are pleased.

But parents had mixed reactions recently to the administration's proposal to make laptops available to a select group of fifth and sixth grade students during a three-year pilot program beginning next August.

That proposal was unanimously approved by the board of education.

The "Anytime, Anywhere Learning Program" would cost about \$50 per month per child for laptop leases, a cost parents would have to pay.

Opposing parents were concerned that unless the board finds a less costly means of financing, some students will be excluded.

"Does this become a program of the haves and have nots in a public school setting?" asked Steve Lee, a Novi parent.

Brenda Gelman-Berkowitz and other parents who were against the program said the monthly costs could easily shoot up to \$80 or \$100 per month.

"Fifty dollars, I don't believe, is what this costs," Lee said. "Now we're faced with Internet access charges and a lot of families will have to put in another phone line so they can stay in contact with the world while their kids are on the Internet."

The district is not paying for the computers out of the 1996 bond money set aside for technology, because those funds are for infrastructure improvements only, said William Hamilton, district assistant superintendent of curriculum. The schools will pay the cost of teacher training, which is unknown.

Mike McClintock, a Commerce Township parent of four school children and a laptop owner since 1990, said he knows from personal experience that laptops become obsolete in about two years.

"I cannot afford laptops for my four children and for my busi-

ness," McClintock said. "I can put two computers in my house for the cost of one of those."

He said the pilot program would eventually lead to peer pressure and students whose parents can't afford laptops will feel pressured into buying them.

Wixom parent Lori Rich agreed.

"A large part of their identity is tied to what they have," she said of middle school students.

Rich said there are many moderate income families who can't afford the laptops, but won't qualify for financial assistance. Hamilton stressed the whole program is one of choice. It will be offered to a select group of current fourth and fifth graders in Walled Lake, Pleasant Lake, Hickory Woods and Keith elementary schools. If there aren't enough of these students, who were chosen for the original pilot program, other fifth and sixth graders from those schools and the four middle schools will have the opportunity to participate.

The program, which was proposed to be offered to a group of

third through fifth graders in January, was altered following the parent survey.

Of the 93 percent of fifth grade parents who responded, about 40 percent said they weren't willing to pay for the laptops.

Other parent concerns included educational benefits, responsibility of young children carrying the laptops to and from school and access to the Internet.

The district plans to find a service which will limit access,

WALLED LAKE

Hamilton said.

Parents who supported the concept said they believed it would increase their students' knowledge of technology and provide real world opportunities. Some school officials and parents said the laptop program is also a way to motivate children to learn.

Hamilton said he envisions a

Just because something is old doesn't mean it isn't valuable.



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AGENDAS

The following are agendas for some of the governmental meetings for the coming week:

Farmington Hills Zoning Board of Appeals
Special meeting
7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 15
City hall, 31555 11 Mile Road

1. Request variances to remodel and add to an existing industrial building at 20720 Tuck Road. Applicant is Anthony Arslanian, owner is Don Arslanian.

2. Request variances to tear down an existing house on a lot and to divide the lot into two and to build a house on each at 21525 Roosevelt. Applicant is Lawrence Lenchner for Abington Development, owner is Mark Kotowski.

Farmington Hills Planning Commission
Public-preliminary hearing meeting
7:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 17
City hall, 31555 11 Mile Road

Public hearings:
1. Master plan amendment: an amendment to the master plan for future land use for parcels on the north side of Eight Mile, between Eight Mile and Grand River.

2. Cluster site plan on the southwest corner of 13 Mile and Middlebelt roads. Proponent is Michael Fellows, Cove Creek Ltd. Partnership. Owner is Cove Creek Ltd. Partnership.

3. Cluster site plan on the southeast corner of 13 Mile and Middlebelt roads. Proponent is David A. Gans, Franklin Investment Co. Owner is Herbert Ludwig and Patrick Carron.

Preliminary hearings — old business:

1. Revised site plan for 20720 Tuck Road. The request is for an addition to the existing Custom Forge facility. Proponent is Anthony Arslanian. Owner is D.C.A. Properties.

2. Revised site plan for the southeast corner of 14 Mile and Middlebelt roads. The request is for an addition to the existing Nino Salvaggio International Marketplace. Proponent is Roger Wade, Sarkesian Architects. Owner is ABS Properties.

New business:

1. Lot split at 22300 Gill Road

to create two parcels of single-family residential. Proponent is Robert LaValley. Owner is Robert and Colleen LaValley.

2. Rezoning request on the north side of 10 Mile Road, east of Ridgeway Drive from office service district to single-family residential. Proponent is Steven Schafer. Owner is Phoenix Land Development.

3. Site plan on the south side

of 12 Mile, east of Orchard Lake Road from office building to office research district. Proponent is C. Michael Kojanian. Owner is Orchards Office Associates.

4. Site condominium plan on the east side of Cass Avenue, south of Nine Mile for 12 lots. Proponent is Sam Baki, Tri-West Development. Owner is Tri-West Development.

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MON. - SAT. 10:00 - 10:00
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