

## ***We Heard Something about iPads?!?! Technology Committee Update, January 2012***

You have probably seen or heard about some of the St. Monica teachers beginning to work with iPads. This is just part of what St. Monica's Technology Committee has been working on as part of the 2012-2014 Technology Plan. We've been looking at everything from how do we create a safe technical environment to how does this really help our curriculum and our students learn. Because there are many inter-related issues, we've put together these FAQs. We hope this gives you a good sense of how we are trying to use technology to continue to improve the overall education of our students.

### ***Who has been working on this plan? How long have they been working on it?***

The St. Monica School Technology Committee is a subcommittee of the School Board Committee (SBC) and includes:  
**Faculty & Staff:** Julie Robinson, Linda Weckwerth, Emily Bremmer, Mike Bradford, Jenny Beehler

**Parents:** Bill Caraher (CIO at Von Briesen & Roper), Jim Desing (IT at Foley & Lardner), Clint Laskowski (Network Security at Verizon), Andrew DeGuire (School Board Co-Chair, Strategy at Johnson Controls), Steve Boettinger (Legal Counsel, Harley Davidson)

We have been working since the start of the school year to determine the scope of what should be in the overall technology plan. The SBC agreed with the overall plan framework at the December SBC meeting. The plan proposes actions and investments over the 2012-2014 school years.

### ***What are the goals of the technology plan?***

Before we even started creating a plan, we focused on the following goals:

- **Learning**
  - Provide tools to our students to enhance their learning experience
  - Provide capabilities to our teachers so more time and resources spent on teaching
  - Prepare students to use technology appropriately in the future
- **Financial**
  - Lower the lifecycle cost of textbooks and consumables
  - Increase the longevity of current technology investments
- **Security & Flexibility**
  - Create an infrastructure that provides for multiple future options for adaptation and expansion
  - Establish a secure technical environment for the school and parish

### ***What is the plan?***

While iPads are cool, they are only in a test right now and a potential single element of the overall technology plan. We assessed the currently technology at St. Monica. Combined with the goals above, we are focusing on four areas:

- Security for the network and preparation for a significant expansion of users
- Addressing current needs in the existing computer lab and laptop cart
- Evaluate if we should go to one device per child model (likely iPads), focusing especially on the curricular / educational impact
- Identify collaboration tools that support educational needs

Each one of these areas has its own plan, requirements and timeline that we are continuing to refine based on its cost and continuing changes in technology.

### ***Who did you talk to? How do we know this is a good plan?***

We have done a significant amount of research to understand how K-8 schools are using technology. What we learned is that colleges & universities are the furthest along in using digital textbooks and a wide range of online tools. High schools have been active users of technology, but there is a wide range of leaders and followers. For K-8 schools, while a few schools across the country have made headlines for their use of technology, most have just a computer lab. We talked to people at a range of schools (including local public schools), looked at best practices across the country, and did initial research about what textbook manufacturers have available.

We found and visited three schools locally that are doing interesting things with technology:

- **St. Eugene** – They have given iPads to every student in grades 6-8. They leased the iPads on a 3-year term. While the focus was originally on math, they continue to increase use across all subjects. All of these students have an email account. The school does not allow inbound email from any other source on the Internet.
- **Holy Family** – They recently deployed an iPad cart, similar to the laptop cart at St. Monica. There are no current plans to move to one-device per student, though they continue to evaluate.
- **St. Catherine's, Racine** – Their new 6-8 grade program provides laptops for every student across all subjects.

### ***What are we doing now?***

The first critical item we heard from every school was the need for increased bandwidth and higher security on our network. We are in the process of updating these now for both the school and the parish. While it isn't visible to most, and certainly not as fun as tablet computers, it will make a significant difference to all of the St. Monica network computers.

Next, we have purchased 14 iPads to help our teachers determine how technology does (or does not) complement the learning process. Our teachers are also evaluating materials on their existing PCs. Our faculty is also going through several training sessions to understand better how to use these tools in an educational environment. Their input will be critical in helping us shape our future path.

Julie Robinson and the faculty have a series of milestones to test technology-enabled curriculum plan through the end of the school year. This critical plan is necessary so that we have a clear way to assess where technology will help the overall educational process and where it won't. Our job is education, so even if all the IT pieces fall into place, if we can't enhance our children's educations, we shouldn't move forward. A big part of this evaluation is an understanding of what tools are available. We are talking with textbook publishers to understand digital educational content availability. Apple has just launched some impressive new tools, many in cooperation with these textbook publishers, but many publishers have nothing more than a digital copy of their textbooks. There are periodic checkpoints at the SBC meetings to see how this plan is progressing.

Finally, we will need to develop a policy regarding use, cost and liability of any technology we choose.

### ***How will this help my child learn more / better?***

There are a great number of studies on how technology has aided in improving classroom performance and a similar number that show that it hasn't. What is clear is that schools that have mapped the use of the technology to their curriculum and execute on a well-defined plan do see improvements. Just giving every kid an iPad does little. This is our key focus right now. We will phase in changes as we understand how all of the pieces fit together and work for faculty and students in a cost effective way. We will periodically publish updates like this to share our progress, and will discuss these issues at select school board meetings (look for the monthly agenda in the Weekly Reminder and online).

### ***Who is going to pay for all of this?***

At every point in this process, we are trying to ensure that we are adding educational value affordably, responsibly and sustainably. As changes are made, there will be some new costs, while others will be offset. Some expenses will be addressed by existing budgets. We are pursuing and will welcome generous donations to help support these initiatives.

### ***OK, that is all great. But really, when will my child get an iPad?***

Four things need to come together:

- We are planning on making the first wave of infrastructure, wireless and security updates by the end of summer. Until those are in place, no additional new devices will work well within the school. Thanks to all who donated at the Dinner Dance to fund technology – this is the first place where your dollars are making a difference.
- The faculty needs to be comfortable and have a plan for how the technology links to the curriculum.
- For the devices themselves, spring is traditionally a time for new releases. We like what we know of the iPad, and the iPad 3 will likely be out in a few months. There are also many Android-based devices like the Kindle Fire (however, they are too new to be tested in many classrooms). Also, there are rumors of a new Microsoft tablet. We want to make the best investment that gives us maximum value.
- Finally, this is St. Monica's year for accreditation testing. The faculty and staff need to make this a primary focus. Once clearing that hurdle is in sight, we will turn more attention to the technology.

This is not a done deal. According to our plan, if everything falls into place as quickly as we hope, we could approve the funding and steps necessary to phase in the use of iPads by the start of the second semester next year (so a year from now) for the junior high. We are also considering making an iPad cart available to lower grades. We appreciate your patience and support as we learn how to make the best use of the technology as well as balance the financial and resource needs with the overall school goals.

### ***Where can I learn more?***

Here are a few of the resources we found most helpful in this process:

Apple for Education: <http://www.apple.com/education/#video-textbooks>

Resource for iPads in Education: <http://ipadeducators.ning.com>

St. Eugene's iPad Blog: <http://sesipads.pbworks.com>

Google for Education: <http://www.google.com/apps/intl/en/edu/k12.html>

Also, please come to the March School Board Committee meeting on March 15 or email School Board members.