

Oakton Parents,

Thank you to those of you who came to Wednesday evening's meeting and to those who emailed their feedback. There was an enormous amount of information shared and I appreciate your patience, but most especially your thoughtful input and willingness to respond to this situation. The feedback on the online textbooks has been overwhelmingly negative with the exception of feedback from parents of children who benefit from the audio feature of the social studies online textbooks.

If you have not had the opportunity to login with your child to his/her online textbooks, you ought to do so. In just a couple of minutes, you will understand the issues that they are facing which will only get more prevalent in coming years as FCPS plans to eliminate all hardcopy textbooks by 2015.

Aside from the enormous issues of access (both from being able to use a computer at home for extended periods and from being able to access the Internet in or outside of the home, which is mandatory as the books cannot be downloaded, copied, nor printed) additional significant issues include:

- **The online texts are not mobile devices.** Ironically, the hardcopy texts are elegant in their mobility. The rigidity of having to sit at a computer makes it impossible for students to use down time to do their homework while waiting for work, sports, music or other activities that occur out of school and out of the home.
- **Doing work out of the online texts takes longer.** Training will not impact this. The fundamental steps of getting into the text, getting to a page in the text, scrolling up and down pages and moving across pages in an online text hinders and complicates achieving the objective of practicing math and reading social studies. It is complicated on a large desktop where the page has a better degree of visibility; it is nearly impossible on an Android tablet and technically impossible on iOS devices. It does not make sense for students to wrestle with technology in order to learn.
- **There is very little added benefit to using an online textbook for math or social studies.** The books with which I am familiar do not contain search features (the user needs to go to the "index" page, then note the page number(s) of the information being sought, enter the page number, then visually search on that particular page) and the few additional explanations included above and beyond the hardcopy text can also be found outside of the texts through search engines. However, for children with reading difficulties, there is a benefit to the audio feature in the online textbooks and for those children, we recommend the online option and appreciate having it.
- **Putting children in front of computers for lengthy timeframes has health risks.** Numerous studies have been done upon the physical effects of extended time in front of a screen, particularly CVS, (Computer Vision Syndrome).
- **Cognitive impacts may occur when using computers to read large volumes of material.** A study conducted with thousands of students in California using online texts indicated difficulty with learning, retaining and concentrating on the material. It was determined that the online experience does not lend itself to in-depth analysis of material for long periods of time.
- **In events that cause a loss of power, the online texts cannot be accessed.**
- **Limitations of the online textbook creates additional workloads on our teachers as well as additional expenditure for paper and copier maintenance.**

It should be noted that our math teachers at Oakton High School in recognition of the tremendous difficulties of working out of the online textbooks have largely bypassed these textbooks and have created their own homework sheets. This is one reason why you may be less aware of the issue. Please contact your child's teacher or the school administration if you feel this is not the case for your child.

While it was initially assumed that there were substantial cost savings with this adoption that is apparently not the case. For example, regarding the AB Calculus text, the FCPS negotiated price for the hardcopy is \$112 and the online textbook price is \$106.

There are many excellent supplemental digital learning tools; however, affordable and appropriate textbook replacement products do not yet exist nor is access available on a broad enough scale for a commitment to be made to move to all online textbooks at this time. This is a six-year contract. Much better products should be available within this time frame. However, the textbooks that should first be considered in online editions that have better capabilities should be for subjects whose information changes rapidly, such as US Government or some of the biological sciences.

Ideally, students would have access to both textbook formats; however, if we were limited to one format, my children's choice would without reservation be the hardcopy textbooks, which is what I have heard from a vast majority of parents. Thus, the provisioning of hardcopy textbooks to all students who need them is my request to FCPS.

The OHS PTSA recommends that you take time to educate yourselves and especially to get your children's feedback on their online textbooks. We will be including broader information about this topic on our website: [www.oaktonhsptsa.org](http://www.oaktonhsptsa.org). If you feel that they are as significant a problem as many parents have discovered, then you are strongly encouraged to write to some or all of the following: Dr. Sloan Presidio, Assistant Superintendent Instructional Services at [sjpresidio@fcps.edu](mailto:sjpresidio@fcps.edu); Fabio Zuluaga, Cluster 8 Assistant Superintendent at [Cluster8admin@fcps.edu](mailto:Cluster8admin@fcps.edu), the Fairfax County School Board at [SchoolBoardMembers@fcps.edu](mailto:SchoolBoardMembers@fcps.edu), Dr. Jack Dale, FCPS Superintendent at [Jack.Dale@fcps.edu](mailto:Jack.Dale@fcps.edu) and anyone else you find on the FCPS website that you would like to include. I have met with some of the School Board members, the FCCPTA, Dr. Presidio and some of his staff. Dr. Presidio, who came into the system after these decisions were made, apologized for our struggles and asked what we feel is needed. This is our opportunity to respond.

Our school system is an integral part of our community. Our feedback is crucial. We are told that the FCPS Leadership is not hearing from many people and that needs to change if we are to help our children get the education they need. Our voices are important and need to be heard.

Please talk about this with each other and encourage attention to this matter.

Best regards,  
Kirsten Rucker  
OHS PTSA President