Tablets in Schools: Saving Money and Trees

Posted by Lauren Moffett on Fri, Jan 25, 2013

I’d like for you to try something for me. Sit back in your chair, close your eyes, and let your mind wander back to yester-year. Remember back to your grade-school years. What were the things that were a part of your everyday environment? What do you see and feel?

When I do so, I can instantly smell the fresh copies my teacher made for that day’s assignment; I can even feel the warmth of the paper from the remnants of the copier’s hot mechanisms. I can feel my freshly sharpened number-two pencil in my hand, and see the gray smudge of graphite on the underside of my writing hand, from dragging my hand across the paper; this is one of the many pitfalls of using a pencil to write. I can remember feeling how very heavy my backpack was, as it was always full of textbooks from each of my classes and my extracurricular reading materials (I never left home without a good book or two). I even have color-coordinated notebooks and book covers, each encased with intricate designs that I’ve personally drawn. All of these are fond reminders of a great childhood.

All right, come back to the present. Bare with me, this will make sense in a moment, I promise: In 10 years, if I were to ask a student of today’s classroom to complete the same task of remembering, the experience would be completely different. With the invention and implementation of tablet devices, paper, pencils, notebooks, and textbooks have become a thing of the past. These devices take the place of many school supplies that were once seen as integral to the structure of a classroom. See? I told you it would make sense.

According to a quick Google search, the average school spends between $30,000 and $50,000 a year on paper alone. That means, every year, at $50,000, a school consumes 1191 boxes of paper ($50,000 / $41.99, the Office Depot Brand Copy Paper). Each box contains 10 reams of 500 sheets, which means that in each box there are 5,000 sheets of paper. 5,000 sheets in a box x 1191 boxes a year = 5,955,000 sheets of paper consumed in one year. Using this logic, that ultimately means that a school consumes 74 trees a year. Not only are school spending a lot of money on paper, they’re also depleting the world, 74 trees at a time, of one of its greatest resources. With this knowledge, alone, I would see the merit to using tablets in schools.

New York City schools are in talks to buy tablets for all 17,000 public schools.

“We currently spend more than a hundred million dollars a year on textbooks,” said New York City Council Speaker and 2014 mayoral hopeful Christine Quinn, who made the tablet proposal Tuesday while addressing how to improve the city's school system. “That's enough money to buy tablets for every student in New York City public schools, and cover staff costs to make sure these online texts are meeting rigorous standards.”

With more and more school pursuing tablets, the future of copies, pencils, textbooks, and notebooks seems grim. Not only would tablets save money for the school districts that utilized these great tools (think about how much paper a school must go through in a year!), engagement and communication would rise dramatically. Students are excited to use their tablets in school and to even use them at home. So why aren’t more districts implementing tablets into their school’s curriculum?