To paraphrase a saying, we cannot plan our children’s future based upon our past. In short, we cannot always address our students’ needs based upon our own experiences. Certainly, education looks different in the Twenty-first Century than it did for most of us during our growing-up years. But there is no doubt that the basic components of effective instruction and learning are universal, and timeless. However, the advent and growth of technology has been a game changer when it comes to how students engage in the learning process.

The research is clear that outstanding school districts embrace a culture of continuous improvement. As an educator, I have always said that the two most important questions we ask ourselves are “What if?” and “What else?” To that end, we are always seeking out ways in which we can enhance the learning process for our students, while at the same time honoring the foundational beliefs and practices that make us a high performing school district. Ohio’s new college and career readiness standards require a higher skill level when it comes to the use of technology. Technology is embedded throughout the standards and is also crucial to the new state assessments that are coming our way. So we have to address the gaps that might exist in our school system as technology grows.

Planning specific to the integration of technology has been going on at our school since the introduction of technology. We are constantly at work on upgrading our curriculum in connection to the ISTE Standards, established by the International Society for Technology in Education. We keep our ear to the ground to understand how changes and innovations in
technology can and will impact our school system. Expanding technology, especially through a one-to-one program, has been on the district’s radar long before my arrival. But about a year and a half ago, we got to the point where we asked ourselves if there is a more effective way to use our budgeted technology funds. We’ll discuss the financing of the program as part of our presentation. Many schools are implementing one-to-one programs, giving us an opportunity to learn from the work they have done. Our students have become used to seamless use of technology as part of their educational experience. Technology has become an integral component of Twenty-first Century education and cannot be ignored. In addition, there was much excitement on the part of the Green Bear Ball committee to support such a program. For that reason, we felt there was a compelling reason to get serious about investigating the possibility of starting a one-to-one program at Ottawa Hills.

Some would ask why we don’t establish a “Bring Your own Device” (or BYOD) program, as many of our students already have some kind of technology at home—whether it be a laptop, an iPad, or some other type of tablet. There are four basic reasons why we prefer a school-sponsored one-to-one program as opposed to a BYOD program:

First, one-to-one is the preferred method of technology delivery; however, not every district can afford it, so BYOD becomes the best plan for them. We think we have the capacity to do better.

Second, from an instructional standpoint, it’s hard to plan and execute if you don’t know the platform and technological access of the students sitting before you. The thing that makes instruction the most efficient and productive is if everyone is on the same playing field.
Third, we have the ability to provide support if there is one platform. We do not have the resources to address a variety of problems with a variety of technology tools.

Fourth, using school-issued tools gives us a greater ability to monitor students’ use of computers.

We have seen some great examples of one-to-one programs, and we have seen some that leave a little bit to be desired. The difference has been the time spent in investigating, planning, and laying the groundwork with professional development. From the beginning, we have been committed to doing it right and rolling it out right. That takes a lot of time and energy, and I want to recognize that our administrative team, our technology team, and many of our teachers have invested a lot of hours in this investigation.

There is no doubt that with the demands of the new standards, the new state assessments, and the needs of our students, we need to expand our technology. Tonight we will share two proposals with you on how we can do that. By the end of March, one of these proposals will be recommended to the Board. But in sharing these proposals, I want to emphasize this: we are not here to replace the culture of Ottawa Hills Schools. It is a culture of high performance, which is grounded in traditions of excellence and strong connections between students and teachers. As educational leaders, we believe a one-to-one program has the power to enhance student engagement, not detract from it. It is why we stand before you tonight with these proposals. We have spent countless hours laying the groundwork. We want to make sure we “get it right,” and have involved students and staff to ensure that we do. It is also important that we involve our parents and community as valuable stakeholders.