

Technology Troubles

Junior Taylor Hopkins and senior Alyssa Hecht use Chromebooks in their anatomy and physiology class. The school received 16 carts of Chromebooks to increase the use of technology in classes. (Photo by Brandan Naef)

Chromebooks helpful, create unexpected problem

by | Charlotte Grush



Opening my email, I recently noticed a very unexpected message from the Henderson County Public Schools. My email contained a warning for “using inappropriate language” in my seemingly innocent AP Statistics homework.

Days later I received another warning about an essay I did not even write. One of my peers requested that I edit a college

application essay for him. I happily agreed, but the next day I received another HCPS email. This time I was flagged for inappropriate language, and it wasn't even my essay. I couldn't help but be puzzled because there wasn't anything inappropriate in my friend's essay.

I am a senior in four honors and four AP classes, and if my documents are being flagged, imagine the documents from all of the other students in the school. The administration must be flooded with documents to go through every morning, many of which contain no offensive language at all.

This fall Chromebooks have proved to be very useful to both students and teachers. Teachers are switching over to a paperless approach to curriculum and are trying out new interactive programs, including Quizlet Live, Socrative and Kahoot. They are also using Google Classroom to help students organize assignments and classnotes.

Though I am glad to have access to more technology, I do not think the Chromebooks are as positive an

addition to our school as everyone predicted they would be. Yes, the Chromebooks allow students to communicate with teachers as well as with each other quickly. Yes, they allow students to have a research tool at the tips of their fingers throughout the day. But is it really worth it to be able to use all of these amazing programs when you are

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being monitored by the school system all the time?

The Chromebooks all employ ZScaler, a program that filters what students have access to. Some websites are blocked on the computers and prevent the students from having the right to access information for research.

The school system is required to use Internet filters to qualify for federal funding, but everything that a student searches for as well as types on a Google document is monitored closely.

The monitoring is used to make sure the student does not use inappropriate language, and while this may seem like a positive addition, it has not been successful. I use a Chromebook to complete homework assignments as well as work on college and scholarship essays. Within the first three weeks of the start of school, I received the two emails saying I had been flagged for use of inappropriate language. I had not.

These warnings show me that not only is what I am researching and reading is being tracked, but the personal documents I am writing are being monitored as well.

This is a scary thought if you really think about it. The computer I typed this article on was constantly being scanned. I understand that the computers themselves are school property, but these programs are taking away my right to privacy.

Each teacher that received a cart of Chromebooks is required to go to half-day workshops to teach them how to use the new technology. This takes away time from the teachers to actually teach their students.

Not only do the teachers have new responsibilities because of the Chromebooks, but the administrators do as well. For every student that is emailed about using inappropriate language, someone has to go through and read each document and see what the problem is.

Technology has proved to be a great tool for 21st century learning in the classroom, but there are always glitches in the system.