

Westport schools pondering use of online textbooks

By DANIELLE CAPALBO and ROBIN KAMINSKI Hour Staff Writers

Posted on 01/30/2012

WESTPORT -- With the price of textbooks rising and school budgets burgeoning at the seams, many school districts are brainstorming innovative ways to save money.

In Westport, Superintendent of Schools Elliot Landon said the district is seriously considering the use of online textbooks by either purchasing them or creating the books on their own.

"We're watching the Apple online digital textbooks carefully as they seem to be the trend of the future," Landon said. "But, we're talking \$15 for each app (application). We're thinking of creating our own books, where we will be able to update and tweak them for new information. It would save an incredible amount of money."

With an expected cost of \$250,000 for both new textbooks and replacing outdated ones for grades 6 to 12 for the 2012-13 school year, Landon said the costs continue to rise out of control. With that in mind, Landon said the department is currently hard at work on developing a digital high school physics book for use during the 2013-14 school year.

"We would need to meet the state and local requirements," Landon said. "One benefit is that students can't lose the book, so they couldn't say the dog ate my textbook anymore."

Aside from the creation of new online books, Landon said the Staples High math department has been utilizing interactive textbooks for the past five years through the HeyMath! program. During the day, classes are taught via smartboards, but after hours, the web-based platform allows students to go online, connect with their teacher and ask questions long after the school day has ended.

"We're very excited about it because it has enabled us to focus on exactly what the kids need," Landon said. "If kids don't have a computer at home, we cannibalize our old machines and give them to students who can't afford them."