

# KELOWNA DAILY COURIER

---

Tuesday, May 13, 2008

## School district to scale back student laptop program

By Don Plant

**Instead of lugging laptops between home and school, students will likely leave them in the classroom this fall.**

School trustees are expected to revise the district's iLearn project at Wednesday's board meeting. Budget restraints and changing technology have prompted the board to curb a \$5.6-million plan to provide a laptop computer to every student in Grades 7 through 12. Instead, trustees are poised to make the laptops available only in class or by signing them out from the school library. "Parents won't be concerned about kids playing games on their laptop because they won't be at home. The weight issue is gone because they generally won't be transporting them back and forth from school," said trustee Cheryl Wiebe, who chairs the committee that recommended the change. The

district now leases 5,000 laptops and provides one to each student and teacher in Grades 7 through 9. The board voted to freeze the program budget at \$2.38 million last fall and launched a review, citing concerns about damage, inappropriate use, back problems due to heavy lifting and technical issues. Since then, the board learned it had to cut \$4.4 million from next year's operating budget. Instead of leasing 1,800 more laptops so every student through Grade 12 has one, the district's education committee recommends spreading the existing laptops among six grades and suspending the one-on-one program.

The portable computers would be stored on trolleys that roll from class to class. Students would use them at the teacher's direction in core classes like science, English and social studies. "Rather than give one to

each student, we'd make them available in academic classrooms. Students would have access during class time," said Schools Supt. Mike Roberts. Under the proposed changes, the laptops would be available for sign-out from the library so students without a computer at home can still tap the keyboard outside school. Staff estimate 93 per cent of district households have home computers. "That's different from four to five years ago. Providing a laptop is really duplicating what most people have already," said Roberts. Students can send a school project home by e-mail or save it to a memory stick and take it home, said Wiebe. "It's shifting focus," she said. "The public really wondered whether the one-on-one program was a prudent use of tax dollars."