

Good Evening,

10/09/10

I am here tonight to represent an echoing voice in the community in opposition to the proposed Neary iPad Pilot Project as it currently stands. Although it is difficult to come forward with a potentially unpopular, non-mainstream view, I have been encouraged by Southborough parents asking the same questions. A school committee member recommended I gather 50 signatures vs. having 50 people attend the meeting. I have more than 80 signatures in hand. In some ways it was difficult to take a stance and in another, it was a no-brainer. I had to do it for my children.

It has been quite a learning experience for me personally regarding the level of fear and perceived retribution out there for speaking up on such matters, but the more people spoke up, the more that level of fear subsided.

First and foremost, I want to ensure you that I am by NO means anti-technology. To make that the focus of this discussion as demonstrated in social media, clouds the real issues at hand. As we know, these kids have plenty of exposure to technology with computer lab, IXL, Xtramath and spelling city homework every night.

I would like to expand on my points in my original letter to the editor, but before I do that, I want to ensure you that I am not opposed to an in-school, iPad Pilot Project funded by the school—but limited at that—not the proposed up to 1/3 of the entire school day. That piece of information was alarming to me. The proposed amount of in-school, screen time, let alone the at-home screen time is merely unacceptable. **But this is interactive screen time, not passive, I hear.** So is the Wii game system, but that needs to be limited too.

There is a lot of talk about ADHD these days in our community and in our schools. Did you know that Neary is full of children with ADHD? One online study suggests no more than 30 minutes of screen time per school day and 2 hours on the weekends (<http://www.wikihow.com/Naturally-Treat-ADHD>). There are numerous reports that too much screen time is affecting children's mental and physical health. What do our pediatricians think about this proposed project? Have we asked?

Furthermore, I along with many others, believe this project would better serve older children who are more advanced in writing, reading and math, better preparing them for high school. Last week, I was approached by a mother of a 6th grader, who said her child has yet to come home with a book report, and that he knows how to spell his spelling words, but he does not understand the meaning of them. I've had the same experience with my 4th grader and his spelling words. I just expected living in a community of this caliber, such basic learning was assumed. However, some of the core competencies seemed to be lost. These children need the opportunity to nail down the basics first. If the project is a success, the plan is to roll it out to younger grades, which is even more disturbing to me. I was also told the school is not planning to ditch pen and paper, but this new program sure shifts the emphasis.

Beyond these issues, imposing the use of iPads in our home, feels like an attack on our family values and our home environment. We are the parents. We decide what electronics come into our home and how much screen time our children are exposed to. We have strived to maintain a balance between active time and electronics in our family. Think about it, as a parent when our child is engaged in electronics, it gives us a break from parenting, even if it is just for a half an hour to prepare dinner. If our children are using electronics in school for up to 1/3 of the day, does that mean we are going to see cut-backs in teacher positions?

Parents can choose to opt out of this project, I am told. My response is, tell that to my 4th grader. To leave your child out of the program invites singling out/isolating children who do not own their own iPad. It invites potential conflict at home because it will make the child feel that his parents are punishing him by not allowing him to participate. Although stated, a child can borrow the schools' iPads for the day; I believe it can create a social stigma when a child doesn't own one as evident on school bus rides, in the hallways and elsewhere. We all know that children notice any slightest deviation from the norm. Leaving a child out of the program is not a viable option.

John Butler of the Town Advisory Committee says, "Think for a minute about the family of three whose youngest is in 4th grade, whose older children have been asking for one of these, whose parents feel they can't afford one, and have been denying the older children. Are they supposed to buy three? Think about the parents of twins. Think about the child who doesn't want to say "I can't work on this at home because I don't own the iPad I'm using here." Think about the bus ride for that child."

I haven't even touched on the unaffordability factor and imposing the financial burden on the families, which to be honest I find almost comical. As evident by my petition and the comments on social media, this project needs to be funded by the school.

Logistics is another major area of concern. To be honest, there is really nothing that can convince me having a 9-year-old transport an iPad to and from school is a good idea. Our children lose water bottles, lunch boxes and sweatshirts, never mind how they throw their bags down, spill drinks, etc. They are too young to be responsible for an expensive piece of equipment in transit. What happens if they lose it? Do you think we will find it in the lost and found? I doubt it. Perhaps on EBay though!

Thank you!

Fiona Maguire-O'Shea