

Arizona School Will Not Use Textbooks

By *srlinuxx*

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A high school in Vail will become the state's first all-wireless, all-laptop public school this fall. The 350 students at the school will not have traditional textbooks. Instead, they will use electronic and online articles as part of more traditional teacher lesson plans.

Vail Unified School District's decision to go with an all-electronic school is rare, experts say. Often, cost, insecurity, ignorance and institutional constraints prevent schools from making the leap away from paper.

"The efforts are very sporadic," said Mark Schneiderman, director of education policy for the Software and Information Industry Association. "A minority of communities are doing a good or very good job, but a large number are just not there on a number of levels."

Calvin Baker, superintendent of Vail Unified School District, said the move to electronic materials gets teachers away from the habit of simply marching through a textbook each year.

He noted that the AIMS test now makes the state standards the curriculum, not textbooks. Arizona students will soon need to pass Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards to graduate from high school.

But the move to laptops is not cheap. The laptops cost \$850 each, and the district will hand them to 350 students for the entire year. The fast-growing district hopes to have 750 students at the high school eventually.

A set of textbooks runs about \$500 to \$600, Baker said.

It's not clear how the change to laptops will work, he conceded.

"I'm sure there are going to be some adjustments. But we visited other schools using laptops. And at the schools with laptops, students were just more engaged than at non-laptop schools," he said.

Associated Press

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