



Open Office Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why would we consider changing from Microsoft Office to Open Office?

Because MS Office is costing us about \$23,000 each year in licensing fees and Open Office would offer very similar capabilities for no yearly licensing fee.

2. Would we be able to use all of our documents if we moved to a new system?

Yes, Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint would all transfer with some minor formatting. Publisher Documents could be converted to Acrobat files and read, but could not be edited beyond simple cutting and pasting. There is a tool in Open Office that does page layout just like Publisher, however it will not open Publisher files.

3. Would we be able to send documents to other people that had Microsoft products?

Yes, there is a setting that allows us to save our Open Office documents as Word or Excel or PowerPoint files so that other folks can open them and edit them, probably without knowing the difference. The technology department would set this as the default, so it would seem like we were actually using Microsoft Office.

4. What about technology classes that depend on Microsoft?

Our mission is to teach our students to be able to utilize whatever tool is available to do computer work and to teach basic skills. It is likely that they will be using some sort of Open Source product in the future (since the cost is economical and business are also looking to cut costs), therefore we would be helping the students learn future skills if we teach them a variety of tools. Additionally the CCRESA sponsored lab at the HS has their own funding source for MS Office should they continue to need it.

5. What sort of technical support will be available?

Technical support is offered for these programs through the Open Source community, meaning the tech staff can log on to a web site at any time and find several people with the answer any level of technical question. Microsoft's technical support by contrast requires us to wait on hold for hours sometimes and then often requires additional fees for the really hard problems. We run several other Open Source products in the district and we've become happier with their support than the traditional structures. And in fact if we really get into a jam where we cannot figure it out, Novell (our network vendor) provides support for Open Office for a fee.

6. How would the money we do not spend be used?

Given the current financial situation of the district it is really hard to say that the money will be used elsewhere. We know that we are facing a substantial hardware situation and that HS and Fuerstenau teachers have very outdated computers. With the current budget cuts we may not be able to sustain the upgrade \$\$ that allowed us to purchase classroom machines for the other buildings. If some of those computers are not replaced, there may be teachers going without as they fail.

7. What are other school districts in our area doing?

Other districts may or may not be tied into the style of Microsoft licensing that we are. When I arrived in the district we were not licensed on many of our computers. To become legal we had to pay. We had a choice of paying outright for licensing (an astronomical fee that we could not afford) or to buy into a yearly licensing program (which we selected). Other districts have either paid up front or are on the same program as us. Paying up front means they are stuck on the same version of Office and to move to the next version you must pay another large sum. Other districts were correctly licensed up front and they are now using older versions of office, or they are paying the fees that we are tied into. The majority of the districts in our area have less computers per child than we do and receive higher \$\$ per child from the state than we do.

8. What has been done to inform staff of the situation?

The technology committee has been discussing this idea since the very first meeting this year. The technology department included Open Office in every new image this year so that it would be available for tryout. In November the technology department sent e-mail describing the situation and asking staff to try out the alternative Office product. The e-mail included simple directions on how to access the software, links to tutorials and an offer to demonstrate the software as needed. In early December a survey was released asking for input, the survey close date was January 17th. The initiative was discussed at the recent district wide PD session that included technology teachers and media specialists. There is a standing offer to demonstrate/discuss with any group that would invite tech staff.

9. If no school districts in our area are doing this is anyone else considering it?

This article talks about an Open Source initiative that the entire state of Indiana has been implementing in their public schools for the past several years:
<http://www.schoolcio.com/showArticle.php?articleID=186701271>
Additionally, Brazil has adopted Open Source as their official software. In Michigan Peck Community Schools are rolling out their demo Linux lab as we speak. We've talked to other technical folks that are rolling it out on a limited basis as an upgrade from older office packages. At the University level MSU Ed Tech Cert program have been considering using NVU for web pages (as a substitute for Microsoft FrontPage). Lansing Schools have a lot of Open Source initiatives going on, however they have the advantage of being eligible for grants due to their high need and the granted

computers included Microsoft Office. We may be a leader in our area for this, but we are certainly not alone.

10. If we move to Open Office how will training occur?

Training, according to several people that have tried out Open Office will probably not need to be extensive, since the two products are so very similar. However formal and informal sessions will be offered after school, during the day during teacher planning times and during building PD sessions as requested by the building. Keep in mind that this training need will not be alleviated if we choose not to switch to Open Office, since Microsoft Office has a new revision that will be ready for installation in the that we will automatically get with our licensing agreement should we continue to pay.

11. The trial version of Open Office had few templates and very little clipart, will we loose out on that if we switch?

There are templates and clipart that we own in the district and will be implementing with Open Office if we go that route, technology choose not to work very hard to install them while we are in this trial stage. They will be in place when and if we go live with the product.

12. What is the time line for this project?

Our Microsoft fee is due at the end of May. We hope to have decided what to do prior to that so that training can occur this year. Then installation of additional resources (templates and clipart) can be installed over the summer. This would enable us to start the new school year with the new software.

13. If our students don't use Microsoft Office, will they loose a competitive edge in the workplace?

Employers stress that they want employees that can think and problem solve, not memorize software. This ability allows them to move across software and learn new skills faster. More and more businesses with the support of their technologists are seeing the value of using Open Source products, and having employees that can demonstrate fiscal responsibility would benefit the employers. Additionally the philosophy of Open Source software is that any programming changes that are made to the software are returned to community for free to increase the joint body of knowledge is very consistent with values we want our students to grasp. Finally in regard to students with an inclination toward software programming, Open Source software provides them the ability to work on a real world project should they choose to do so. For instance if a student had an idea for making the software better he or she could download the source code and work toward making the idea a reality. With the licensing restrictions on the Microsoft products, we cannot offer source code in the same way. Along the same lines with Open Office we have the ability to send home copies of the software for every student, allowing them to do home work on their own computers. This capability is especially nice for presentations, since very few home computers have the presentation software (like PowerPoint) that we use at school.

14. I have more questions where can I learn more?

The Open Options website contains information regarding Open Source Software specifically targeted to school districts.

<http://www.netc.org/openoptions/>

Download Open Office (in case you want to try it out at home)

<http://download.openoffice.org/index.html>

Open Office Tutorials-Includes easy to print PDF files as well as lesson plans for teachers to us with students:

<http://www.tutorialsforopenoffice.org/index.html>

A great primer for getting started with Open Office:

<http://openoffice.blogs.com/openoffice/files/essentials.pdf>

Video Based Tutorials:

<http://business.newsforge.com/business/05/11/09/2044220.shtml?tid=35&tid=136&tid=130>

For more information about the DPS discovery process on this project, please feel free to contact the technology department.

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