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## **Grant means new computers**

**By Sonie Boor**

At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, the CCHS English department changed its sophomore curriculum. For 25 years prior, sophomore English consisted of a semester of studying famous novels, much like the current freshman English, and one semester of “mini-electives.” As of last year, however, the curriculum changed to one focusing more on developing writing skills. The new curriculum is described by the CCHS Program of Studies as follows: “Along with detailed attention to the writing process, students will learn the skills involved in writing a documented essay and will prepare for the English Language Arts portion of the MCAS test.” In addition to an emphasis on writing, students focus on American literature of all genres. English Department Chair Dr. Bee Loprete writes that “Almost immediately [last] fall the teachers and students began to feel the benefits of having more time to work on the craft of writing, and individual student attention has been the key to the differentiated instruction.”

One crucial tool in the improvement of writing skills is the computer. In order to get more of this valuable resource, Dr. Loprete proposed a \$29,832.74 grant last winter to the Concord Education Fund to purchase a 25-computer cart that would allow computers to travel between English classrooms. The C.E.F. approved the proposal, an act which Loprete attributes primarily to the C.E.F.’s understanding of the prevalence and importance of writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She writes, “Sophomore teachers have found without exception that when they use computers to facilitate writing, even if they are only using them for the students to craft their thesis statements in class, the quality of writing rises exponentially because of the teacher’s ability to work individually with each Sophomore at the beginning of the writing process.” School renovations in 1993, brought with them the H-building writing lab, and since 2005 the English department has had a computer cart which travels between classes. However, both of these sets of computers, along with those in the library, can be problematic in terms of scheduling and running too slowly to accomplish much work during class periods. The 25 new MacBooks will ameliorate this problem for Sophomore English classes.

### **Planting a seed**

The idea for the grant originated with Tom Hart, previous English Department head, who “started [Loprete’s] fantasy” to have a new computer cart. Although Hart’s vision was to convert a closet in H-11 to a “computer charging station,” such a renovation would be very expensive, and all benefits would be lost if the high school were to be rebuilt. The English Department changed this idea to be a new computer cart to supplement the existing one, which would remain padlocked in H-15. There is now one computer cart assigned to each half of the H-Building’s English hallway.

Although the cart has only been in use as of October 6, Loprete is very enthusiastic and optimistic about its future. Having access to the computers in class allows teachers to check each student’s initial work to make sure he or she is headed in the right direction

before working intensively on the paper at home. The cart should also improve MCAS scores, which have already improved since the creation of the full-year sophomore writing program, by encouraging the teachers and students to write more. Loprete concludes, "Thank you, thank you, Concord Ed. Fund. We can't wait to get the kids going on it, continuing with our work on their 21st-century literacy skills."