September 19, 2016

To: SD61 Operations Committee Meeting

RE: Considering an Open Source Policy for SD61

My regrets for being unable to attend your meeting directly, this evening.

Software applications are now essential to our school curricula, and an indispensable tool that is ever more interwoven into the pedagogy and practice of our teachers and students.

In the past, proprietary software purchases and contracts have been the de facto approach for school districts. The costs are ever increasing, the stipulations ever narrowing, and the support ever varying.

An alternative to proprietary software, Open Source software is developed by vast, magnanimous communities of developers and educators, around the globe. The software typically rivals and often exceeds the proprietary, commercial versions of the same. Because there is a huge and growing network of users, the support keeps flowing, freely, by way of regular upgrades and help forums.

Open source applications, rather than being copyright, are generally issued under Creative Commons or Copyleft licenses, allowing for free or relatively inexpensive adaptation, even for institutional use.

Take as one example the Microsoft Office Suite. Contractual obligations for this software costs our school boards considerable sums, on an ongoing basis. (Surprise yourself by finding out just how much.) But moreover, our schools become purveyors, essentially marketers, of Microsoft product. And our students are assimilated to consume, if not rely, on the commercial product.

And yet there exists Open Office. The word processor and the spreadsheet applications rival those of Microsoft, in fact they are completely compatible. But there exists no fee or contractual obligation, to install and operate this software on our school networks.

For just about every commercial, proprietary software application there exists an Open Source derivative or alternative.

As added benefit for the students, they are able to freely access and install the very same hardware on their own computers and devices. This ensures an even playing field, unencumbered by the economics of the tech marketplace.

In fact, many countries in the world, including Mexico and China, have implemented Open Source policies, and so depend on Open Source applications for their school curricula.

It goes without saying, the cost savings are enormous. Huge savings are presented also by way of time and costs to administration.

Further, students are exposed to an aspect of the sharing economy, as opposed to the usual status quo of commercial product and merchandising.

Too often the Open Source options are dismissed on vagaries suggesting the "lesser quality" or "unreliability" of these products. I claim with authority that this is simply not true. The real reason for reliance on the proprietary software is ultimately the result of effective lobbying, on part of those industries.

As such, I will attach a link to an article that provides the reader with a good historical review of the Open Source movement, to better understand the potency and scale of this significant development that is shaping our technological lives whether we know it or not:

http://www.wired.com/2016/08/linux-took-web-now-taking-world/

I'll leave it there for now. Please don't hesitate to call on me again for further information or references to support my case above. I'd be happy to meet or present as required.

Sincerely,

Darren Alexander

tel.250-642-7994