

## School computers to fight cancer



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Jefferson board OKs research

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The Courier-Journal

Despite some objections, the Jefferson County school board approved a plan last night to let medical researchers employ idle classroom computers to help develop new anti-cancer drugs.

The board voted 4-2 to become the third Kentucky school system to allow researchers at Louisville's James Graham Brown Cancer Center to harness unused computers to speed the process of checking millions of molecular combinations for possible cancer treatment.

Stringing together many such desktop computers to produce a virtual supercomputer saves money and research time and will also bring scientists into classrooms to speak about their work, officials said.

Alan Whitworth, the school system's director of technology, said the process would not overburden the district's computer system.

But two board members said it was a bad idea because the district already has its hands full with a problem-prone student-data system, which most recently caused scheduling and enrollment glitches in the first days of school.

"The last thing we need to do is step in the middle of another technology challenge," said Pat O'Leary, who voted against the agreement. He also has been a vocal opponent of the district's plan to give laptop computers to students at several schools this fall.

School officials and representatives from Dataseam, a Louisville company setting up the scientific-research system, said it's unrelated to the student-data system and would not cause further problems.

Carol Ann Haddad, who cast the other vote against the agreement, said she worried that allowing access would make student records less secure. "Privacy is a big concern," she said.

Dataseam and school officials countered that such danger would not increase, citing security measures and privacy agreements.

Whitworth said that putting the computers to scientific use would add only minimal electricity costs over merely leaving them on at night.

The agreement is part of a statewide initiative led by Dataseam, which has worked with universities, schools, research companies and state government in developing the technology.

Sometimes called "grid" computing, it sends data through the Internet or wire connections to idle work stations. Those computers analyze that data and send the results back to a central location. That work slows

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or stops when other users begin working on the computer.

"I think it's a win-win," board member Ann Elmore said.

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