

New gadgets for a new school year

By **MATT COYNE**
 HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — Robert Polselli gave the Board of Education a sample lesson at its meeting last Tuesday night.

The lesson, on the district's new technology, was devoid of the usual classroom trappings. Polselli, the director of Technology for Norwalk schools, did the usual question asking and board writing, but not a single hand was raised and there was no chalk in sight.

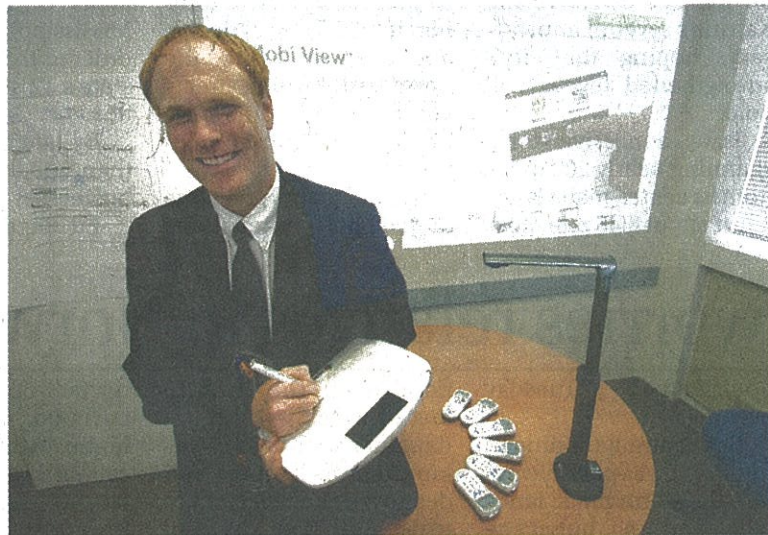
Instead, the Board of Education used a set of remotes to answer the multiple-choice questions and Polselli roamed the Common Council chambers while marking up his presentation via a device known as a Mobi.

"It's unlike any other technology or any other tool I've ever

noon.

Both sets of technology, purchased out of the capital budget, will be in Norwalk classrooms this year after being rolled out last year. The remotes, called clickers, look like a cross between an old school cell phone and a television remote and allow the entire classroom of students to answer a question when posed by a teacher, with their answers archived. The Mobi is a tablet-like device with a stylus and a small LCD screen. With the Mobi, teachers will be able to project what is on their computer screens and draw on that screen wirelessly from around the classroom. The screen allows teachers to get feedback from when students answer questions with their clickers.

All this, according to Polselli,



Hour photo / Alex von Kleydor
Robert Polselli Jr., director of Technology for Norwalk Public Schools holds the Mobi unit. Next to him are the CPS Clickers and the Hoove cam

Schools have new tools

From Page A3

will enhance classroom learning if done right. The clicker-Mobi combination will allow teachers to get instant feedback on how well individual students, and the class in general, grasp the content. Teachers who use the technology — and Polselli said demand is high — will be able to tailor instruction to where the class is struggling.

“It’s not the magic bullet for instruction, but as far as an impactful technology, it’s absolutely one of the most impactful technologies I’ve seen,” he said. “What other device can allow a teacher to know what all the kids know every question they ask?”

The clickers, rolled out roughly a year ago by Polselli’s estimation, were a hit in elementary and middle school math. Each building has at least two bags of clickers, with some schools fundraising for more. The Mobis were rolled out in December, but only 20 made their way into classrooms. This year,

165 will be in the hands of teachers.

“It’s kind of weird, like writing on the wall. I can’t imagine where we’re going to be 20 years from now,” Polselli said. “With what we’re looking at, you would’ve seen this in kind of a Star Trek thing or Mission Impossible or high-end government ops, drawing all over the boards, instantly getting information, those kind of things.”

The clickers and the Mobis are one, and likely the most recognizable, portion of the district’s three-year technology plan, which Polselli was rolling out with his presentation to the board. The plan includes online courses high school students are using for credit recovery called Apex Learning, a special education program utilizing the iPad, high-tech overhead projectors called document cameras and, eventually if outside funding is found, outfitting all schools with wireless Internet, a necessity when the Common Core State

Standards are implemented in 2014-15 as all the testing will be online.

Polselli said the new technology is piloted and gets the stamp of approval by teachers before the school district implements any of it. Teachers only receive the technology once they go through training.

“The technologies are going so quickly we don’t want to make errors in judgment in buying into technology,” he said. “That’s the real fear, and that’s one of the reasons we’ve held back a little bit in the purchase of laptops and tablets.”

Those purchases would likely be included in the next technology plan, which would span the 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2018-19 school years, Polselli said.

All this technology, though, is still a tool.

“The technology itself should be invisible and irrelevant,” Polselli said. “The technology shouldn’t make the lesson. It should be the instruction that’s enhanced by the technology.”