

# READERS respond

## Change Is Good

The latest edition of *L&L* included many of the changes that I have been hoping to see in the publication. The use of graphics, white space, font, and so on makes it much easier to read. But that is not the most important part of the change that caught my attention. For the first time in quite a while, I read every article. The topics are well chosen and timely. Thanks for rethinking the publication. I believe ISTE membership will be very pleased with your constant attention to meeting their needs through *Learning & Leading with Technology*.

Jan Van Dam, EdD  
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Pearson Digital Learning  
Scottsdale, AZ

**From the Editor:** What Van Dam refers to as “rethinking the publication” stemmed from the reader survey we conducted in January 2005. Many thanks again for sharing your thoughts with us. My hope is that *L&L* readers will share Van Dam’s and the editors’ belief that we’ve made improvements to the magazine. As always, the best way to let us know that—and anything else you’re thinking—is to send us an e-mail (letters@iste.org) or to give us a call (1.800.336.5191, ext. 275, or 1.541.434.8926). We’re happy to hear your feedback regardless of whether you share our beliefs, differ from them, or just want to tell us what cool things you’re doing with technology.

## Is Open Source the Answer?

In the September 2005 issue of *L&L*, our Point/Counterpoint asked, “Is Open Source the Answer?” Most of you think it is, with very few reservations.

Open-source software such as Moodle, OpenOffice.org, Linux, and others offer schools a viable, high-performing product that does almost everything the commercial alternative can. This allows schools to save their scarce tech budgets and use them to buy more computers, projectors, and other technology to increase access for students. And the software to run them is free!

Brett Hinton  
Gilbert Public Schools  
Gilbert, AZ



My guess is that Farsaii is a closet open-source advocate because his arguments against open source software (OSS) are, actually, arguments against software that locks up its source code. To wit:

His critique of Linux as a potential haven for hackers and virus writers actually applies to Microsoft Windows, an OS whose vulnerabilities have cost many educators immeasurable time and effort to protect against. In fact, if your version of Linux comes from a trusted provider (e.g., Red Hat, Lin-spire), the OS works just great.

He next asks how you keep up with upgrades. This question applies to all software no matter what OS it runs on. Apple OS revs are common, and XP has had so many patches it has become the Operating System of Many Colors.

Farsaii’s last criticism has to do with mission-critical products requiring confidence, not uncertainty. This is why Sprint (last time I visited their

California switching center) was using Linux—not because it was free, but because it worked.

The biggest argument against Linux was not mentioned. Linux has not yet reached enough desktops to make software developers in K–12 port their software. Now that Indiana has just announced the decision to move 300,000 Linux-based computers into the hands of high school students, even this argument is likely to fade within a year.

David D. Thornburg, PhD  
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Thornburg Center for Professional Development  
Lake Barrington, IL

I have been a long-time skeptic of OSS and other technology solutions suggested to provide some access to ICT within dwindling budgets—Compromise. However, after seeing several demonstrations in New Hampshire this week, I am becoming cautiously optimistic, because the trade-offs seem much lower than I’d thought. As Guhlin said, there are other things we could do with millions of dollars.

David Warlick  
The Landmark Project  
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As educators and role models, we should avoid requiring proprietary file formats for work submitted by our students. All students should be able to get their work done unencumbered by proprietary file formats that require costly software.

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