

The State of Broadband Access for Students and Libraries in Rural Wisconsin

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Access to Broadband in Schools and Libraries

- Over 99% of all Wisconsin schools and 95% of libraries are connected to the internet by fiber.
- Schools and libraries can get 1 Gbps of service from TEACH Wisconsin for \$250/month, and any amount less for \$100/month.
- Wisconsin schools and libraries have access to sufficient, affordable broadband.



Challenges to Student and Library Internet Access

- Schools and libraries need network infrastructure to bring the internet from the building wall to the people in the building.
- 10% of rural schools have insufficient network infrastructure.
- Infrastructure costs are significant and ongoing for all schools and libraries.

Source: DPI 2018 [Digital Learning Survey](#)



Challenges to Student and Library Internet Access

- Lack of internet access at home is the most pressing broadband issue facing rural schools and libraries.
- 20% of rural students and library patrons do not have internet access at home.
- Availability and Affordability are the primary reasons that families don't have access at home.

Source: ["Digital Inequity in Wisconsin Schools: A Survey of Students' Access to the Internet When Outside of School Spring, 2017"](#)



Supporting Availability: Broadband Expansion Grants

- Broadband expansion grants fund projects to extend high-speed broadband to businesses, anchor institutions, and residences.
- Students can be beneficiaries -- for example, a broadband grant brought fiber to every home in Bloomer, WI.
- Broadband expansion grants have provided an important avenue to bring internet access to students who don't have access at home.



Availability vs. Affordability

- However, broadband expansion grants are designed to extend availability of internet access, but not affordability.
- Many families can't afford internet at home.
- Exact statistics on affordability are not available, but we know that 15% of Wisconsin children live at or below the poverty level: for a family of four, \$25,750 annually.

Source: [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)



Hotspots: One Option To Provide Affordability

- Mobile hotspots are small devices that connect to the cellular network and provide wifi access in the home.
- Hotspots can be checked out by students from schools and checked out from libraries. They can also be installed on school buses.
- Hotspots can bring home access to families that can't afford it otherwise.
- Schools and libraries can be reimbursed for hotspot purchases as part of Information Technology Block Grants



Hotspots: One Option To Provide Affordability

- Hotspots are not a panacea -- they only work where cellular service is available.
- Broadband expansion grants can extend cellular service, and can work in tandem with hotspot programs to bring internet access to families who can't afford it .



Hotspots: One Option To Provide Affordability

- Hotspots can be loaned to students and library patrons so that there is
 - No setup cost to the family
 - No service cost
- If service is not provided along with hotspot devices, affordability will not be addressed



Questions?

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