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

Presentation to Rural Advisory Group
April 24, 2019

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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
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.

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.
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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tinyurl.com/wi-broadband-2019