Georgia Deploys 448 Wi-Fi Rangers to 36 School Districts

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Atlanta, GA – Today Governor Brian P. Kemp announced a donation from AT&T to the Georgia Department of Education, Foundation for Public Education. The donation will be used to deploy 448 Wi-Fi Rangers to 36 school districts, filling the internet connectivity gap for thousands of students in rural areas, tripling the number of Wi-Fi buses in the state.

Each district will create its own mobilization plans for placing the Wi-Fi Rangers on school buses or other public vehicles to reach the highest numbers of unserved students in their communities. Each Wi-Fi Ranger can enable internet connections for up to 45 devices at one time.

"AT&T is doing our state a great service, helping us take a step forward to address the lack of available broadband connectivity for Georgia students," **said Governor Kemp.** "This issue has come into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic as so many rural students struggle to continue remote learning without internet access. We thank AT&T for recognizing that the children affected by this lack of connectivity are the young people who represent our future. Their generosity will leave a lasting legacy."

One of AT&T's core values is to be there when people need them most, and they recognized Georgia's need for an innovative digital learning environment. "We are proud to work with Governor Kemp and the Georgia Department of Education to equip hundreds of school buses with AT&T Wi-Fi, connecting students in communities all across the state," **said Venessa Harrison, President of AT&T Georgia.** "More than ever before, connecting people with resources needed to maintain a sense of normalcy is critical, and we are committed to supporting Georgia's students, families, and teachers."

According to a **Federal Communications Commission report (https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsable.madmimi.com%2Fc%2F226400%3Fid%3D872364.9639.1.827e3bb7d614a68e94df097742483bbd&data=02%7C01%7Ckylie.harrod%40georgia.gov%7C5ff636b9fb6949e5282e08d7f68562f6%7C512da10d071b4b948abc9ec4044d1516%7C0%7C0%7C637248925190798006&sdata=pmuqOy74y47u9kk30O%2FKDSsLMhQX%2BjueqQchSKgK04U%3D&reserved=0)** released last month, of Americans not connected to the internet, 78 percent live in rural areas. More than 22 percent of rural Americans do not have access to high-speed internet, compared to 1.5 percent of urban dwellers without high-speed internet. This means that rural students are almost 15 times more likely to lack access to the internet for remote learning when school buildings are closed.

All 36 school systems chosen are located in rural Georgia; system selection was based on factors which included poverty level of the school population, the student-to-device ratio in a school's existing technology inventory, and the school's status on either the Comprehensive Support and Improvement or Targeted Support and Improvement lists.

AT&T's donation includes two free months of service for each device. Additional grant funding was applied to extend the impact of the initiative to an additional three months of service for each device. Districts have expressed their appreciation for the Wi-Fi Rangers and the five months of service that the donation will make available.

"Assisting our students during the summer months and beyond with learning opportunities has never been more important," **said Michael Williams, Madison County School Superintendent**. "Our rural county is predominantly agriculturally based. We don't have a huge business and industry base in our area. This donation will enable us to serve those big pockets of students around our county without internet service with materials and instructions for summer enrichment, and it will help ease some of our back-to-school stresses as well."

“In difficult times, Georgians are coming together to support public schools and students,” **said State School Superintendent Richard Woods.** “I wish to thank our industry partners for their generosity and commitment to Georgia’s kids, and the Georgia Foundation for Public Education, Innovation Fund Foundation, and Governor’s Office of Student Achievement for their partnership as well. Expanding Wi-Fi access will be a powerful support for school districts’ summer learning programs and will ensure a more equitable education system into the new school year.”

“We appreciate the generous support of private and public companies during this time, who are seeking out creative ways to help Georgia,” **stated Paige Pushkin, Executive Director of the Georgia Foundation for Public Education.** “Investments like this one from AT&T not only work to solve immediate challenges as a result of the pandemic, but also provide long term economic development and stability along with an educated and ready workforce. We are happy to work with other corporations looking to make this type of impact statewide."

School systems will choose locations for Wi-Fi Ranger bus networks, sending them to unserved areas where students do not have access to internet at home. Access information will be communicated directly to their students and families who will be able to access the Wi-Fi by parking nearby or by walking to the Wi-Fi Ranger bus location. Parents and students will be directed to follow the state guidelines for social distancing, but they will be able to access the internet signal within a certain distance of the bus. The signal for each bus has a range for connection up to 300 feet - the length of a football field.

The following school districts will receive Wi-Fi Rangers:

Baldwin County
Barrow County
Bleckley County
Brooks County
Bryan County
Butts County
Calhoun City Schools

Calhoun County
Camden County
Dooly County
Emanuel County
Floyd County
Franklin County
Glynn County
Greene County
Jackson County
Jasper County
Laurens County
Liberty County
Madison County
McIntosh County
Miller County
Mitchell County
Morgan County
Murray County
Paulding County
Pike County
Putnam County
Rockdale County
Schley County
Screven County
Turner County
Walker County
Washington County
Wilcox County
Wilkes County

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