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Governor Walz,Lt. Governor Flanagan Announce Public-Private Partnership to Support Technology Needs of Minnesota Students

State is working with philanthropic and business leaders to provide technology devices and internet access

June 30, 2020

[ST. PAUL, MN] – Today, Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan announced a public-private partnership of philanthropic and business leaders from across Minnesota that aims to meet the technology and connectivity needs of families with school-aged children. Partnership for a ConnectedMN is led by Best Buy, Comcast, Blandin Foundation, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation and the Minnesota Business Partnership, in collaboration with the State of Minnesota.

Before the start of the upcoming school year, ConnectedMN's goal is to bring technology and internet access to students across the state, especially communities most in need, including Indigenous students and students of color, students from low-income families, and families residing in rural Minnesota.

"I'm grateful to see Minnesota companies step up and help meet the needs of students," said Governor Walz. **"We need to work together — as individuals, state agencies, private companies, and schools — to face the opportunity gap and make sure that Minnesota is the best state for each and every child to grow up and receive the best education possible."**

"As the parent of a seven-year old, we endured our share of triumphs and challenges with distance learning this past spring," said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. **"Those challenges are exacerbated for low-income families, Indigenous families and families of color, and families in Greater Minnesota who may not have access to technology that meets their work and learning needs. Whatever school looks like this fall, this partnership will help us fill in the gaps."**

"As someone who grew up in rural Minnesota in a family without many resources, I am aware of how important this effort is. Without it, far too many of our state's students will be left behind as we face an uncertain school year, more reliant than ever on the tools and resources necessary to learn remotely," said Corie Barry, CEO of Best Buy. **"As a founding partner, we are pleased to work with the Governor and other organizations to truly 'connect Minnesota' and I call upon my fellow CEOs to engage however they and their business are able."**

"It is vital that all Americans are connected to the internet—for education, for work, and for personal health reasons, but unfortunately, many low-income families who live in our service areas don't have internet at home and that's where we can help," said J.D. Keller, regional senior vice president, Comcast Twin Cities. **"We are proud to be a founding partner of ConnectedMN knowing we can help through our Internet Essentials program, which is the nation's largest and most comprehensive broadband adoption program for low-income Americans."**

"Access denied is opportunity denied," said Bernadine Joselyn, director of public policy and engagement for Grand Rapids-based Blandin Foundation. **"It will require partnership to make sure that every student, in every corner of every county, has access to the knowledge, learning and services for their success."**

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) estimates that at least 25,000 Minnesota students lack the technology and high-speed internet access essential for academic learning, out-of-school activities and critical services such as telehealth. These students are disproportionately students of color, Indigenous students, and low-income students. ConnectedMN aims to supply these students with technology before the start of the upcoming school year. In addition, the partnership will work to create solutions to the lack of reliable, affordable broadband access in communities around the state, so students have the tools necessary to connect and engage around school, physical and mental health, and future career pathways.

Business and philanthropic leaders have collectively raised $1.65 million to date. In addition to the founding partners of the initiative, other organizations contributing include Accenture, Andersen Corporation, Bush Foundation, Ecolab, EY, Land O'Lakes, Minneapolis Foundation, Protolabs Foundation, Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation, Securian Financial, SPS Commerce Foundation, and Xcel Energy. These organizations will provide financial support and resources to this important initiative, including in-kind products, services or other support (e.g., hotspots, devices, connectivity, technical assistance).

The Governor and Lieutenant Governor have prioritized the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) dollars to meet technology and connectivity challenges, with approximately $14 million earmarked for districts to prioritize devices and connectivity. MDE has prioritized distributions of GEER and the discretionary Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund dollars to districts with the highest numbers of students receiving special education, students of color, homeless students, English language learners, and students who qualify for free-and reduced-price meals. Districts applying for these funds should visit MDE's website (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/covid19/cares/) .

Partnership for a ConnectedMN's application process will be available later in July. The Governor and State do not have a role in fundraising or directing funds for the Partnership for a ConnectedMN. More information on ConnectedMN can be found at www.connectedmn.us (https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.connectedmn.us%2F&data=02%7C01%7CHolland.Griffin%40state.mn.us%7Ccedce9852b954505abd108d81d1d1eea%7Ceb14b04624c445198f2
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