Governor Cooper Announces Nearly $40 million to Connect Students and Communities to High-Speed Internet, Help Educators With Remote Learning

Raleigh

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Today, Governor Roy Cooper announced nearly $40 million in funding for NC Student Connect, a new partnership created to address internet connectivity gaps that are a barrier to remote learning for many North Carolina students. When school resumed in August, superintendents estimated that at least 100,000 students still lacked a reliable internet connection at home.

Many North Carolina students are currently attending school remotely and need reliable internet access to be able to connect with their teachers and access their lessons. Students who are attending school onsite may also need internet access at home to be able to complete assignments.

“Long before COVID-19, expanding access to high-speed internet has been a top priority for my administration, and this pandemic has made the need even more urgent,” said Governor Cooper. “NC Student Connect will make critical investments in high speed internet access and remote learning that will help students, health care and businesses in our state.”

Today’s NC Student Connect investment includes:

- $30 million to distribute 100,000 wireless high speed hot spots for students to connect with their remote learning classes.
- $8 million to create accessible sites in convenient locations across the state such as school parking lots, municipal areas, and state parks, museums and historic sites. These NC Student Connect sites will provide free high-speed internet for students to connect to the Internet to download lessons and complete assignments offline.
- $2 million for educator professional development, parent training and student involvement in a spectrum of activities that go into effective remote learning. More than 1,300 educators from rural North Carolina already participated in a virtual conference focused on remote learning to help them be better prepared to teach throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Learn more about that conference (https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=39781839&msgid=481762&act=20YB&c=1346310&destination=https*3A*2F*2Fgovernor.nc.gov*2Fnews*2Fnc-rural-educators-get-support-remote-learning&cf=13425&v=66f20715f6bfba1574f51a20a3fd0236347e7dd311ffdf705fc0402a064e6585__;JSUlJSU!!HYmSToo!NOqU1ENX7TKomY rt5XgniSSt$).

NC Student Connect is a partnership across state government including the Department of Information Technology (DIT), the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR), Governor Cooper’s Hometown Strong initiative and the NC Business Committee for Education (NCBCE), an educational nonprofit in the Governor’s Office. These and other agencies have already worked to build partnerships to help leverage public investments to increase internet access in underserved communities. Purchasing began before Labor Day and thousands of hot spots will be shipped to school systems this week and will continue throughout the month.

“This announcement illustrates the state’s unwavering commitment in connecting all our students and all of NC,” said DIT Acting Secretary Thomas Parrish. “There’s no greater action than investing in our children, our future world changers. We are grateful to our private partners, and all those who are assisting in this effort; our tomorrow says thank you.”

“As a parent with a child that is remote learning at home, I can testify to the urgent need for devices with high speed connectivity,” said DNCR Secretary Susi Hamilton. “As a leader in State government, I can answer the Governor’s call to help school children by lending them devices through our State Library and add to their learning experience through outdoor and cultural programming that this department offers.”

“Today’s actions significantly advance Governor Cooper’s commitment to quality, accessible high-speed internet for every North Carolina school district. Our Remote Learning Working Group continues to produce meaningful solutions for our most marginalized students. The time is now for bold, innovative, and collaborative solutions that deliver high-speed internet to every North Carolina home,” said Jeremy

Collins, Director of Innovative Connectivity with Hometown Strong.

"Google is proud to work with our state, local, and corporate partners to provide innovative connectivity solutions—such as our Rolling Hotspots program in North Carolina—to help students access Wi-Fi. NCBCE's Remote Learning Working Group is thrilled that the state will invest in the NC Student Connect Program and provide professional development for educators as part of a collective effort to make it possible for more students to engage in school work remotely," said Lilyn Hester, Head of External Affairs - Southeast, Google, who serves as vice chairwoman of NCBCE and Chairwoman of the NCBCE Remote Learning Working Group.

Initial private sector investments in remote learning and NC Student Connect include, AT&T, Duke Energy Foundation, Fidelity Investments, Google, Smithfield Foundation, Verizon Foundation, and Wells Fargo Foundation.

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