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CONNECTING KIDS ENSURES 100% OF NEVADA'S STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN DIGITAL LEARNING HAVE ACCESS TO A COMPUTER AND THE INTERNET AT HOME

Public-private partnership helps Nevada become one of the first states in the nation with confirmed connectivity for every student learning online

LAS VEGAS – Connecting Kids announced today that the coalition formed under the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force has reached and connected every K-12 student in Nevada participating in digital learning, whether full- or part-time.

In all 17 of the State's school districts, as well as State- and district-sponsored charter schools, every student participating in online learning due to COVID-19 restrictions has confirmed at-home access to the internet and a computer.

This represents enormous progress in closing the digital divide since Connecting Kids began its work in early August, when schools were unable to confirm connectivity for more than 120,000 of Nevada's nearly half a million public school students.

"This coalition came together when business and community leaders learned some students would be left out of digital learning because their families could not afford access to high-speed internet and a learning-ready device," said Elaine Wynn, former President of Nevada's State Board of Education.

"Nevada's digital divide was exacerbating existing inequities and we did not have a moment to waste to address students' needs," Wynn continued. "Nevada accomplished this for our children through unprecedented cooperation coming from every corner of the State. This achievement is further evidence that when people of good heart and intention come together, they can solve a community's most daunting problems."

The Governor's COVID-19 Task Force formed Connecting Kids in early August as a Statewide public-private coalition including businesses, school districts, State agencies, local municipalities, non-profit groups, education advocacy groups, chambers of commerce, food banks and other organizations to address the immediate and time-sensitive need to connect every kid so they can participate in digital learning at home.

"Connecting Kids has demonstrated to all Nevadans that, when we work together toward a singular purpose, we can overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles and make a significant impact in public education," said Jim Murren, Chairman of the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force.

“Together, we established a coalition centered on trust and dedication, set a clear goal, marshaled resources, and held each other accountable,” Murren continued. “As we enter a new year and period of recovery, I hope we can build on this success and continue to unite on behalf of our students whose lives have been disrupted during this time.”

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jhone Ebert said Nevada is one of the first states in the nation to confirm that every student participating in digital learning is able to connect to school. Prior to this milestone, some students learning from home in Nevada had been sitting outside of restaurants, libraries or even WiFi-equipped school buses to participate in online school. In addition, many students had been sharing family-owned devices during the school day or relying on cellular data plans to connect to learning.

“When Nevada’s school buildings closed due to COVID-19 in March, the Nevada Department of Education focused our response in three key areas to ensure equitable access to learning: devices and connectivity for students and families, high-quality professional learning for educators and staff, and high-quality digital instructional materials,” said Superintendent Ebert “Thanks to the unprecedented response of the Connecting Kids coalition, every single Nevada public school student participating in digital learning – no matter where they live or go to school – now has the tools to connect to school from home.”

As co-chairs of the Connecting Kids coalition, Wynn and Murren extended a special “thank you” to everyone who participated in the effort. Some major contributors include:

Statewide efforts:

- The Governor’s COVID-19 Task Force established Connecting Kids, led by the Elaine P. Wynn Family Foundation, Communities in Schools Nevada, The Public Education Foundation, and R&R Partners, among others. The online tracker at connectingkids.org was updated almost daily with progress, and regular status updates were sent to 500-plus Statewide leaders, who consistently responded to calls for assistance.
- Attorney General Aaron Ford negotiated with T-Mobile to make Nevada the first state to secure approximately 18,000 hotspots through their national “Project 10Million” program. These hotspots have been distributed according to identified need throughout the State.
- The Nevada Department of Education under the leadership of Superintendent Ebert and Brian Mitchell, Director of the Governor’s Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, mobilized resources and solved problems for district-sponsored charter schools and for rural districts, where students sometimes live in remote spots without access to most wireless carriers.
- Rebecca Feiden, Executive Director of the State Public Charter School Authority, reached every enrolled student and worked with school leaders to ensure they had access to a computer and the internet.
- Media partners stepped up with regular updates about the number of kids needing connectivity, especially in the Spanish-speaking community, where public service announcements ran regularly.
- District and charter school leaders Statewide provided weekly updates on the number of connected students so the community could track progress.

County efforts:

- Communities in Schools Nevada worked with the Elaine P. Wynn Family Foundation to establish a virtual Family Support Center, where call agents connected families to the internet six days a week. The Family Support Center fielded more than 45,000 calls from families and connected nearly 18,000 families to reliable internet. The Governor's COVID-19 Task Force invested about \$200,000 to contract with a proven vendor to supply the software for the Family Support Center.
- The Clark County School District (CCSD) Board of Trustees and Superintendent Dr. Jesus F. Jara agreed to issue internet subsidies (using federal CARES Act funds) to eligible families through the Family Support Center, and they reassigned support professionals and guest teachers to work as call agents.
- Cox Communications authorized Family Support Center agents to sign up low-income families for their Connect2Compete program (at no cost to the family through June 31, 2021). Cox also allowed families without social security numbers to use their ID number from Mexico. Just three weeks ago, [Cox announced it was doubling the download speed for Connect2Compete families to help those with multiple students participating in online learning.](#)
- CCSD, the City of Las Vegas, the City of North Las Vegas and Clark County assigned staff members to knock on doors as field agents to track down hard-to-reach students and provide them with whatever resources they needed to connect to school.
- CCSD leaders provided daily data updates on the number of connected students so the community could track our progress.
- Dozens of community groups, unions and faith-based organizations spread the word to families about the Family Support Center. Volunteers, food banks, and community organizations distributed more than 300,000 postcards with our Family Support Center phone number through door-to-door community walks and through food distribution centers.
- Leaders from the Department of Family Services worked with the Family Support Center to connect every student in the foster care system with a computer and at-home internet.
- In Washoe County, local business Click Bond helped district officials format devices for student use.
- In Elko County, Nevada Gold Mines rallied businesses to purchase hundreds of computers.