

Governor Announces Public-Private Partnership to Support Connectivity Needs of Minnesota Students

The digital divide has been intensified by COVID-19, and the state is working together with philanthropic and business leaders to provide technology devices and internet access

The Governor announced today 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 being led by Best Buy, Comcast, Blandin Foundation, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation and the Minnesota Business Partnership, in collaboration with the state.

In the wake of COVID-19, economic stress and recent civil injustices, ConnectedMN's goal is to bring tech devices 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 us meet the needs of students," said Gov. Tim Walz. **"We need to work together — from individuals to state agencies to companies to schools — to attack the opportunity gap and make sure that Minnesota is the best state for each and every child to grow up in and where they receive the best education possible."**

Through hundreds of conversations with teachers, students and communities, the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and state agencies continue to hear about the urgent need for technology and connectivity. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) estimates that at least 25,000 Minnesota students still lack the tech devices and high-speed internet access essential for academic learning, out-of-school activities and critical services such as telehealth.

Even with the valiant efforts of educators and schools to accommodate and ensure that distance learning did not mean online learning, we know that students who are not connected face bigger barriers in educational experience, mental health access and more. These students are disproportionately students of color, Indigenous students and low-income students. ConnectedMN aims to supply these students with tech devices 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.

"We must come together. It is going to take all of us — public and private partners — to meet this moment," added the Governor. **"I am grateful that companies and foundations are responding to our communities by raising resources to put technology in the hands of students and help them stay connected."**

Business and philanthropic leaders have collectively raised \$1.65 million so far to enhance what will be available through the state. 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 have committed money and resources to this important initiative, including in-kind products, services or other support (e.g., hotspots, devices, connectivity, technical assistance).

Based on community feedback, the Governor has prioritized his Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) dollars to meet technology and connectivity challenges. About \$14 million is earmarked for districts to prioritize devices and connectivity, ensuring that the necessary technology is in the hands of every student. 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](#).

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, including updates on the launch of the fund and information on how businesses, philanthropic organizations and individuals can get involved can be found at www.connectedmn.us.