



# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Kip Harkness

**SUBJECT: DIGITAL ACCESS AND  
INCLUSION FOR SCHOOLS  
IN COVID-19**

**DATE:** April 20, 2020

Approved

Date

**4/20/2020**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the report on the on digital access and inclusion strategy for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **OUTCOME**

Acceptance of the update will inform Council of the key components of the City of San José's re-focused broadband strategy. Council will be advised of the new strategy, and how it is evolving to accommodate the evolving digital needs of San José teachers, parents and students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **BACKGROUND**

With the belief that access to the Internet is a basic human right, the City of San José crafted a broadband strategy in 2016 that identified the importance of digital connectivity in the 21st century. Without reliable access to the Internet, individuals, families and students are disconnected from a vital utility and unable to effectively participate in the digital economy.

The broadband strategy seeks to extend technology's reach and empower each San José resident, especially those who are historically under-represented or under-served.

Before the COVID-19 crisis began, an estimated 95,000 people in the City of San José lacked reliable broadband Internet connectivity. The Digital Inclusion Partnership, which combines private sector investment with a nonprofit focused Digital Inclusion Fund, is designed to bridge that digital divide. Through the Education and Digital Literacy Strategy and Schools/City Collaborative, the City has engaged with school districts to identify and implement programs that enhance digital literacy skill development, as well as access to equipment and curricula.

Due to COVID-19, school campuses have had to close to physical attendance and all have been asked to implement distance learning. Even when schools could reopen to physical attendance, distance learning will be a necessary component of learning in order to prevent disruption of learning due to temporary closures or other measures necessary to adhere to social distancing requirements and promote the safety and well-being of all students while ensuring continuity of instruction. Distance learning implementation necessarily will evolve and to sustain quality online learning access to the internet is a must.

On February 25, 2020, Council unanimously approved the issuance of \$1,000,000 to fund the first round of Digital Inclusion grants to 23 San José community-based organizations. The City's implementation partner, the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF), is instrumental in this effort, and has begun working directly with community-based organizations to host community of practice sessions, and to train the community-based organizations on digital adoptions.

This memorandum details how the City's broadband strategy will be re-focused in the short-term to respond to the digital effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and will provide support to San José schools and school districts.

## **ANALYSIS**

In the era of COVID-19, the need for Digital Inclusion has only become clearer. Schools and school districts have shifted entirely to distance and digital learning as their platform for delivering education. As a result, digital inclusion must now be a core service of the school districts, as every student must have a device (most commonly a laptop), broadband access (that supports 25 Mbps download and 3Mbps upload per person) and the digital literacy skills to use them, in order to receive an education.

The City of San José, through its Emergency Operations Center, is committed to continuing to support the work of its broadband strategy with an initial focus on the needs of schoolchildren disconnected from the traditional classroom experience. We will also be evaluating other communities of needs, such as seniors' need for connectivity for telehealth.

The County's Office of Education will be a primary partner in this more student-focused strategy. The County office, and its County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Mary Ann Dewan, is charged with providing technology and technical support to 267,224 students throughout all 31 school districts across the County. Dr. Dewan is currently in the County's Emergency Operations Center as the primary point person and liaison with the schools and school districts.

The refocused strategy will have seven key components:

1. Development of a Digital Inclusion Strategy by the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) with support from the City's Digital Inclusion Fund implementation partner, the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF);
2. Leveraging the Schools/City Collaborative partnership to ensure long-term resource sharing and capacity building between district and City staff for both distance and in-person learning;
3. Implementation of Digital Inclusion Fund Grants with a re-alignment to tracking student connectivity and digital skills building;
4. Convene public-private partnerships to bring the telecommunications companies and other key partners to the table in service of students;
5. Continued build out of Community WiFi;
6. Continued small-cell deployment; and
7. Securing emergency funding for devices, hotspots, and infrastructure expansion.

**Digital Inclusion Strategy** – The City of San José will make available to the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) the technical expertise of its partners in CETF. We intend for CETF to provide technical assistance to the County in developing a comprehensive distance learning strategy that supports our underserved students in all 31 school districts. The strategy will identify both immediate and medium term gaps in connectivity, devices and digital literacy, as currently these gaps have not been formally quantified.

Initial coordination between the County and CETF in this endeavor has already begun. For instance, on April 15, 2020 SCCOE and CETF jointly-hosted a webinar for SCCOE staff to provide them with vital digital connectivity information, such as affordable internet offers and avenues to pursue grievances with Internet Service Providers.

**Schools/City Collaborative** – The City will leverage its long-standing partnership with all school districts serving San José students to continue development of an immediate and ongoing workplan for enhancing and measuring digital literacy acquisition, while ensuring integration of City, SCCOE, and CETF efforts to implement both distance and in-person learning.

**Digital Inclusion Fund Grants** – the first round of Digital Inclusion Fund grants was targeted at bridging the digital divide with a mandatory deliverable to achieve 4,000 San José household adoptions. These grants will continue to the extent possible and we will continue to support the 23 community-based organizations and nonprofits that have received grant funds in the first round. These community-based organizations have begun the important work of building their internal infrastructure, developing digital access and literacy training courses, and working directly with San José residents to achieve digital household adoptions.

A number of school districts, and the San José Public Library Foundation, were awarded grants in this first round. These organizations may be refocused on distance learning and filling the gap of four to five months of lost education for underserved students. Future rounds of the Digital

Inclusion Fund Grants will seek to focus resources in support of distance learning for underserved students.

Digital Inclusion fundraising activities will continue as well and will be conducted in tandem with the Silicon Valley Strong Fund, which supports residents, businesses and community organizations that have been severely impacted by COVID-19. Targeted efforts include:

- i. Continuity of existing Digital Inclusion Fund campaigns;
- ii. Development of unique campaigns in support of Digital Inclusion's decade-long fundraising goals;
- iii. Securing appropriate emergency funding;
- iv. Seeking private sector contributions, including from telecommunications companies; and
- v. Collaborating with school districts as they seek to realign funds.

A specific focus will be placed on understanding the capacities and unmet needs of each school district so that the City's efforts in working with grantees may be targeted to specific households with connectivity, device access, and augmented learning opportunities.

**Public Private Partnerships** – The City of San José will convene its telecommunications partners including AT&T, Comcast, T-Mobile, and Verizon to explore opportunities for enhanced connectivity, reduced costs, and access to devices for low-income students and their families.

**Community Wi-Fi** – In October 2017, the City of San José successfully completed the installation of Community Wi-Fi at James Lick attendance area providing Wi-Fi access to both students and the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the construction of community Wi-Fi systems (Access East Side) for the Overfelt attendance area will continue and will be completed by summer 2020. Similarly, the design of Yerba Buena community Wi-Fi systems will continue and be completed by summer 2021, through resources provided by Community Development Block Grant funding. The community Wi-Fi deployments will enable the community and the students from both of these high schools (and the feeder middle and elementary schools) to access Wi-Fi needed in order to receive their education and to improve quality of life outcomes. As feeder school funding becomes available to expand the Access East Side footprint, the East Side Union High School District has offered to partner with the feeder schools to help them build their technology and Wi-Fi administration skills and capacity.

**Small Cell Deployment** - In order to address critical infrastructure gaps, the City of San José will clarify with the County of Santa Clara if certain small cell and telecommunication infrastructure improvement projects can be allowed to expand more fully, provided that they directly benefit distance learning and low-income students.

**Securing Emergency Funding** - City staff will explore funding opportunities from the CARES Act and other crisis funding sources to make direct investments in digital learning at scale.

Specifically, the City will examine the opportunities provided by FEMA, as well as additional recovery funding available to support the closing of the digital divide.

This refocused strategy will be data-driven and supported by common understanding across all 31 school districts across the County. The strategy will share distance learning best-practices amongst schools and districts. The strategy will provide technical assistance by supporting the dissemination of effective distance learning tools such as playbooks and forums for training and knowledge sharing. San José students and teachers will derive a direct benefit from the collective wisdom gained by these practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

In response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the changing digital needs of the San José community, staff will refocus Digital Inclusion efforts to support distance learning requirements in San José schools and school districts. These efforts will be effective immediately and continue through at least August 31, 2020.

Staff will support coordination between SCCOE and CETF to develop a comprehensive distance learning strategy and assist with the strategy's implementation. The strategy will include a roadmap to support distance learning implementation utilizing a data-informed approach to meet the digital needs of all San Jose students.

## **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

SCCOE and CETF will develop a comprehensive digital inclusion strategy in support of distance learning implementation, commence the strategy, and report back. We will report back to Council via informational updates as part of the Report of the City Manager under Agenda Item 3.1 on immediate issues and return to Council later with more comprehensive implementation data.

As the Education and Digital Literacy lead for the City, the Library Department will provide guidance to SCCOE and CETF regarding digital literacy standards, metrics and educational outcomes. City Librarian Jill Bourne will work with Dr. Dewan, Mayor Liccardo and others as co-Chairs of the School City Collaborative, to develop programming to maximize resources to serve our children, families and the community and the educational, development and economic growth of our community

## **CLIMATE SMART SAN JOSE**

The recommendation in this memorandum aligns with one or more Climate Smart San José energy, water, or mobility goals.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This memorandum will be posted on the City's Council Agenda website for the April 21, 2020 Council Meeting.

## **COORDINATION**

This memorandum was coordinated with the Library Department, the City Attorney's Office, and the City Manager's Budget Office.

## **COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT**

No commission recommendation or input is associated with this action.

## **FISCAL/POLICY ALIGNMENT**

This recommendation aligns with the City's Broadband and Digital Inclusion strategy approved by the City Council in November 2017, the creation of the Digital Inclusion Fund in May 2018, and Council's approval of the first round of grant funds in February 2020.

## **COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATION**

Necessary resources to support the Digital Inclusion Program were included in the 2019-2020 Adopted Operating Budget. The payment to CETF from the Digital Inclusion Program appropriation funded first-round grant payments to 23 grantees. Grants will be disbursed in phases, with the first phase totaling \$250,000, and subsequent phases not to exceed the total allocation of \$1,000,000. Community Development Block Grant Funding of \$1.5 million is recommended for inclusion in the 2020-2021 Annual Action Plan scheduled for City Council review and approval prior to the end of this fiscal year.

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**CEQA**

Not a Project, File No. PP17 009, Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports, and Informational Memos that involve no approvals of any City action.

/s/

**KIP HARKNESS**

Deputy City Manager

For questions, please contact Kerstyn Olson, Digital Inclusion Program Manager at (408) 535-8166.