

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Jill Bourne

**SUBJECT: SJ ACCESS – STUDENT HOTSPOT PROGRAM OVERVIEW**      **DATE:** April 29, 2021

Approved



Date

**4/29/2021**

## INFORMATION

This memorandum provides a detailed overview of the SJ Access – Student Hotspot program, which has provided 12,800 student households with a hotspot and a high-speed unlimited data plan for the main purpose of connecting to distance learning. As noted in the Rules and Open Government Committee Meeting on April 7, 2021, an Informational Memorandum was requested to provide an overview of the Student Hotspot program, in lieu of the deferred Annual Report of the Education and Digital Literacy Strategy, to be heard by the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee in Fall 2021. A single page overview of the program is provided as Attachment A.

### **School Closures**

On March 13, 2020, the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) announced that beginning on Monday, March 16, 2020, schools in Santa Clara County would shift to distance learning in response to growing cases of COVID-19 in the community. This closure was originally announced for a three-week duration and preceded the March 16 announcement of a regional Shelter-in-Place order. With few exceptions, schools remained closed and relied on distance learning programs through June 2020, and remained closed for the majority of the 2020-2021 school year until April 2021, when Local Education Agencies (LEAs) began large-scale reopening plans, many of which include a hybrid learning approach (leveraging both distance and in-person learning).

### **Addressing Insufficient Connectivity**

On April 21, 2020, staff provided the City Council with an update on digital access and inclusion efforts, specifically related to the need to assist schools and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. A Digital Inclusion (DI) Branch was then activated within the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), involving staff from the Library, Office of Civic Innovation, Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services, Public Works, and Information Technology Departments. The City

Council directed staff to explore connectivity solutions for student households in advance of the 2020-2021 school year.

From early May through mid-June 2020, staff convened discussions with telecommunications and internet providers (AT&T, Verizon, Comcast, and T-Mobile) seeking their partnership to accelerate closing the digital divide and meeting the urgent needs of unconnected and under-connected students and residents who lack access to school and services due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On June 23, 2020, the City Council authorized the City Manager to negotiate and execute a contract with AT&T for 11,000 hotspots with 12 months of high-speed unlimited data plans. Of this total, 8,000 hotspots were allocated for students, and 3,000 hotspots were allocated for members of the public, made available through the San Jose Public Library.

### **Logistics and Distribution of Devices**

Immediately following City Council approval, City staff worked with AT&T and SCCOE to: execute contracts, order devices, develop the custom interface for secure and filtered connections, coordinate with LEAs to allocate devices based on need, create collateral materials in multiple languages, and manage logistics of receiving 11,000 uniquely identified custom devices. This effort heavily leveraged the Library's existing logistics and materials management functions, as well as the Library's data unit.

On July 14, 2020, the first allocation of 11,000 hotspot devices was officially ordered from AT&T. The first devices were received by the Library on July 23, 2020, exactly one month from the Council approval of the program. Devices were then processed and packaged for distribution.

Between August 7 and 24, 2020, City staff delivered 8,000 hotspots to 17 LEAs that requested support through the SJ Access program; the majority of these devices were delivered in advance of each LEA's first day of school.

In response to growing demand for support from LEAs, the City placed a second order with AT&T that included an additional 4,800 hotspot devices. This is described further in the "Outreach and Ongoing Coordination with School Partners" section of this memorandum.

Between September 25 and October 26, 2020, additional hotspots were distributed to schools. By the end of this period, all 12,800 hotspots had been distributed across 32 LEAs. As described under "Ongoing Management and Monitoring of Need," the City has continued to support LEAs with additional need throughout the school year, made possible by the strength of partnerships focused on equity. LEAs with an identified surplus of devices were willing to return them for redistribution to other students. To date, the City has coordinated 61 separate hotspot deliveries and 5 returns. Half of the LEAs served (16) received more than one delivery to meet ongoing needs.

## **Program Parameters**

The SJ Access hotspot devices were provided to LEAs through a grant agreement between the City and each LEA and SCCOE. The program parameters were codified in each grant agreement and include:

- LEAs bear no costs for the devices or data plans;
- LEAs can retain the devices after the school year concludes, if they choose;
- LEAs are required to maintain individual records of students who are provided Grant Fund Devices, which will be reported in the aggregate to the City at the end of the grant period -
  - No identifiable information of students will be shared with the City; and
  - SCCOE will support LEAs in data collection and reporting, including aggregating information at a project level (i.e., the City will not see disaggregated data by LEA);
- City may require the return of devices that are not being used for the Grant purpose (i.e., devices that have not been distributed or show no usage by students); and
- City will pay full cost and bear full financial obligation to AT&T for 12-months of connectivity, and will support all escalations or interactions with AT&T.

## **Outreach and Ongoing Coordination with School Partners**

To maintain clear pathways for communication, the City partnered with SCCOE to coordinate directly with LEAs regarding the number of devices needed to support each organization's student population. On July 28, 2020, the City and SCCOE hosted a welcome meeting for 13 LEAs that indicated an interest in receiving SJ Access hotspots based on initial outreach efforts.

Throughout August and September, City and SCCOE staff conducted significant outreach to ensure LEAs were aware of program offerings. Four (4) additional LEAs were able to be served with the count of devices available in the first order (8,000 originally allocated for students and 300 originally allocated for Library users, which were reconfigured for use by students to meet demand), bringing the total number of LEAs served by the end of August 2020 to 17.

The demand for support quickly exceeded the supply, as new requests for support were received from existing LEA partners and additional LEAs made new requests for hotspot devices.

On September 22, 2020, City Council ratified an amendment to the agreement with AT&T to obtain 4,800 additional hotspots, 4,500 of which would be allocated to students and 300 of which would backfill the devices that were reconfigured to meet student need from the stock allocated for Library users.

In an effort to meet urgent student needs, at the beginning of September 2020, City staff opened the Library checkout program early for families with school-aged children through an LEA referral process. LEAs with active requests for support who were waiting to receive devices from the second order could refer families to the Library to check out a device directly, before this

service was available to the public. This stop-gap measure was in place for less than one month, as the City began to receive and distribute new devices for students directly to schools. Approximately 50 students were served through the referral program.

In addition to general coordination support, City and SCCOE staff hosted seven (7) large-scale meetings and trainings through the year, all of which focused on providing the highest quality technical support. Two (2) of these sessions were offered at separate dates and times to maximize engagement and one (1) was convened as a special convening of the Schools-City Collaborative to ensure leaders at the highest level were aware of options for ongoing support as we prepare for summer and the next academic year.

### **Ongoing Management and Monitoring of Need**

After 12,800 hotspots were delivered at the end of October 2020, City and SCCOE staff reached out to LEAs to understand how well the supply was meeting the demand. Two (2) LEAs offered to return a portion of the count allocated to them, recognizing a surplus that would not be needed to serve students within their school communities moving forward. Since that time, three (3) other LEAs with identified surplus have worked with City staff to coordinate returns. These returns have enabled the City to meet ongoing needs from seven (7) other LEAs. As of April 2021, all 32 partnering LEAs report having a sufficient supply of SJ Access devices to meet their needs.

Beginning in January 2021, City staff conducted usage data analyses, to identify any devices receiving less than 10 mbps of data during the billing cycle. After disaggregating results, staff shared individualized reports with LEA partners in January 2021 and hosted individual Zoom meetings to provide meaningful support during the months of January and February 2021. These individualized usage reports have been, and will continue to be, provided to LEAs on a monthly basis.

LEAs have been asked to inform City staff if: they identify "lost" or "stolen" hotspots (City will cancel service); they have a surplus of hotspots that they are not likely to need within the LEA (City will make every effort to redistribute these resources); or they have hotspots that require high-level troubleshooting (City will work with AT&T to make sure all the hotspots in hand are operational). City, SCCOE, and LEA staff have engaged in these conversations with the shared goal of understanding the scope of use and need to better estimate expenditures required for connectivity support after the end of the grant period.

Analyses and conversations around usage data revealed an opportunity to maximize use of the hotspots by offering LEAs expanded flexibility in their distribution efforts. City staff developed a grant agreement addendum permitting a "geographic exemption" for the use SJ Access hotspots. The addendum allows for a precise count of hotspots allocated to an interested LEA to be distributed to students who are residents of Santa Clara County, but live outside of City limits. This is all possible because of SCCOE's \$400,000 investment in the Student Hotspot program, which provided for the purchase of 1,000 hotspot devices. To date, 5 LEAs have submitted

requests, all of which have been approved, allowing approximately 250 devices (less than 2% of the total count) to be distributed with increased flexibility.

### **Community Conversations/Feedback**

In December 2020, City staff collected feedback from community members via two aligned efforts: community conversations with Library patrons who borrowed SJ Access hotspots during Fall 2020 and focus groups with stakeholders connected to schools, including those from LEAs participating in the Student Hotspot program.

Goals of the focus groups were to: 1) better understand the challenges that schools and families have been facing related to connectivity and the digital divide, 2) gauge how well SJ Access hotspots have been functioning as a resource to help students connect to distance learning, and 3) identify ways the City can support students, schools, and the wider community in the future. All 32 participating LEAs were invited to participate in the focus group effort. In addition, students were also recruited from the Youth Commission and SJPL's Teen Reach program.

City staff hosted six (6) focus groups and two (2) interviews with LEA leaders. One (1) focus group for parents was conducted in Spanish. Stakeholders included superintendents and other district staff, school leaders and other school staff, parents, and students.

#### *Summary of Findings*

- Hotspots have an important role to play in supplementing basic (insufficient) internet services, but the City should continue to invest in high-quality and affordable broadband options for City residents.
- In order to ensure equitable experiences and distribution of resources, the City should continue to leverage partnerships with LEAs and CBOs and explore ways to improve communication pathways.
- Successfully engaging with underserved community members (particularly under- or unconnected residents who do not speak English) requires substantial time and commitment from staff. The City should continue to invest in staff development and training opportunities.
- Offering technical support and opportunities to develop digital literacy skills has been vital to the success of SJ Access programs. The City should continue to invest in these areas to ensure meaningful long-term impact.
- SJ Access resources have not only enabled families to connect to the internet and distance learning, but they also enabled them to feel more cared for and connected to the community, and to access other vital resources during the pandemic. The City should continue to invest in these resources in a post-pandemic world.

### **Impact Reporting**

Each LEA is required to maintain records of the students that use each hotspot. LEAs will report data in several categories of learning outcomes and engagement to SCCOE by July 1, 2021. SCCOE will prepare an impact report on the use and educational outcomes of these devices to

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the City by August 1, 2021. City staff aim to share impact data about the students served through this program in Fall 2021.

### **Future Actions to Support Student Household Connectivity**

The December 2020 relief package created the Emergency Broadband Benefit Fund, which authorized low-income households and student households that qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program to receive as much as a \$50/month discount on broadband service. The Federal Communications Commission has recently released the regulations and first round of eligible service providers authorized to provide this subsidy to qualifying households. Staff is reviewing the information and preparing to make this information widely available to San Jose residents, including students that have benefited from SJ Access hotspots.

The current landscape of funding available for connectivity continues to shift, as do plans for in-person instruction in the Fall. Staff is actively analyzing funding opportunities to extend a portion of the student hotspot devices through January 2022 to provide greater flexibility to respond to future public health orders, hybrid learning scenarios, and to support enrollment into the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. Staff will provide additional information on the SJ Access Student Hotspot project to the City Council through this year's budget process and at the Neighborhood Services & Education sub-committee in the Fall.



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For questions, please contact Ann Grabowski, Library Chief of Staff & Manager of Policy and Analytics, at [ann.grabowski@sjlibrary.org](mailto:ann.grabowski@sjlibrary.org).

Attachment A





## Wi-Fi Hotspots for San Jose Students

### Project Overview

San José Public Library (SJPL) and the City of San José are proud to partner with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) and AT&T to support students' academic success by providing FREE access to the internet for the 2020-21 school year through 12,800 Wi-Fi hotspot devices. *Project Website:* <https://www.sjpl.org/hotspot-schools>

### Project Highlights

- *Eligibility:* K-12 students living in San José<sup>1</sup> and attending a public school are eligible.
- *The Device:* The Unite Express 2 Category 13 Hotspot device comes with an unlimited high speed data plan available for the 2020-2021 school year. Up to 15 mobile-enabled devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, or smartphones) can access Wi-Fi through a single hotspot device. All devices that have been configured for schools will also have Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) filtering. Devices are distributed with a setup guide that is translated in Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Tagalog.
- *Distribution Plan:* Students access hotspot devices directly through their school sites. SCCOE has been working with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to understand community needs on an ongoing basis. SJPL has managed the delivery of hotspot devices to LEAs.
- *Cost:* This service is being offered at NO COST to schools or students, and there will be no fees for damaged, lost, or stolen devices.
- *Privacy:* SJPL will NOT know which students are using the devices. Only schools will have that information.
- *Grant Period:* August 1, 2020 to July 31, 2021

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### Participating Local Education Agencies

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Alpha Public Schools	Moreland School District
Alum Rock Union School District	Morgan Hill Unified School District
Berryessa Union School District	Mount Pleasant Elementary School District
Cambrian School District	Oak Grove School District
Campbell Union High School District	Orchard School District
Campbell Union School District	Perseverance Preparatory
Cupertino Union School District	Rocketship Public Schools
Discovery Charter Schools	San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School
Downtown College Prep	San Jose Unified School District
East Side Union High School District	Santa Clara County Office of Education
Escuela Popular	Santa Clara Unified School District
Evergreen Elementary School District	Summit Public Schools
Franklin-McKinley School District	Sunrise Middle School
Fremont Union High School District	Union School District
KIPP Public Schools - Northern California	University Preparatory Academy
Luther Burbank School District	Voices College Bound Language Academies

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<sup>1</sup> In March 2021, the City approved requests from 5 LEAs to have flexibility to distribute a precise count of allocated hotspots to residents of Santa Clara County who are not City residents via a "Geographic Exemption Addendum."