Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: EASTERN U P INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Project Title: Sparking Broadband Use in the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary _________________________

This project represents a unique partnership between three geographically large counties, a rural broadband provider and 16 small, remote school districts that will create a vast tech rich, broadband enabled environment designed to propel education and economic growth in the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The project will leverage strong partnerships to ensure that each and every family with school aged children has a broadband connection. Until very recently, such a goal would have been impossible but a partner broadband project and agreements to honor connection and monthly fee vouchers by the rural broadband provider has eliminated many barriers. For the past decade the Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District (EUP) has been a leader in Michigan’s one-to-one computing efforts. Covering 4000 square miles, the ISD serves one of the most remote and economically disadvantaged student populations in Michigan. Out of necessity, the ISD has employed technology-based solutions to support schools in deploying effective teaching and learning across significant space and time. With the advent of improved mobile and IP technology, EUP seeks to transform schools in rural and remote areas through anywhere / anytime teaching and learning and spike broadband adoption and use in the process. Regardless how proficient schools are at providing technology rich environments, many rural students go home each afternoon, weekend and summer to 19th Century homes, without computer technology or broadband connectivity. The examination of unserved and underserved maps available for Michigan clearly depict limitations in rural areas with regard to broadband access. Closer examination and discussions with local broadband providers creates an even more complex picture. Even in our geographic areas where broadband is available, adoption rates are nowhere near levels that would provide broad enhancement to education and communities. There are really two distinct broadband access issues in play in rural Michigan. First, and most essential, is simple availability of broadband. Second, in areas where broadband is available, broadband connection/adoption. What are the barriers to broadband adoption in rural areas? Access to devices: Do families have access to computers at home? Cost: Are costs associated with initial connection and/or ongoing monthly fees prohibitive for target families? Relevance: Do families feel that having broadband access at home will enhance their circumstance? This project will specifically address all three of these adoption barriers. With regard to access to devices, all partner districts will provide computers to all students at identified grade spans. The computers will be utilized in class daily, employing effective technology integration strategies. As described, these districts have distinguished themselves by having the baseline requirements including a robust network infrastructure and trained district staff. In addition to effective classroom use, the laptops will be expected to go home with students each afternoon. This goes well beyond past initiatives that provided computers in school with occasional allowance for
transport home for 'special projects'. There are significant software and hardware advancements that make the timing of this bold step possible. Districts were selected based on specific readiness indicators beginning with a fundamental belief that technology is essential in any 21st Century learning environment. These small, rural schools have been strategic in the creation of technology rich environments using very limited resources. The environments created are fully wireless and have a level of technology use that is beyond that seen in most in Michigan schools. Parallel to these infrastructure and equipment related efforts has been the implementation of ongoing teacher, administrator and technology staff professional development sessions that have increased individual skills and promoted rich integration efforts at the classroom level. The populations served will include all school aged children and their families in the 16 partner school districts. This represents over 7000 students. The populations are primarily economically disadvantaged; census poverty rates vary from 8'38% (2007). It should be noted that census poverty rates can be deceiving in rural areas. The retiree and summer resort populations tend to skew the overall census poverty data up. A more accurate measure of poverty for this project may be free and reduced lunch percentages. Those values range from 33-85% with the average at approximately 40%. The areas targeted by this project contain approximately 12% of the total Native American student population in Michigan while comprising less than 1% of the overall student population in the state. A demographic profile of each district is provided in the supplemental information. The job creation associated with this project will include the hiring of 8 new staff members. One full time project director, 4 technology specialists and 3 school / community educators will be hired for the three year duration to fully implement and monitor this project. In addition to these positions, all teachers (approximately 500) participating in this project will be upgrading their skills. With the State's economy in freefall, unemployment and underemployment stands at 22 percent, Michigan must look for innovative models for using broadband technology to sustain innovation. A critical area is the delivery 21st Century teaching and learning via the web. With today's low-cost computing and networking technology, sustainable one-to-one, mobile computer programs hold great promise for changing the way educators and students and their families learn about the world and engage in the global economy.