



SCHOOL BOARD ACTION REPORT

DATE: October 22, 2020
FROM: Denise Juneau, Superintendent
LEAD STAFF: JoLynn Berge, Chief Financial Officer

For Introduction: November 18, 2020
For Action: December 2, 2020

1. TITLE

Approve hotspots for students to support remote learning through school year 2020-21.

2. PURPOSE

Approve the purchase and related service of hotspots to support remote learning through school year 2020-21.

3. RECOMMENDED MOTION

I move that the Board of Directors authorize the Superintendent to approve the purchase and service costs for internet hotspots from various vendors for the 2020-2021 school year as follows:

Mobile Beacon in the amount of \$273,113 and Verizon in the amount of \$294,900, plus any applicable WA state sales tax.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- a. COVID-19 has brought about a significant change in the way we are delivering education to students. Students are now learning from home, necessitating access to the internet. Many of our free and reduced lunch (FRL) students did not have internet at home when remote learning began, resulting in an equity challenge, previously known as the “homework gap”. SPS bridged that gap in 2019-2020 with Comcast Internet Essentials, Wave, and hotspots from Verizon and Mobile Beacon, reseller for Sprint. (Vendor amounts for 2019-20 were under the \$250,000 threshold for Board approval). In 2020-2021, SPS is leveraging hotspots from Verizon, Sprint and T-Mobile, as well as additional OSPI/state funded Comcast accounts. Hotspots from Verizon and Mobile Beacon will exceed \$250,000 for school year 2020-21, and are therefore presented in the BAR for Board approval. Additional information regarding 2019-20 purchases, while not meeting the \$250,000 threshold for Board approval, is nevertheless provided in the BAR to provide transparency.

Priority was originally given to homeless students, students furthest from educational justice, special education students, EL students and graduating seniors. However, all students who have requested a hotspot have been provided one. We know many family circumstances have changed, and even if a student is not FRL in our records there may be a need.

The state has begun to offer “free” internet essentials via Comcast; to the extent possible, SPS will transition students and families to those services. Unfortunately, the state will not allow families to whom we provided service prior to August 2020 to qualify for those services.

The T-Mobile amount of \$61,800 is to participate in its Project 10Million, <https://www.t-mobile.com/business/education/project-10-million> . This program is only for verified FRL students, and only allows one hotspot per family. It has been our experience that hotspots will support no more than two students. When there are more than two SPS students in a family we provide additional hotspots.

We are working to access the state program, and programs like T-Mobile's as they come online. But we have found that some service providers have stronger signals in some locations in the district. As a result, we have a variety of program and hotspot offerings to have options for families and students.

Vendor/Year	Amount	Number of Hotspots
Mobile Beacon/Sprint 2019-2020	\$ 193,870	
Verizon 2019-2020	\$ 197,991	
Total 2019-2020	\$ 391,861	2,244
Tmobile 2020-2021	\$ 61,800	412
Approval in the BAR requested for:		
Mobile Beacon/Sprint	\$ 273,113	
Verizon 2020-2021	\$ 294,900	
Total Approval requested in BAR for 2020-2021	\$ 568,013	2,460
Total for all hotspots March 2020- Aug 2021	\$ 1,021,674	5,116

b. Alternatives

1. Don’t provide hotspots to students and/or limit the number of hotspots provided to families with more than two SPS students.
2. Only provide hotspots to FRL students.

c. Research

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-06-16-covid-19-has-widened-the-homework-gap-into-a-full-fledged-learning-gap>

“COVID-19 did not create the digital divide for students”, added Robin Lake, the panel moderator and the director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE), which is based out of the University of Washington and has been tracking school districts’ transitions to distance learning. But the pandemic did force us to “stare [the problem] right in the eye.”

5. FISCAL IMPACT/REVENUE SOURCE

Fiscal impact to this action is estimated at \$568,013. The revenue source for this motion is BTA IV - \$565,264 and Comcast donation - \$2,749.

Expenditure: One-time Annual Multi-Year N/A

Revenue: One-time Annual Multi-Year N/A

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

With guidance from the District’s Community Engagement tool, this action was determined to merit the following tier of community engagement:

Not applicable

Tier 1: Inform

Tier 2: Consult/Involve

Tier 3: Collaborate

Staff has sent communication about hotspot availability and deployment plans via the School Leaders Communicator and News Brief along with the Resource Center informational flyers. These communication channels will continue to be utilized to disseminate updates and useful information. We also partnered with the Seattle Housing Authority to hand out hotspots at their back to school events.

7. EQUITY ANALYSIS

Our students furthest from education justice were the most affected by the lack of internet access at home.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/26/nearly-one-in-five-teens-cant-always-finish-their-homework-because-of-the-digital-divide/>

Before COVID-19, Pew Research found that 25 percent of black teens had been unable to do their homework because of barriers to internet access at home, and 21 percent had used public Wi-Fi to do homework for the same reasons. After COVID-19, many of those public wifi locations became unavailable (libraries, coffee shops, etc). Providing hotspots to students helps reduce barriers to accessing remote learning.

8. STUDENT BENEFIT

The provided internet hotspots provide basic access to teaching and learning, while learning is occurring online and from home. Without this access, many of our most at-risk students may be without access to their classes and teachers.

From the prior research, school-age children in lower-income households are especially likely to lack broadband access. Roughly one-third of households with children ages 6 to 17 and whose annual income falls below \$30,000 a year do not have a high-speed internet connection at home.

These broadband disparities are particularly pronounced for black and Hispanic households with school-age children – especially those with low household incomes. See prior research links.

9. WHY BOARD ACTION IS NECESSARY

Amount of contract initial value or contract amendment exceeds \$250,000 (Policy No. 6220)

10. POLICY IMPLICATION

Per Board Policy No. 6220, Procurement, any contract over \$250,000 must be brought before the Board for approval.

11. BOARD COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

This motion was discussed at the Audit and Finance Committee meeting on November 9, 2020. The Committee reviewed the motion and moved it forward for approval.

12. TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Hotspot deployment continues as needed.

13. ATTACHMENTS

- None