



The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges

PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

DATE: September 9-10, 2013

SUBJECT: California Connects Sustainable Broadband Program: Bridging the Digital Divide		Item Number: 4.4	
		Attachment: No	
CATEGORY:	Foundation for California Community Colleges	TYPE OF BOARD CONSIDERATION:	
Recommended By:	 Keetha Mills, President/CEO	Consent/Routine	
		First Reading	
Approved for Consideration:	 Brice W. Harris, Chancellor	Action	
		Information	X

ISSUE: This item will include a presentation and discussion related to the contributions of the federally funded \$10.9 million California Connects Program; highlighting program accomplishments, key statewide partnerships, and noteworthy benefits to our colleges, students and communities throughout California’s Central Valley Region.

BACKGROUND: The California Connects Program is a multi-year program funded in August 2010 by the United States Department of Commerce. California Connects, which focuses on increasing digital literacy and broadband Internet usage in California’s Central Valley Region, is expected to reach its funding conclusion in December 2013. This presentation intends to highlight the key partnerships, achievements, and impacts made possible by this important award and investment of federal funds. The benefits of this program not only positively impact our California community colleges and students, but also provide significant benefit to communities at large throughout the Central Valley Region in California.

RECOMMENDATION: This item is presented for information and discussion.

ANALYSIS:

Program Purpose and Goals

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration \$4.7 billion to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure, enhance and expand public computer centers, encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service, and develop and maintain a nationwide public map of broadband service capability and availability.

In August 2010, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office collaborated with the Foundation for California Community Colleges to secure a federal grant award of \$10.9 million from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, administered by the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, to launch the California Connects Program, centered on sustainable broadband adoption. Funding awarded by the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program reaches all 50 US states; we are the second largest recipient of Broadband Technology Opportunities Program funding, representing a single state.

The purpose of sustainable broadband adoption projects, like California Connects, is to increase broadband Internet usage and adoption, especially among vulnerable populations where broadband technology traditionally has been underutilized, utilizing digital literacy training and outreach campaigns to increase the relevance of broadband in people's everyday lives.

In the long term, these American Recovery and Reinvestment Act investments aim to bridge the digital divide, improve access to education, healthcare and other community-based services, and boost economic development for communities held back by limited or no access to broadband – communities that would otherwise be left behind.

The primary goal of the California Connects program is to enlist 61,000 new broadband adopters in California's traditionally underserved Central Valley Region. A number of techniques were used to meet the lofty goal of 61,000 new broadband adopters within three years, including the award and distribution of roughly 5,800 laptops to socioeconomically disadvantaged students currently enrolled in California Community College Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement (MESA) programs. The laptops were awarded to encourage and enable broadband adoption among students and their families, many of whom have not previously seen the need or had the resources to acquire computers, learn computer skills, or connect to the Internet.

Partnerships

A number of effective partnerships were instrumental in successfully implementing the techniques and activities necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of the California Connects Program. The Chancellor's Office partnership and leadership in the California Connects program helped to build bridges with partners, including the coordination of 35 MESA sites throughout the Central Valley, and provided technical and programmatic operation support throughout the conduct of the program.

Partnerships with MESA centers, at 35 community colleges, and with the Great Valley Center, which operates across an 18-county region in California's Central Valley, were integral to the program's success in providing outreach, training, and learning support, to increase digital literacy skills and broadband adoption, especially among low-income Hispanic residents in the region.

The MESA program is one of many successful programs at the community colleges designed to help students reach their academic and career goals in science, technology, engineering, and math. Celebrating 40 years of service, MESA has empowered students to transfer to top colleges and universities and go on to be doctors, engineers, astrophysicists, scientists, and teachers in an array of fields.

The MESA program is the largest partner in California Connects owing to the span of its statewide outreach and accessibility to key underserved and digitally disconnected populations at 35 California community colleges. Partnership with the MESA program provided direct digital-literacy-focused assistance to California community college students, their families, and the community at large.

In exchange for participation in the California Connects program, MESA students were awarded laptop computers equipped with state-of-the-art technology made possible by a number of critical corporate partners. Hewlett Packard, together with Insight, provided a cost-effective "plug and play" laptop solution equipped with Adobe PDF reader and flash, Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2010, and six months of AT&T 5G Wi-Fi service. Additionally, MESA students were provided access to the Microsoft IT Academy to prepare for taking a certification exam in Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and/or Access, and Certiport certificate testing centers were created at the 35 MESA program locations. With these resources available at their disposal, students were asked to give back to their communities by providing digital literacy training to their families and community members in their area.

Partnership with the Great Valley Center broadened the reach of California Connects beyond the 35 community college based MESA centers. Great Valley Center, headquartered in Modesto, is a community-focused organization that supports activities and organizations that promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the central valley. The Great Valley Center was critical in providing community trainers to conduct outreach and deliver digital literacy training for Central Valley residents, with an emphasis on reaching low-income Spanish speaking populations.

American River College is another important partner in California Connects. Aside from its MESA program student participation, under the leadership of Dean Derrick Booth, faculty of American River College's Business and Computer Science Division, developed new digital literacy tools utilized by the program.

"Living with Technology" is an online tool designed to help new internet users increase the involvement of the Internet in their day-to-day lives by providing independent instruction on the basic "how-to's" of job hunting, résumé development, exploring higher education opportunities, accessing healthcare and finance resources, and performing other functions of daily life -

connectivity that we sometimes take for granted. Community trainees are provided access to the online tool after undergoing initial training from MESA or Great Valley Center trainers. This tool is an ongoing resource for community trainees as they continue to expand their knowledge of broadband connectivity and the tremendous impact it could play on their lives.

Participating MESA student trainers together with Great Valley Center community trainers are providing far-reaching hands-on training in one-to-one, small-group or computer-lab settings, teaching their families and members of the community critical digital literacy skills, such as, how to use the Internet for securing gainful employment, exploring higher education opportunities, accessing health and finance resources, utilizing social networks, and more. These two important community-based groups work in parallel to reach populations for whom computer and internet use is still a challenge, yet necessary to enhance their lifelong learning ability, improve their economic status and advance their quality of life. The work of these two groups is also breaking down barriers to access by increasing the awareness of public computing centers, educating new users about affordable broadband options, providing training in multiple languages, and educating users about how the internet affects their lives. Through these partnerships with MESA student trainers, Great Valley Center community trainers, corporate partner resources, and American River College faculty innovation, over 68,000 Californians have become new broadband adopters as a result of the California Connects program, exceeding original program goals.

Overall Impact

5,800 students and their families, many of whom have not previously seen the need or had the resources to acquire computers, learn computer skills, or connect to the Internet, have been provided increased accessibility to meaningful resources in improving and enhancing their daily lives. For students, this greatly increased their ability to succeed and be competitive in an increasingly digital world.

Over 68,000 members of the California Central Valley community and beyond have been provided choices and information they did not originally have. Through broader knowledge about how to effectively utilize broadband technology and access resources to make informed decisions to further one's education, select healthcare services, and assist in other day-to-day activities, more and more individuals are able to embrace broadband technology in their homes and lives which directly contributes to furthering economic development of California's Central Valley.

Sustainability after Grant-Funding

Mobile Citizen is the first 4G service provider in the U.S. to offer mobile Internet exclusively to education and non-profit organizations at a remarkably low cost. Mobile Citizen is funded by five non-profit foundations that have been committed to bringing technology to the education and non-profit communities for over 25 years. In 2006, these foundations entered into a unique, 30-year partnership agreement with CLEAR that allows them to offer cutting-edge mobile Internet service exclusively to schools and nonprofits.

Through the recent California Connects program budget extension, the US Department of Commerce fostered a partnership opportunity with Mobile Citizen to pilot a wireless technology program that aims to:

- (1) provide free 4G wireless service to at least 500 users within the CLEAR coverage area from August through December 2013; and
- (2) assess the viability of providing low-cost wireless 4G technology to select coverage areas in California.

The Mobile Citizen Pilot is part of a sustainable connectivity strategy crafted by the California Connects Program for students and the community post-grant funding. Contingent on successful outcomes, low-cost wireless 4G technology will become part of future CollegeBuys offerings through the Foundation.