

Education Committee
Summary of Digital Inclusion Presentations at 2/10/21 mtg

Access and Barriers

- In Madison, it is not about availability of broadband service, but rather digital equity in regards to financial and technical barriers, i.e. affordability and support;
- It is critical that Madison address digital inclusion to reduce and eliminate barriers to access and use of technology;
- Wisconsin legislation prevents municipalities from providing internet to residents without conducting studies and charging rates above current providers, internet provider/ landlord contracts present additional barriers. It would take years and approximately \$170 million dollars to create the fiber build needed on all streets;
- There are federal grants for rural areas, but very little focused on urban areas; and
- MMSD students face barriers regarding internet capacity, connectivity issues between internet providers and residents, and school facilities not yet connected.

Work and Roles Thus Far:

- Since 2016, the City has worked to provide more fiber to connect city facilities, libraries and some schools through contracts with service providers;
- City has conducted pilot projects in 5 neighborhoods, as well as providing internet to CDA residents;
- The City's Digital Technology Committee has been tasked with creating a strategic plan for Digital Inclusion;
- Role of different City departments is not clear. IT department was designed to provide internal support within the City's networks. CDD doesn't have digital inclusion as a specific priority area. Library skills and resources cross-over with digital inclusion; and
- MMSD has 25,000 students all with devices as classes moved from in-person to virtual. MMSD distributed approximately 2,000 hotspots to families, but cell connections are still required for internet access.

Next Steps

- Education Committee (EC) could provide recommendations to the Digital Technology Committee in the development of the strategic plan for Digital Inclusion;
- EC could support and advocate for policies and projects identified in the strategic plan for Digital Inclusion;
- EC members from MMSD and Dane Co. could serve as a conduit to related MMSD or Dane Co. committees or workgroups;
- EC could recommend that the roles of City departments in regards to digital inclusion, including IT, Community Development, Civil Rights, Library and other relevant City departments be clarified;
- EC could support and promote alignment across the three public entities;
- EC could recommend that the Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan include:
 - Creation and funding of a digital navigators program using existing systems;
 - Development of a system for communicating and/or outreach to promote resources that support digital inclusion (i.e. address barriers, increase access). For example, promoting the Emergency Broadband Benefit and identifying support for households sign-up;
 - Development of a mechanism to get surplus devices cleaned, refurbished and in the hands of people who need them;
 - Use of larger entities buying power to purchase bulk accounts for low-income households.