

Dr. Michael Johnson
Commissioner



Department of Education
and Early Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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DEED Issues Broadband Assistance Grants to Improve School Bandwidth

DEED Assists Schools During Second Federal Filing Window for Additional Funding

JUNEAU – This summer the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) awarded over \$6 million in Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) funds to 139 K-12 schools in 27 districts to help schools increase their broadband internet capacity. The program is targeted toward rural school districts that experience extremely high costs for internet.

“Alaska’s students deserve every tool available for success, especially as traditional schooling has experienced interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Governor Mike Dunleavy. “Increased broadband will greatly help these 27 school districts deliver quality education to their students.”

This March, in the midst of the COVID-19 emergency, Governor Dunleavy signed into law Senate Bill 74. Sponsored by Senator Hoffman, SB 74 amended the BAG program to increase the minimum download speed from 10 to 25 mbps. Increasing the broadband speed in schools opens more educational opportunities and resources for students and teachers and is especially timely in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, when distance delivery of educational services has become essential to student learning. The State Board of Education adopted emergency regulations at its September 17 meeting to make permanent the increase in download speed from 10 to 25 mbps.

“Even before the pandemic, education was becoming increasingly reliant on the use of technology,” said DEED Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson. “The BAG program helps us mitigate the digital divide in Alaska and ensures students in our state have access to as many educational opportunities as possible.”

In response to COVID-19 and the increased demand on schools for broadband, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) opened a second filing window earlier this month so schools may apply for additional funding to increase their internet speeds. DEED determined that districts currently receiving a BAG award may apply during this window using their own funds to match, and that their current and future BAG awards will not be impacted. Further, DEED is working to support schools currently under 25 mbps to also apply during this window, in addition to applying for the BAG program, as a limited amount of unallocated BAG funds are available to support these schools. DEED remains committed to maximizing the School BAG program and assisting as many schools as possible with increased broadband.

The 27 districts receiving funding in Fiscal Year 2021 include: Alaska Gateway, Aleutian Region, Aleutians East, Bering Strait, Bristol Bay, Chatham, Chugach, Dillingham, Galena, Kashunamiut, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Kodiak Island Borough, Kuspuk, Lake and Peninsula Borough, Lower Kuskokwim, Nome Public Schools, North Slope Borough, Northwest Arctic Borough, Pribilof, St. Mary’s, Southeast Island, Southwest Region, Unalaska City, Yakutat, Yukon Flats, Yukon-Koyukuk, and Yupiit School Districts.

Established in 2014 by the Alaska State Legislature and administered by the Division of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, the BAG program was initially created to assist schools in reaching internet download speeds of 10 megabits per second (mbps). Since 2014, nearly \$18 million has been awarded to Alaska's schools to increase connectivity. More information about the BAG program can be found on the Alaska State Libraries, Archives, and Museums website at lam.alaska.gov/schoolbag.

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development provides information, resources, and leadership to support over 130,000 students in 503 public schools across Alaska. The mission of the department is to ensure an "Excellent Education for Every Student Every Day."

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Media Contact: [Rochelle Lindley](#), Information Officer, (907) 465-6535