

Public Television Brings Instructional Content to Students Without Internet Access

The COVID-19 pandemic has created turmoil for students, families and teachers as schools closed and learning went virtual last spring, and many school districts have decided to continue with remote learning this school year.

This is a challenging situation for all, but it is particularly concerning for students who live in areas unserved by broadband. Of the 56.6 million school children across the United States, approximately 20 percent lack access to broadband connectivity.

Public television stations are providing curriculum aligned on-air television learning opportunities for children. But schools and State Departments of Education require supplemental resources for students in addition to on-air broadcast learning. The usual delivery of additional resources is via broadband.

For example, all seven public television stations in Pennsylvania are working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and have created [Learning at Home](#), a connection to educational videos, activities and games to support students, families and teachers. If students do not have access to broadband, other rudimentary means of delivery of resources are necessary. Last spring, public television station WITF in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania distributed over 3,000 grab and go kits that included all the information from its website.

This example points to the critical importance of broadcast datacasting, and Next Gen TV Broadcast Internet. Public television stations are providing remote learning opportunities through broadcast datacasting to provide educational content to student households that lack broadband connectivity. Datacasting uses public television's broadcast spectrum to send the same instructional material used by students on the internet to devices (computers, Chromebooks, tablet, smartphones) in homes of students without internet access. A home needs only one Wi-Fi datacasting receiver that can serve several devices and students in the home simultaneously. The newest receivers are ATSC 3.0 compatible. Educational datacasting helps address the very serious equity issue and homework gap faced by students without internet access.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education and Pennsylvania PBS, a collaboration of the public television stations throughout the state of Pennsylvania, partnered to bring instruction to students without internet access via datacasting. On September 10, 2020, Governor Tom Wolf announced that the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds awarded \$8 million in federal funding to [Pennsylvania PBS to establish a statewide datacasting initiative](#). A total of \$15 million will be made available for schools to secure broadband, mobile hot spots and other platforms that increase equitable access to remote learning in Pennsylvania. In [the full press release](#) from the Governor's office more information is included on this critical development in datacasting.

South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV) initiated the use of educational datacasting in the spring of 2020, working with school districts around the state to build out [datacasting technology](#) to help with educational needs for students and families. SCETV received \$2.4 million of a [grant from the U.S. Department of Education to expand their work in educational](#)

[datacasting](#). As the announcement by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos notes, "South Carolina will provide all students access to a robust virtual education ecosystem, including the use of 'datacasting,' an innovative concept that can help provide instructional content to students without internet access." On September 9, 2020, South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster announced a \$1.3 million investment to expand datacasting at South Carolina ETV (SCETV) to help reach more students in rural and remote areas across the state. Watch the [full press conference](#) for more about this exciting new initiative. Additional information can be found in [this article published in *Government Technology*](#).

On August 24, 2020, Jennings County School Corporation (JCSC) and Indiana Public Broadcasting Stations, Inc. (IPBS) announced a partnership that will provide educational datacasting to approximately 1,200 students in Jennings County who have little or no access to reliable broadband. Jennings County is a predominantly rural county located in southeastern Indiana. IPBS member-station WTIU in Bloomington will carry out the implementation. Funding for the project was made possible by [a \\$1.38 million grant awarded to JCSC and IPBS from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief \(GEER\) Funding provided by Congress in the CARES Act](#) (the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) for the purpose of developing and improving the availability of distance/remote learning techniques and technologies.

These examples show the critical importance of datacasting. Datacasting has the potential to change the remote learning landscape for children and educators in rural, low-income, and internet desert communities because of its ability to transmit the same instructional content and educational resources that would normally require an internet connection. The transition to Next Gen TV will greatly enhance datacasting, truly creating Broadcast Internet services in education, public safety, telehealth, precision agriculture, and more.

Further, these examples point to the illogical disconnect in requiring public television stations to pay a five percent fee on funding the stations receive from federal, state, and local governmental sources for mission related public services.