Broadband Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
September 15, 2020

Event/Meeting:
Broadband Advisory Council Regular Meeting

Date/Time: September 15, 2020 at 11:00 AM

Locations: WebEx

Board Members Present: Deb Alfredson, Director Paula Basta, Bill Bodine, Karen Boswell, Melia Carter, Mayor Mike Chamberlain, Ryan Gruenenfelder, Steven Hill, Rick Holzmacher, Chris Nelson, Jeff Newell, Deno Perdiou, Representative John Connor, Matt Schmit, Josh Shallenberger, Anne Slaughter, Lori Sorenson, Jim Zolnierik

Board Members Absent: David Antonacci, Director Theresa Eagleson, Zak Horn, Representative Keith Wheeler, Susan Satter, Senator Bill Cunningham, Senator Jil Tracy

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Staff Present: Margaret Croke

Governor's Staff Present: Jessica Himes

Call to Order and Introductory Remarks from Chairman: The meeting was called to order by Chairman Schmit at approximately 11:00 am. Chairman Schmit conducted the official roll call. After roll call, Chairman Schmit provided an overview of the Broadband Advisory Council ("BAC") agenda.

Chairman Schmit asked members of the public to hold comment until such time that the floor was opened. Chairman Schmit recognized that a quorum of members was present.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Not all members had an opportunity to view minutes from the May 2020 meeting; as such, Chairman Schmit agreed to delay approval of the minutes until the next meeting.

Illinois State Board of Education Update:
Erich Grauke, Principal Consultant, provided an update on remote learning initiatives, noting that all updates, news articles, etc. can be found out www.isbe.net/covid19.
- On the website, you can find learning recommendation guides for families or whoever else needs guidance regarding remote, hybrid, and in-person recommendations.

- Illinois Priority Learning Standards
  - foundational /essential learning standards for all students, most critical standards, recommendations, etc.
  - a list of curated online resources to assist teachers, districts, and parents at www.isbe.net/keeplearning
  - Kept updated, free
- The Illinois Learning Technology Center
  - Supports all public k-12 districts through technology initiatives, services and professional learning opportunities focusing on:
    - Digital teaching, learning, and leadership
    - Network and technology infrastructure planning and support
    - Student access
    - Equity
- WIFI hotspot map; developed in partnership with IBHE, ICCB, and the Office of broadband
- Grant programs
  - Two grant programs currently available to assist districts
    - Digital Equity Formula Grant
      - $80,092,677 is available from both ESSER and GEER funds to schools districts for tech devices and connectivity needs
      - Available to any district or state authorized charter school at or below 70%
      - Districts must complete a technology program and its infrastructure to support that program
      - Devices internet connections at school and at home
      - Applications due November 1
      - Going to look through data to see with equities really lie
    - Digital Professional Learning Grant
      - Funds available to assistant districts with professional development needs for staff and parents
      - Effective use of technology
      - Teaching in a remote learning environment
      - Strategies to help students for both teachers and parents
      - $13,954,909 available
      - Application due September 18
      - Evolving response
  - ISBE is working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Public Health to provide the most current resources and guidance to support our educational communities in these times
- Questions:
  - Matt Schmit: To what extent do the surveys previously sent out help?
    - They received a lot of data back, but not entirely sure about the data quality because everyone from superintendents to parents replied. We would like to take time to make another survey to make sure the proper people are filling it out and ask more specific questions about the speeds of the internet, who needs help, who doesn't
  - Jim Zolnierek: Is the WIFI hotspot effective for parents?

- Yes, we got feedback and locations, login information, looking at Chicago for a few more hotspots, but yes we have gotten good feedback.
  - ○ Deno Perdiou: What kind of options for low income families?
    - We do offer help for low income families and it is on our website for people to find the information. If anyone has any advice, we are open to hearing about that.

Office of Broadband Update:
Chairman Schmit provided an update regarding recent Office of Broadband activities
- Connect Illinois Round 1
  - ○ $50 million dollars + $65 nonstate match= $115m investment
  - ○ 26,000+new/improved connections to homes, farms, biz, community anchors
  - ○ 28 projects, 18 different grantees
  - ○ 17 providers + one local government
  - ○ 39 applications, 37 were complete and or responsive to NOFO
  - ○ Strong cross-section of provider representation
  - ○ Round 1 was evenly dispersed around the state
  - ○ Round 2- hopefully in October, with an extended application because providers are busy and we want to respect that
- Illinois Connected Communities:
  - ○ Partnership among the Illinois Office of Broadband, the Benton Institution for Broadband & Society, local philanthropy
  - ○ Really geared towards helping families, and communities
- Broadband Mapping
  - ○ Expect updated map before round 2
  - ○ Maps of available hotspots and eligible areas can be found
- Digital Equity
  - ○ PCs for People- nonprofit will be coming to Illinois to set up in metro east and building off that for in 40 counties, very valuable add,
    - Computer refurbishing
    - Mobile devices/hotspots
    - Digital literacy programming
  - ○ Digital Divide Elimination Fund- will be talked more about in a later meeting
    - Competitive Grants
    - Community Focus
    - Other Partnerships
  - ○ Office is trying to create a "Digital Navigator" program, where it's more resourceful and eventually trying to get a voice behind the phone. We are looking at other groups around the country to see how we can develop this better
- Broadband Affordability Study
  - ○ IGA (SB 2135), May 2020
  - ○ In pursuit of universal broadband access goal, study:
    - Free access to all residents through grant program expansion
    - Affordable access to all residents
    - Must include analysis of universal access in areas of poverty and areas where existing broadband infrastructure is insufficient for high-speed access

- Should include discussion of Broadband Strategic Plan initiatives
- Identify new streams of state, federal, and P3 revenue
- Recommended schedule for implementation
- Report on findings and recommendations due Jan 1, 2021
  - Focus on affordability
  - Thoughts, questions?
    - Deno Perdiou suggested a regional approach to defining affordability

Approaches to Broadband Affordability Research:
Dr. Colin Rhinesmith, Associate Professor, Simmons College, provided an overview of best practice approaches to broadband affordability research.

- Research areas
  - Broadband adoption and affordability
  - Broadband measurement in public libraries
  - Wireless hotspot lending
  - Digital equity ecosystems
- Focuses on Determinants of Broadband access and affordability study
  - 5 factors of literature of broadband
  - Obvious approaches
    - 1. Geographical disparities- "low population density and high development costs discourage private investments, creating little to no commitment to connecting areas include smaller towns and rural areas"
    - 2. Competition- "Competition in the telecommunications sector helps make broadband more affordable to its citizens, however there is low competition in rural areas therefore increasing service costs (deployment, operations, and maintenance of wireless broadband access networks are take into consideration) that leads to the issue of affordability"
  - Not so obvious approaches
    - 3. Profit based discrimination- "Minority households may have lower demand for broadband service. In this case, carriers do not enter because they expect profit to be too low to support entry. To foster further broadband implementation in rural areas, the cost-benefit is a key factor affecting rural broadband affordability that needs to be addressed"
    - 4. Technology deployment cost- "Deployment of broadband technology can be expensive. Offering broadband services in local areas requires investment' local areas are only enabled for broadband when the expected stream for future profits. However, this expectation results in unaffordable service"
    - 5. Socio-economic factors: income, education, race, and age- "THe poor, the less educated, and non-whites are on the disconnected side of the divide. High monthly costs are a limiting factor to broadband subscriptions followed by the cost of a digital device. Age is another factor, consumers below 24 years are either studying or just beginning employment and may not be able to afford the current price plan"
  - "Low-income Americans participate in a cycle of 'unadoption" in which they adopt broadband connectivity at home, and then drop it for financial or other reasons, only to reschedule again when conditions warrant

- - Unadoption needs to be in the spotlight
  - The ability to Pay for Broadband
  - "Through the Mobile Beacon and Mobile Citizen programs, low-income people were able to receive broadband at home for about $10 per month. When asked in interviews about this price, many community members stated that even increasing the cost to $20 per month would be difficult within their budgets"
  - It isn't about willingness, it is about ability. Low income people can only afford $10-$20 a month, a lot of people have to choose between eating and paying for broadband
- Conclusion:
  - Reviewing existing data is very important to understand:
    - FCC Form 477 broadband deployment data
    - American Community Survey data on socioeconomic factors:
      - income
      - race
      - age
    - Future research
    - Universal Broadband Access
    - Conduct surveys and case studies to determine the impacts of free access to all residents
- Questions:
  - Matt Schmit: Whether states or municipalities, we are interested in affordability, but with everything going on now, and what can we do to advance the process?
    - If we go back to the study, what they are trying to do is look at what can be done now. Look at what is available, what isn't available, and seeing what questions can be looked at
  - Matt Schmit: We spend a lot of time looking at affordability, this question will be larger and larger in policy discussions
  - Deno Perdiou: I like Colin's idea with looking at regions and incorporating what we know from specific areas instead of as a state as a whole because it doesn't seem doable, but regions seems more doable
    - Matt: I agree, it seems like a better idea
  - Susan Satter: When looking at affordability, do you look at the effect of bundling?
    - Colin: I haven't personally, there are studying out there and it would be possible to look at that, but I don't have the answers to that.
  - Jim Zolnierek: How much have you looked at computer affordability when it comes to having broadband
    - Colin: I have looked at that, I found that low income people have access to a smart phone and internet through that, devices are available to folks, but it's the persistent hawk of broadband every month.
  - Lori Sorenson: With the report coming January 1, we need to have more meetings before then to figure more out before
    - Matt: Yes we can meet in November for a special meeting and then our regular meeting in December

Public Comment: Chairman Schmit opened the floor for public comment. No public comment was made.

Adjournment: Chairman Schmit announced that a Special Meeting of the Broadband Advisory Council would be held in November, with the next Regular Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, December 16. Both meetings would be held via WebEx. Chairman Schmit asked for a motion to adjourn. Vice Chair Lori Sorenson motioned to adjourn; the motion was seconded by Steve Hill. Motion passed by unanimous decision. Meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:45 pm.