

September 19, 2019

Dear Chairman Toner and Members of the Rural Broadband Task Force:

We commend the members and staff of the Rural Broadband Task Force for their many months of work, numerous meetings, and constructive recommendations to address the major challenge of bringing affordable and reliable broadband to rural Nebraska.

As co-chairs of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Education Council, the only PreK-20 public and private education advisory group in Nebraska, we applaud your efforts and the draft recommendations that have been proposed by the Homework Gap subcommittee.

The lack of home internet for a significant number of students is placing them at a distinct disadvantage as more and more educational services and digital resources are moved to the cloud, thus requiring an "always on" access to the internet. Faster, more affordable home internet cannot happen soon enough for these students.

We agree with, and strongly support, the role that public libraries can play in helping bridge the Homework Gap, not only for PreK-12 learners, as has traditionally been referred, but also to college, adult, and continuing education students of all ages as they try to improve their lives through degree attainment, certifications, or just-in-time learning.

We agree with, and strongly support, the creation of an E-Rate Special Construction matching fund program that could help incentivize additional fiber construction in our villages and towns, en route to providing libraries and schools their very first affordable fiber services.

We agree with, and strongly support, the exploration of alternative technologies and after-hours internet access for students.

We support the mapping of Ethernet circuits from Network Nebraska in the hopes that the most expensive circuits serving school districts be decreased in cost to be more in line with Ethernet circuits elsewhere in the state.

The Education Council members would like to assist with the acceleration of rural broadband deployment, particularly for educational purposes. This may take the form of better communication to, or the organization of, stakeholder support.

Sincerely,

Gary Needham

K-12 Co-Chair

ESU 9-Hastings

Mary Niemiec

Higher Education Co-Chair

University of Nebraska Online