

EQUITY IN CONNECTIVITY, A PROJECT FOR FOSTER YOUTH & MESA STUDENTS

FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

The Foundation for California Community Colleges is providing low-cost internet connectivity for students in need

The Foundation for California Community Colleges is bridging the digital divide by providing free access to internet connectivity to underserved and underrepresented populations – specifically foster youth and MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Sciences, Achievement) students.

Addressing the challenges and many layers of equity, access and connectivity, the foundation and its programs, CollegeBuys (which offers discounts on a range of educational products including technology) and California Connects (which aims to close the broadband gap), sought out opportunities to provide internet service.

This effort resulted in more than 2,000 underserved students each receiving a mobile hotspot with 12 months of broadband internet access. It also allows students and their households access to broadband internet connectivity for a multitude of devices. This program gives students’ access to online learning options and professional development courses toward their degrees, certification or career goals.

Those who are connected only with a smartphone are a distinct segment of the population referred to as the “underconnected.” With the rising cost of living in the state and balancing more immediate priorities (such as food, housing, electricity, clothing and transportation), online connectivity is not as immediate a priority, and inadvertently holds back the online education of a segment of the student population, including 17,000 community college foster youth students.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESULTS

MILESTONES

Dec 2018

- Project funding is approved by the Chancellor’s Office to deploy more than 2,000 mobile hotspot devices to underrepresented populations in the community college system over the span of two years

Jan 2019

- The CollegeBuys team begins outreach to campus foster youth coordinators and liaisons to identify students in need and prepare for the initial deployment

Feb 2019

- First round of devices is deployed to 482 foster youths throughout California

July 2019

- The team collaborates with MESA directors to also serve MESA students

Aug 2019

- Second round is deployed with 600 devices to foster youths and 550 devices to MESA students, bringing the total deployment count to 1,632 students served

Dec 2019

- The CollegeBuys team begins planning stages for deployment of more than 1,000 additional mobile hotspot devices during the 2020 school year

The California Connects initiative has provided internet access to 1,632 students in the community college system. This number will continue to grow tremendously with the third round of deployment during the 2020 school year, bringing the count to well over 2,600 students.

When compared to a comparable internet plan of \$50 per month, this program reflects a cost savings of more than \$1 million annually for all students served.

IMPACT AND BENEFITS

With this program, students now have one less barrier preventing them from accessing class registration and online research tools required for coursework, getting them a step closer to course completion and transfer.

Post-deployment surveys reported:

- 36 percent of students did not have access to internet at home
- 44 percent of students were spending extra time on campus in order to access internet to complete their schoolwork, while 29 percent were sourcing internet connection from public spaces, such as cafes, prior to receiving a mobile hotspot device
- 92 percent of students saved time by not traveling to find internet outside the home
- 95 percent of students said having California Connects internet allowed them to be more involved or productive in their classes

LESSONS LEARNED

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This project is immensely “hands on,” and a handful of team members are in charge of every detail, from collecting names, creating user guides, labeling individual devices and personally mailing the devices to each school. Working with a small staff, batching work and having a dedicated schedule for steps A through Z is crucial. Order and streamlining is imperative, and each step is reliant on the accuracy of the steps that came before.



The CollegeBuys team, from left, Nouriyah Saleh, Jennifer Le, J.C. Sales, Chris Pogue, Jennifer Keiper and Brett Chaponot.

FURTHER REFERENCES

Foundation for California Community Colleges:

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California Connects website:

<https://foundationccc.org/What-We-Do/Student-Success/California-Connects>