



Supporting Learners & Leaders

Two Prospect Street, Suite 3
Montpelier, Vermont 05602-3555
Telephone: 802-229-0547 – Fax: 802-229-4801
www.vpaonline.org

PRESIDENT: Bob Thibault

PRESIDENT ELECT: Beth O'Brien

PAST-PRESIDENT: Joan Cavallo

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Jay Nichols
jnichols@vpaonline.org

ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Bob Johnson
bjohnson@vpaonline.org

ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Mike McRaith
mmcraith@vpaonline.org

August 24, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this letter in support of the Governor's request to provide funding to support broadband expansion in the state. Grant money in the amount of \$2 million provided to the Public Service Department through the Communication Union Districts is a step in the right direction of making sure all Vermont citizens have access to high quality broadband internet and connectivity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on inequalities in our system that have always been there. Further, the pandemic is also increasing those inequalities. Students that previously could rely on the school to give them the in-person extra support they need no longer have that. Lack of reliable broadband and connectivity issues at home makes it even harder for these marginalized students. A student's zip code in the state of Vermont should not automatically put them at a disadvantage with other students.

Students without broadband are at a distinct disadvantage regardless of whether school is in session or not. Having broadband enables students to interact online with other students, to check for additional resources, and to follow through on something learned or introduced in class. A child without high-speed internet access does not have that opportunity.

Having reliable, high-speed internet access would be great for everyone. It's an economic investment in the future of our kids and the future of the state. Vermont has a decreasing student population problem which is placing a strain on schools and the communities they serve. The state has gone from 125k students to 88k students counting preschool kids since 1997. Having broadband would allow a lot more people to work remotely and potentially relocate to Vermont.

With the current pandemic and more people working remotely, the problem is amplified. Now family members with low-quality internet are competing for bandwidth. The only solution is for high-speed internet access to be made a fundamental right.

Yours in Leadership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jay Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jay Nichols

cc: Representative, Laura Sibilina
Representative, Tim Briglin
Senator, Ann Cummings
Senator, Randy Brock
Commissioner of Public Service, June Tierney