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Technology Grants

On January 6, 2015 the outgoing Patrick Administration announced the selection of 17 school districts to receive a total of approximately $5 million in matching state bond funds to upgrade their technology infrastructure and strengthen digital learning.

The program is called the Digital Connections Partnership Schools Grant and represents an unprecedented level of collaboration between, education, policy, and technology leaders from across state government to engage with local officials to bridge the digital divide that exists in some schools across the Commonwealth and strengthen twenty-first century teaching and learning. At the forefront of this collaboration is the Massachusetts Office of Information Technology (MassIT), who have broadened their strategic focus to leverage the Commonwealth’s resources, purchasing power, and expertise to support local projects.

- At present the $5 million in state bond funds authorized for this program allows the Department to fund projects in 47 schools in 17 districts. These schools collectively serve 25,000 children and 1,900 educators. The local match commitment for these projects is approximately $3.59 million.

- The remaining $33 million appropriated by the legislature in August 2014 has not been released. Approximately $11.79 million can fund the 200 additional schools in 81 districts that applied for funding, which collectively serve 108,000 students and 7,800 teachers. These communities are prepared to commit upwards of $13.77 million in local matching funds.

As you may know, on February 18, 2015 the Baker-Polito Administration announced the availability of up to $50 million to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) to fund broadband expansion initiatives designed to narrow existing gaps in high-speed Internet access for residents and businesses in Western Massachusetts. Currently, 45 Western Massachusetts towns lack any residential cable or broadband access, relying upon DSL or dial-up technologies. This funding was authorized in the same bill as the Digital Connections Partnership Schools Grant, but on a different line item. The principal difference between the two line items is that the Digital Connections Partnership Schools Grant is meant for school technology upgrades while the funding for MBI is designed to be an economic development engine for entire communities.

The strong response we received to the initial request for proposals is a powerful indication of the level of need that exists for educational technology in the Commonwealth’s schools and districts, as well as the readiness of cities and towns to match state dollars with local funds. If additional funds are released, the Department anticipates running a second competition in summer/fall 2015 to align with FY2017 municipal budget planning which begins in earnest in the fall of 2015, and to take advantage of E-rate reimbursements (E-rate applications will be due in March 2016 for projects taking place in FY2017).

Federal E-rate Program Updates

On February 12, 2015 U.S. Senator Edward Markey of Massachusetts, the author of E-rate, convened a conference call to discuss increased federal funding to reimburse schools and libraries for category 2 (formerly priority 2) projects designed to upgrade school infrastructure such as internal wiring and Wi-Fi. Staff from the Department and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) participated in the call along with 200+ individuals from over 140 school districts and libraries. The big takeaways for school districts are:

- In July 2014 the FCC released a modernization order designed to ensure affordable access to high-speed broadband sufficient to support digital learning in schools and robust connectivity for all libraries, (2) maximize the cost-effectiveness of spending for E-rate supported purchases, and (3) make the E-rate application process and other E-rate processes fast, simple and efficient. The order eliminates the requirement for districts to submit technology plans to the Department as a condition of E-rate funding (more information about the future of technology plans in MA is discussed below).

- In December 2014 the FCC issued a second modernization order that raised the annual E-rate funding cap from $2.4 billion to $3.9 billion. This means that a greater number of school districts, particularly those serving high percentages of low-income students, will be able to realize E-rate discounts. Consequently, the FCC is confident that it will be able to satisfy demand for all category 2 funding requests in at least the next two fiscal years (state fiscal years 2016 and 2017). If your district or town is contemplating large infrastructure projects in schools, the planning process should begin no later than early fall 2015 for projects taking place in FY2017. E-rate applications for FY2017 will be due in March 2016.

- The FCC recognized the need to reorient the E-rate program to focus on high-speed broadband, phase out support for phone services, and eliminate funding for others, such as paging, e-mail, and web hosting. Beginning this year, support for category 1 (formerly priority 1) services will be phased down by 20 percent each year such that by 2019, E-rate will only
support products and services related to Wi-Fi (category 2). Priority for funding will continue be in order of poverty; however, in order to expand the availability of category two discounts the FCC has implemented a five-year budget for which schools seeking support for category 2 services in funding years 2015 through 2019 will be eligible to request up to $150 per student (pre-discount) over a 5-year period. This lets you plan longer-term projects that may be too costly to fund in a single fiscal year.

- In consultation with the FCC, the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), which services the nation’s E-rate program for schools and libraries, has extended this year’s application filing window for THREE additional weeks. The application filing window will now close on April 16, 2015 instead of the original date of March 26, 2015. FCC Form 471 applications must be submitted on or before 11:59:59 pm EDT on Thursday, April 16, 2015 to be considered in-window.

- All districts applying for an E-rate category 2 reimbursement directly must do so by the Federal filing deadline: April 16, 2015. For more information on the requirements, including forms and technical assistance resources, visit the website of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC).

### Local Technology Plans

As you may know, in 2010 the Department promulgated voluntary guidelines for long-range local technology plans through the 2014-15 school year. Through the 2013-14 school year districts were required to submit these plans to the Department for approval. Aside from their value locally, other incentives for districts to develop long-range local technology plans included eligibility for E-rate discounts and federal and state technology grants.

In addition to the requirement to submit the actual plan, the Department also collected more fine-grained technology data from districts through the Security Portal. At the end of the 2010-11 school year, the data collection requirement shifted to the PARCC technology readiness tool (TRT) maintained by Pearson, Inc. The TRT collected an even narrower set of data than was collected via the Security Portal. As the name implied, the purpose of the TRT was to gauge each district’s readiness for piloting PARCC by collecting information about the district’s infrastructure and devices. The TRT was retired by Pearson in August 2014.

In July 2014 the FCC issued the first of two orders to modernize the E-rate program. Among other changes, the order eliminated the requirement for districts to submit technology plans to the Department for approval in order to qualify for E-rate discounts.

The discontinuation of the TRT and the technology plan requirement, coupled with the increase in the E-rate funding cap authorized in the December 2014 order, is an opportunity to align planning and the local budget cycle, and collect information and data that mutually benefit both districts and the Department. Below please find information on what we know now, pending recommendations by the Digital Learning Advisory Council, which includes superintendents as well as state and national experts in technology and digital learning:

- The Annual Massachusetts Digital Learning Survey will be available beginning April 16, 2015. Look for new questions regarding personalized learning, the implementation of online and blended learning, including dual enrollment programs, and online AP courses. We will email district technology directors when this online survey is posted.

- We are in the process of identifying a new data collection tool. We recognize that the TRT was limited in both the quantity and the quality of the data collected, particularly with regard to districts’ readiness for digital learning. We are in the process of identifying a more user-friendly successor tool, as well as plan for training district staff in completing the tool. Our goals are as follows:
  - Give districts the ability to compare their data with data from “comparable” school districts, similar to the state’s District Analysis and Review Tools (DARTs) that exist presently in areas such as Success After High School and Staffing and Finance. As is the case with the current DART data, we expect these data will help districts make the case for increased investment in digital learning to school committees and municipal governance bodies.
  - Give districts the ability to auto-generate reports they can use for other planning or regulatory purposes.
  - Allow us to significantly expand the technology data available on our School and Districts Profiles website, which has not been updated since 2010-11.
  - Allow us to better identify the state’s digital learning needs and the innovations districts are making in this space.

- We will update our voluntary guidance for long-range technology plans, which currently span the 2010-11 through the 2014-15 school years, to span the 2015-16 through the 2017-18 school years. This will bring the guidance into alignment with the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) broadband targets for 2017-18 and to reflect new
developments in digital learning. To ensure districts do not lose momentum in their local technology planning, changes will include but not be limited to the following:

- If the district has a **one-to-one or BYOD (bring-your-own-device) program** in one or more schools, the policy has to be compliant with Chapter 71, Section 48 as described here: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=7585](http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=7585). The district must have a clear policy on personal use of devices, both on campus and off campus, which includes software installation, website access, and other uses. This includes ensuring parents understand their responsibility for the devices and its role in the educational process.

- To the extent the district purchases devices for students, the plan should include the identification of reliable funding streams for lifecycle costs that answers the question, **when will devices need to be replaced and how will districts replace them?** For the IT bond grant recipients we hold a high bar – both the district and local municipal officials need to sign an assurance that they will incorporate lifecycle costs into the annual operating budget as opposed to one-time grants or capital expenditures. Oftentimes this requires creating a new line item in the budget and treating device costs as the district would treat utility bills. Most districts replace devices every 3-4 years. This relatively fast cycle requires that teachers and support staff remain up to date on the latest technology and versions of software. Related to the lifecycle decision is whether extended warranties and insurance are required. Many manufacturers have limited warranties that don’t cover the full lifecycle of the device, and repairs for out-of-warranty devices can be costly. Therefore, extended warranties and device insurance can help to mitigate these costs and should be considered. This is more specific than the existing language of “The district has a budget that will ensure the implementation of its long-range technology plan” although it is alluded to in on page 5 (“The district has established a computer replacement cycle of five years or less.”) We will also be recommending to districts that devices meet, at a minimum, **current PARCC specifications** regardless of state or local decisions regarding online assessment.

- **School Internet connections** should be scalable to SETDA’s recommendation for Internet access for schools of at least 1 Gbps per 1,000 students and staff (users). This is an increase from 100 Mbps as stated in B.2. District and school networks should be capable of providing a dedicated data service scalable to the SETDA wide/local area network (WAN/LAN) target of 10 Gbps per 1,000 students. This is also an increase from 100 Mbps as stated in B.2. Please note the emphasis on “scalable.”

- Although the general intent remains the same, districts should revise their Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) to reflect the principles of “**Responsible Use Policies**.” A good summary of this shift, and what could be in this next generation of policies can be found here: [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/07/20/37bosco.h30.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/07/20/37bosco.h30.html) and here: [http://www.cosn.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Revised%20AUP%20March%202013_final.pdf](http://www.cosn.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Revised%20AUP%20March%202013_final.pdf).

- The guidelines speak to “**Accessibility of Technology**” (Benchmark 4 on page 4; specifically A.3 on page 5). It will be revised to reflect the requirement that all digital tools and content, including district, school, and teacher websites, meet Section 508 accessibility criteria for students with disabilities and all staff receive the appropriate level of training based on their position. For example, many teachers host “class web sites.” Failure to provide digital tools or content in compliance with Section 508 can result in Office of Civil Rights complaints and potentially costly remedies.

- Guidance will be included regarding the **fair use** of licensed content as well as open educational resources (OER).

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**Announcing the NHL Future Goals Digital Citizenship Course!**

In time for Digital Learning Day, the Office of Digital Learning is pleased to promote a free student-facing online resource for students and teachers in the Commonwealth. In partnership with the National Hockey League (NHL), the National Hockey League Players Association (NHLP), and the Boston Bruins, **EverFi** will offer Massachusetts students and their teachers in grades 5-8 full access to the [NHL Future Goals – Digital Citizenship Course](http://www.cosn.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Revised%20AUP%20March%202013_final.pdf), a 3.5 hour, supplemental web-based learning course focused on preparing students to lead a healthy digital lifestyle. The interactive **curriculum**, aligned with Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, teaches the nuts and bolts of technology while tackling issues like cyberbullying, validating online sources, plagiarism, Internet safety and other critical topics.

This course is free to Massachusetts schools and districts, face-to-face professional development through EverFi is free, and the course will be available to Massachusetts students and teachers beyond Digital Learning Day. To request access to the program please contact Maddy Murphy, EverFi Program Manager, at (202) 713-5163 or maddy@everfi.com.
Take the Future Ready Pledge and attend the NE Regional Summit in April!

The Future Ready District Pledge, developed by the U.S. Department of Education in October, is a commitment by district leaders to work with educators, families, and community members to make all schools in their districts Future Ready. The Future Ready Schools effort will encourage and support superintendents as they transition their districts to personalized, digital learning. District superintendents who sign the pledge will be eligible to attend one of the free Future Ready Regional Summits. Regardless of attendance at a summit, the Future Ready Leadership Network will provide free, ongoing support to any district who takes the Future Ready Pledge. More than 30 Massachusetts superintendents have already taken the pledge.

Future Ready Regional Summits will offer district teams time and space to make a thoughtful plan for how technology can be used to improve student learning. The agenda will be "brand agnostic" and focus on a comprehensive set of issues that need to be addressed to ensure a smooth transition to digital learning. A key goal is to help district leaders become more informed consumers when decisions about specific technologies are being made. These issues include:

- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
- Professional learning;
- Technology, networks, and hardware;
- Budget and resources;
- Data and privacy;
- Use of time; and
- Community partnerships.

Trained facilitators skilled at using technology and digital learning effectively, many of them coalition partners, lead the regional summits. The summits highlight experiences of districts in each region and offer district leaders tangible ways to build capacity among their teams and throughout their districts. Each team will leave with a concrete action plan for creating a Future Ready school district. The summits also encourage cross-district collaboration as participants join an active network of regional experts and other district leaders committed to sharing information and lessons learned.

There are opportunities for scholarships granted to district teams who apply and demonstrate need. Travel and lodging expenses will be reimbursed when district teams are accepted for a scholarship and complete the expectations listed above. These funds are subject to availability and preference will be given to district teams from rural locations more than two hours driving time to their closest regional summit.

Online Professional Development Course

The professional development course entitled Teaching and Developing an Online or Blended course has begun with over 30 high school teachers participating. This offering will provide participants with the knowledge and skills to develop and teach an online or blended course using the most effective practices gathered from case studies and research. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to interact with several guest experts in online learning, as well as share and facilitate special topics related to online courses. We will be announcing in the fall when the next course offering will be open to registration.

If you have questions about the course, please contact Chris Hieber, (781) 338-3014, chieber@doe.mass.edu.

Massachusetts Focus Academy Courses

The Massachusetts FOCUS Academy provides ten (10) graduate level online courses each fall and spring semesters, with most courses running more than one section each semester. For the last several years several thousand educators participated in courses on universal design for learning, how to partner with families of students with disabilities, creating school-wide positive learning environments and how to co-teach effectively in the classroom. More information regarding these courses can be found at the MTSS site.

Registration for the fall 2015 semester will be open in September.
Resources for Students with Disabilities

Today’s digital technologies have the ability to dramatically change the lives of students with disabilities, enabling them to access the curriculum, participate in learning activities alongside their peers, personalize their learning, and achieve their full potential. For example, various technologies make it possible to provide area accessible versions of textbooks and other printed materials for students who are blind or otherwise unable to use printed materials. To assist schools in providing accessible materials for students, Massachusetts coordinates with three providers: our state AIM Library (braille, large print, and tangible aids), Learning Ally (downloadable audiobooks), and Bookshare (downloadable digital text for use with text-to-speech software). For more information, see our web page on Providing Accessible Instructional Materials.

Virtual and Blended Learning

Update on Virtual Schools

The two Commonwealth Virtual Schools (CMVS), Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield and TEC Connections Academy, are public school districts, directly accountable to the Board and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Like a charter school, a virtual school is an autonomous, single-school district that operates independently of any existing school district.

CMVSs are required to notify each sending district in writing of the number and grade levels of students who shall be attending the CMVS from the sending districts within 10 days of the student registering for enrollment in the CMVS.

Additionally, the Department provides sending districts with preliminary reports in January showing the name, grade, program, and estimated annual tuition for each pupil reported in the previous CMVS October data collection.

If you have questions or wish to speak with someone from our office about Commonwealth Virtual Schools, please contact Jennifer Gwatkin, (781) 338-3251, jgwatkin@doe.mass.edu.

Digital Learning Advisory Council (DLAC)

The 2013 virtual schools legislation created the Digital Learning Advisory Council to advise the Board and the Commissioner on the development of policies guiding virtual schools, supplemental online courses, education technology, and other matters related to virtual education; the identification of best practices to encourage online education to complement classroom instruction in district schools; and the assessment of the appropriateness of the fee that the Department may retain for the administration of the virtual school program. The DLAC is one of the more active committees. Both general DLAC and subcommittee meetings are open to the public, and districts are encouraged to attend these meetings. See the DLAC website for meeting dates, agendas, and additional information.

Other Updates

Protecting Student Privacy

On February 26, 2015 the U.S. Department of Education released model terms of service guidance and a training video aimed at helping schools and districts protect student privacy while using online educational services and applications. The guidance offers examples of terms of service provisions to help school officials identify which online educational services and applications have strong privacy and data security policies and practices.

Network Essentials Guide for Superintendents

The Network Essentials Guide for Superintendents provides actionable practices and expert tips for district and school administrators who are managing network upgrade projects. This resource helps ensure planned district broadband infrastructure projects are digital learning-ready.
Developed by staff from EducationSuperHighway, this guide provides administrators with suggested action steps they can use to guide teams toward a successful upgrade. It aggregates much of what EducationSuperHighway has learned about school network upgrades from working with districts across the country.

EducationSuperHighway is a non-profit focused on upgrading the Internet infrastructure in K-12 public schools. Their work helped shape President Obama’s ConnectED initiative and modernization of the Federal Communications Commission’s E-rate program.

**PARCC**

Have you checked the newest release of the Technology Guidelines for PARCC released January of 2015? Updates in this version include: Firefox and Chrome browser version updates; the removal of the microphone requirement beginning in SY2016-17; additional details for the headphones requirement; firewalls, content, and spam filters information; support for Linux, Android, MAC OS 10.10, and Safari 8.0; updated SystemCheck information for iPads and Chromebooks; guidance for proctor caching certain large forms and accommodated forms updated; and updates to the accessibility features and accommodations table.

In addition, our student assessment office has posted February’s SAS Update and accessibility and accommodations updates.

We are often asked how many devices a school should have to administer a PARCC online assessment. Please refer to this PARCC document.

**Voluntary Digital Literacy and Computer Science Standards**

The Department is collaborating with the Massachusetts Computing Attainment Network (MassCAN), an alliance of organizations advocating for computer science in schools, on the development of voluntary Digital Literacy and Computer Science Standards for Massachusetts schools. A review panel, representing diverse perspectives, has been created to guide this work. The panel will review existing computer science standards and the current Technology Literacy standards. The draft standards are expected to be available for public comment and final approval by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in the fall of 2015. For more information, see the Massachusetts Digital Literacy and Computer Science Standards Panel’s web page.

**2013-14 Annual Report - Digital Learning in Massachusetts**

The 2013-14 edition of our annual report on digital learning in Massachusetts is now available.

**Stay in the Know!**

**Archived Issues**

Access past issues from the Digital Learning Headlines and News Archives on the ODL website.

**New ODL Listserv!**

The Office of Digital Learning has created a listserv to disseminate information and notices including, but not limited to, newsletters, policy/regulation updates, public comment announcements, professional development opportunities, and public awareness messages. If you are listed in ESE Directory Administration as an “Educational Technology Director” or “Library/Media Services Director,” you have already been subscribed to this list. If you know others who would benefit from the information from the Office of Digital Learning listserv, please forward the subscriber information below:

Place the following subscribe command in the first line of the body of the message:

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subscribe MADigitalLearning  FIRST LAST
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(**Substitute your first name for FIRST and your last name for LAST**)
If you were subscribed to this distribution list in error and would like to be removed, send an email to imailsrv@list1.doe.mass.edu with the following information in the body of the email: unsubscribe MADigitalLearningemail Your Name. (Example: unsubscribe MADigitalLearningemail John Smith).

Subscribe to the Commissioner’s Updates

The Commissioner’s weekly update provides valuable information on key statewide initiatives, many of which may be of interest to technology directors. Superintendents, principals, and charter school leaders will receive the Commissioner’s Updates automatically. For others wishing to subscribe, send an email to imailsrv@list1.doe.mass.edu with the following information in the body of the email: subscribe ESEUpdate Your Name. (Example: subscribe ESEUpdate John Smith) To unsubscribe, send an email to the same address with the following information in the body: unsubscribe ESEUpdate Your Name. (Example: unsubscribe ESEUpdate John Smith).