Recommendations Checklist

How can states help their school districts define, integrate, and sustain quality internal broadband connections?

☐ Include Wi-Fi in the planning process

While states may vary in their approach, there is a great need for leadership at the state level. School districts are looking for guidance in terms of equipment needs, network speed and connectivity recommendations, and budget recommendations in order to sustain and grow their networks.

It is imperative that considerations for Wi-Fi infrastructure be included in state-led initiatives and/or broadband and digital learning plans. Sharing best practice approaches to supporting and maintaining robust wireless networks will be a valuable resource for schools and districts.

☐ Outline a vision and establish a state standard for what qualifies as digital learning ready Wi-Fi

What does "digital learning ready" mean? States should work collaboratively with school districts, state-level stakeholders, and Wi-Fi experts to define what it means to be digital learning ready and outline the requirements necessary to support the digital learning needs of today's schools.

Considerations should include assessment needs, learning applications, data management and security requirements, devices, guest access, and scalability. It is imperative for schools to understand and clearly define their technology needs based on the teaching and learning requirements of their staff and students.

☐ Support a funding model

Consider a funding model that offsets federal E-rate support. Many schools struggle to fill the funding gap after the E-rate discount has been applied. As a result, they apply a piecemeal approach to their wireless design and maintenance that ultimately hinders them from meeting their users' needs and expectations. Build a program to offer alternative purchasing models for your schools that include lease and buy options for equipment and services, allowing schools to manage budgets in an efficient manner.

☐ Create a pricing guideline and approved vendor qualification form

States need to work with vendor partners and Wi-Fi experts to clarify the myths and realities surrounding internal broadband connectivity. Education technology leaders are inundated with vendors suggesting the easiest way to build a robust wireless network is to install an AP in every space they intend to utilize for connectivity.

Placing an AP in every user area can be very expensive and can sometimes perpetuate network disruptions. Districts need guidance on installation design models that make sense and support their needs without capping their budgets.

☐ Leverage vendors and partners to share best practice models and engineering expertise

Many school districts lack the capacity to build enterprise-grade wireless networks that support the escalating needs of their digital learners. States should collaborate with national and local vendors to create affordable options for schools to engage outside engineering expertise and support.

Managed or co-managed wireless services can also assist schools with limited staff needing to shift their personnel resources toward supporting other mission-critical instructional technologies.

Schools with the capacity to manage and support their own networks would greatly benefit from a state-generated best practice model that provides guidelines for building a quality, digital learning ready Wi-Fi network.

☐ Foster the development of a statewide professional learning community among school districts

Most states have grassroots efforts taking place among their school districts. Unfortunately, these discussions tend to be mostly regional and districts in more rural locations are often left out of the conversation.

Building a statewide professional learning community gives every school district a voice and promotes the exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations among the state's education technology leaders.

☐ Engage state legislatures in the conversation

State education departments should engage their legislative leaders in conversations about equitable internal broadband access and emphasize the critical role Wi-Fi now plays in today's learning environments.

☐ Evaluate and monitor internal broadband growth and usage throughout your state

It is important to monitor, evaluate, and track the statewide penetration rate of quality Wi-Fi among school districts. Building benchmarks for usage data and growth and sharing best practices will benefit all schools in the state.

☐ Establish a stakeholder team to assist schools in addressing the "homework gap"

There are still many families who lack sustainable Internet access at their homes or within their community. While some cities have worked together to offer opportunities for students and families to access Internet at their local libraries or coffee shops, this is still a critical need.

Students without access to Internet connectivity and wireless connections at their homes or in their local community are at a disadvantage.

☐ Assist schools in planning for today and preparing for the future

Technology is changing rapidly and states can help school districts stay ahead of the curve by assisting districts as they plan for sustainability, growth, and future technology needs.

Anticipating and communicating the future needs at the state level will benefit schools in their long-term planning and sustainability.