



NEWS RELEASE

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JULY 23, 2021

CONNECTED NEBRASKA OFFERS FREE WIRELESS INTERNET TO NEBRASKA SCHOOLS

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Network Nebraska, and the University of Nebraska unveiled ConnectEd Nebraska, a new educational internet program for Nebraska K-12 schools. This program is powered by *eduroam* and provides students and educators with free and readily available access to guest wireless networks at participating ConnectEd Nebraska *eduroam* schools.

ConnectEd Nebraska is currently funded by Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act money and free to Nebraska school districts for three years. "In the spring of 2020, the NDE administered a public survey designed to prioritize Covid-19 relief funds in a way that most benefits Nebraska students, families, and school communities," said Commissioner Matthew Blomstedt. "Respondents identified the top need as enhancement of technology infrastructure, including Wi-Fi and broadband access. ConnectEd Nebraska is committed to fulfilling this need, providing consistent wireless access to Nebraska educators and students no matter where they teach and learn—across town, across the state, across the nation, and across the globe."

Nebraska was selected as one of two state networks in the country to pilot a support organization approach to *eduroam* for K-12 schools. When a student or teacher from any participating school is at a location with *eduroam*, they automatically connect to the internet with their home school credentials. ConnectEd Nebraska allows any Network Nebraska K-12 public or non-public entity to provide access to their wireless networks to users from other *eduroam*-connected schools.

School districts opting into the program will not only save money but time as *eduroam* authentication is automatic and access is immediate. *eduroam* provides a secure connection to wireless internet at schools during classes and events or when visiting other participating schools for activities and sports. The same credentials may also be used when taking classes at higher education campuses.

ConnectEd Nebraska strives for equity in the state, helping underserved students stay securely connected. "Due to collaborative efforts on behalf of state agencies and the University of Nebraska, our state was eligible to bring this program to Nebraska schools," said State CIO Ed Toner. "Recent FCC data indicates 12 percent of Nebraskans under the age of 18 do not have access to a reliable internet connection at home, showing that Nebraska's students rely more heavily on our schools for access to the Internet."

The University of Nebraska system began using *eduroam* in 2012, making it easier for students, faculty, and staff to connect to Wi-Fi as they move between campuses and visit other *eduroam* sites around the world. According to NU Chief Information Officer Bret Blackman, the more *eduroam* sites that exist, the more useful the service becomes.

“The University of Nebraska is thrilled to join with our State of Nebraska partners in supporting the expansion of *eduroam* across the state,” Blackman said. “Access is our primary mission, and extending *eduroam* is one more way we can help reduce barriers for students and all Nebraskans. The importance of technology in our jobs and lives is only going to grow, and it’s critical that all Nebraskans have equitable access to reliable, secure internet service. Expanding *eduroam* is a significant step forward in closing the digital divide and truly connecting our state.”

If you would like free Wi-Fi in your school and community, visit connectednebraska.com. Superintendents and school leaders will have the opportunity to adopt the program for their schools at Administrators’ Days – NDE Day in Kearney, NE on July 28, 2021.

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