
**Digital Readiness for Learning and Assessment Project (DRLAP)-Broadband Component
Frequently Asked Questions about the
Consortium Purchase of Telecommunications Services and Internet Access**

This document is designed to answer the most common questions from schools about the upcoming consortium purchase of telecommunications services and Internet access through the DRLAP-Broadband initiative. If this document does not answer your questions, please contact John Matthews, DRLAP consultant at jmatthews@dellicker.com for a personalized and prompt response.

What is DRLAP-Broadband?

The Digital Readiness for Learning and Assessment Project (DRLAP) is the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJ DOE) initiative to help schools prepare for next year's online assessments and future digital learning activities. The Broadband Component is designed to help schools upgrade their Internet access so they have ample bandwidth for important emerging educational technology applications.

Who is Dellicker Strategies?

Dellicker Strategies is a Pennsylvania-based consulting company hired by the New Jersey Department of Education through an existing state contract with North Highland Worldwide Consulting, which is helping NJ DOE with all aspects of DRLAP. Dellicker Strategies has extensive experience helping schools and other institutions upgrade their telecommunications capacity through collaborative purchasing. The company has helped more than 470 different school organizations improve their networks since 2005.

Who are the other parties in the process?

Besides working with Dellicker Strategies, DOE is working with several other organizations to help make the project a success. In particular, three educational organizations have volunteered to help NJ DOE work with schools throughout this process: Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission (MRESC), Bergen County Technical School (BCTC) and Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC). These organizations are hosting meetings, providing resources and contributing their expertise to build a more comprehensive shared services infrastructure that can better serve New Jersey schools.

How does the consortium procurement process work?

The concept is really very simple. Schools can get a better deal on Internet access by combining their purchasing power with other schools instead of buying services on their own. Purchasing Internet and telecommunications services in bulk can drive down prices and increase service availability.

What is the project timeline?

Now through June, the DRLAP Broadband team will be signing up schools for the consortium procurement, which is scheduled to be released in July. After the vendors have a chance to review the competitive contracting document, they will submit proposals for review by the consortium (around October 2014). By December, the winning vendors will be selected and schools will know the final price. New services will begin in July 2015.

How will the procurement be managed?

The DRLAP Broadband team has decided to use MRESC as the Issuing Officer for the competitive contracting process due to their comprehensive membership list and extensive experience in procurement. MRESC will issue one consolidated procurement for wide area network (WAN) and Internet access services on behalf of all participating schools and all regions.

What are the procurement regions?

The procurement will be divided into four regions with a lead organization designated for each. Schools will be assigned to the appropriate region based on their location:

1. Northwest (BCTC): Sussex and Warren
2. Northeast (BCTC): Passaic, Morris, Bergen, Essex, Hudson
3. Central (MRESC): Hunterdon, Somerset, Union, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth
4. South (EIRC): Burlington, Ocean, Camden, Atlantic, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, Cape May

Why do we have regions?

Organizing the procurements by region instead of bidding one big statewide network accomplishes two things. First, it allows service providers to offer services where they operate without forcing them too far out of their existing service territories. Second, it provides local service support from supporting organizations. For example, each lead organization (BCTC, MRESC and EIRC) will assist with local communications, coordination and management of the procurement now through contract execution.

Who will manage the networks?

That depends on what the vendors propose and what the schools agree to do. One option is for the winning service providers to manage the networks on behalf of the schools. Many districts across the country choose this option. Another scenario would be for the supporting organizations to provide certain management services to schools in order to save money. These decisions will be made during the selection process.

Can I be a part of the selection process?

Of course. Any participating school can volunteer to be a part of the bid review process.

Describe the basic design of the regional networks?

Network designs will vary based on the capabilities and business models of the service providers, but the basic parameters will be the same. Service providers will connect multiple school district locations to a regional Wide Area Network (WAN) for the bulk delivery of Internet access. Schools will be able to order as much Internet as their transport connections can deliver. Regional networks also will provide any-to-any connectivity among all participating schools statewide to facilitate the development and delivery of shared services, such as online courses, blended learning and other educational applications.

Who will hold the contracts?

Again, that depends on the bids and the buyers' collective decisions. One option is for MRESC, EIRC and/or BCTC to sign consolidated contracts with selected service providers and separate contracts with each participating school. Another option would be for schools to contract directly with each successful service provider. The procurement will provide enough flexibility to allow the lead organizations, individual schools or even other consortium organizations not yet known to hold the contracts.

What about E-Rate?

Receiving federal discounts on services is a very important component of this program's success and the DRLAP Broadband team will require all schools participating in our consortium procurement to enroll and participate in the E-Rate program. In July at the outset of the procurement, MRESC will issue an E-Rate Form 470 on behalf of all participating schools. Schools or their contracting agency will be able to refer to that original E-Rate Form 470 when filing their Forms 471 next winter.

How do I participate?

Schools need to complete and return two forms to the DRLAP Broadband team by June 13 in order to be included: the Letter of Intent and the Service Order Form. The Letter of Intent is a non-binding expression of good faith to participate in the consortium procurement process. The Service Order Form specifies where and what type of telecommunications and Internet service will be delivered. That's all you have to do until the bids are reviewed and you are given a service agreement later this year. Remember, schools have no obligation to purchase if the consortium process does not provide value.

How do I fill out the Service Order Form?

Please refer to the Service Order Form Instructions. Each school needs to input the location that will receive the network connection and the service start date. In addition, schools need to specify whether they only want Basic Broadband Internet Access (e.g. cable modem service) or WAN Service (Basic or High-Speed) along with dedicated Internet Access. Basic Broadband Internet Access definitely is cheaper but may not provide the bandwidth or reliability that schools need for emerging digital learning applications. If you select one of the WAN options for your school, be sure also to input the amount of Internet access you want to be delivered over your WAN connection. Contact John Matthews for help.

What about Page Two of the Service Order Form (Additional Intra-District Connections)?

Generally, districts will connect one school's building (the district "hub-site") to an Internet Service Provider and connect the other buildings to the hub-site to receive Internet access. These intra-district WANs are a popular and effective way to distribute Internet throughout a multi-campus school environment. If your district has multiple buildings that need to be connected for bulk Internet delivery, the DRLAP Broadband team can include those additional buildings in the procurement. Just fill out Page Two of the Service Order Form. Each district will make its own intra-district purchasing decisions.

What if my school is tied up in a long-term contract?

We can accommodate that. In the Service Order Form, select a future date when your contract expires. Or, just tell us about your problem and we can work with you. We have lots of experience with this.

What is the risk to participate?

There is none. Procurement results will be available by late fall when most schools are just starting their own E-Rate competitive bid process. If you don't like the results you don't have to participate. It's that simple. The real risk is not participating and not being able to take advantage of consortium discounts.

Why would a school not participate?

We don't really know. Why pass up an opportunity to get more Internet service for less cost?