

Executive Summary

The New Jersey Digital Readiness for Learning and Assessment Project-Broadband Component (NJDRLAP-Broadband) is part of a multi-faceted effort by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to help K-12 schools improve their educational technology capabilities. Conceived in 2013, the idea was to use an innovative procurement process to aggregate demand for Internet access among hundreds of schools in order to increase capacity and quality while simultaneously cutting costs.

The NJDOE contracted with Dellicker Strategies to develop the concept and partnered with the Middlesex Regional Educational Service Commission (MRESC) and Bergen County Technical Schools (BCTS) to execute the procurement. After the issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP) in 2014, a team of educators evaluated submissions and the MRESC awarded service to seven different providers. As of June, 2015, 145 school organizations have signed up for MRESC consortium service and will start to receive Internet access beginning July, 2015.

The success of NJDRLAP-Broadband is defined by five criteria: good school participation, enhanced Internet capacity, improved service quality, better overall value and a more competitive marketplace.

NJDRLAP Impact

For fiscal year (FY) 2014-15, NJDRLAP-Broadband has exceeded expectations for all evaluated criteria.¹ Key results from the program report and conclusions derived from the analysis are summarized below:

Participation by schools was good, but could have been even better.

- **145 school organizations** signed up for **\$20.6 million** in new NJDRLAP-Broadband contracts so far.
 - This includes 70 percent of operating districts eligible for new services during FY 2015.
 - The consortium will connect 219 school buildings to the Internet beginning July 1, 2015.
 - Eight public charters and private/non-public schools have ordered consortium services.

The capacity of educational networks was enhanced significantly.

- Participating school organizations added **2.5 times their current Internet capacity**, on average.
 - Internet bandwidth increased 152 percent- from 284 to 718 megabits per second (Mbps).
 - Total bandwidth for inter-district digital exchange increased by 385 percent, on average.²

NJDRLAP-Broadband reduced the price of Internet access by 76 percent for 145 participating school organizations across New Jersey, increasing their bandwidth 2.5 times while saving them \$89 million.

¹ To compile the NJDRLAP-Broadband Fiscal Year (FY) 2014-15 Program Results, the project team reviewed information from 747 school organizations, including 598 districts, 87 public charters and 62 private/non-public schools. Data was derived from vendor reports, school surveys and E-Rate filings, current as of May 31, 2015.

² This includes regional wide area network (WAN) bandwidth that connect schools across district boundaries.

The quality of school technology infrastructure has improved markedly.

- **25** participating school organizations **upgraded to Ethernet fiber** from cable modems or DSL.
 - Statewide, the ratio of schools choosing fiber over copper increased from 71 to 79 percent.
 - Schools choosing enhanced types of Internet access increased from 66 to 74 percent.³
 - 69 K-12 organizations will have access to regional wide area networks for enhanced service.

The value of K-12 Internet service contracts has increased substantially.

- Average monthly Internet prices **declined from \$26.77 to \$6.40 per Mbps** for participating schools.
 - This 76 percent price decrease saved schools an average of \$20.37 per Mbps each month.
 - That totals \$89 million in cost savings and a 7,700 percent return on investment to NJDOE.⁴

The competitiveness of the K-12 marketplace has advanced dramatically.

- Even schools that did not sign consortium contracts spent \$10 million less on Internet access.
 - 13 different companies competed to earn the business for NJDRLAP-Broadband.
 - Seven earned awards: Affiniti, Comcast, DNS, Lightpath, PenTeleData, Sunesys and Xtel.

Policy Recommendations

The report makes three recommendations to NJDOE for improving and continuing NJDRLAP-Broadband:

Policy Proposal 1- Conduct a Follow-On RFP

- A second RFP will help more schools take advantage of consortium pricing. Without a second procurement, school participation and opportunities for inter-district collaboration may decline in FY 2016-17.

Policy Proposal 2- Publicize the Results

- The outcomes of NJDRLAP-Broadband are compelling. Lessons learned should be shared with the citizens of New Jersey and leaders in other states as an example of educational policy success.

Policy Proposal 3- Develop the Shared Services Model

- The NJDOE should take advantage of the upgraded infrastructure to promote collaborative digital learning applications that make use of abundant, quality and affordable Internet access.

NJDRLAP-Broadband has exceeded expectations in achieving its program objectives. The NJDOE should build on this success to ensure that all school organizations can take advantage of this proven method for improving their technology infrastructure. As more schools get connected with faster, better and more affordable Internet, the policy focus can shift to applying this technology to help students learn.

NJDRLAP-Broadband has exceeded expectations for success during FY 2014-15

³ Enhanced services includes dedicated access and Ethernet-based services instead of “best-effort” broadband.

⁴ Cost savings are calculated by comparing the new (purchased) level of service at the new price to the new level of service at the previous (current) price for the full term of the contracts (42 months, on average).