



CONSORTIUM
OF FLORIDA EDUCATION
FOUNDATIONS



COVID Education Innovation in Florida

Access for All Digital Inclusion Initiative (Palm Beach County)

This Palm Beach County collaboration involves more than 40 government, philanthropic and business partners working together with a sense of urgency on one lofty goal: Create and implement a sustainable solution that brings broadband service to densely populated areas where 25,000 students indicate they do not have internet access. Together, they are leveraging more than \$60 million in funding to build a Wi-Fi Mesh Network in historically underserved communities within a 50 square mile area. They prioritized their construction plans by overlaying a “heat map” indicating populations of students on the Federal Free/Reduced Lunch Program and survey data on families reporting a lack of internet service.

The project involves mounting Wi-Fi hardware on vertical assets such as utility poles, installing root radios in more than 80 school facilities, then providing eligible families with a Wi-Fi Range Extender with instructions to plug it into an open, unobstructed outlet near a window to “pull down” the signal. The School District Department of Educational Technology assigned dedicated staff to configure each Wi-Fi extender and is providing onboarding assistance for families. The Quantum Foundation is stepping up with navigators to help families maximize the technology, not only for education but for overall quality of life, including health and employment opportunities for parents.

A key to getting lift off on this initiative was Palm Beach County and other municipalities working with community partners on construction and implementation and the School District willing to commit significant Federal CARES Act funding toward the project.

Leaders of the initiative point to the sustainability factor in opting for this solution. Once construction is completed, there is no monthly internet service provider charge for families. The Wi-Fi Range Extenders cost \$35-\$75 per household and last about 5-7 years. The Education Foundation of Palm Beach County focused on this part of the effort, raising \$1 million in private funds.

“This project is life changing,” said Palm Beach County Superintendent Dr. Donald Fennoy. “It’s a game changer for families in terms of education and access.”

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Other Resources:

[Digital Inclusion Initiative Newsletter, January 2021](#)

[Digital Equity Pilot Program with Palm Beach](#)

[Bridging the Digital Divide: A Report on the Progress of the Digital Inclusion Project](#)

[February Digital Inclusion Update](#)

The Consortium elevates the impact of Florida’s local education foundations through advocacy and providing a collegial community for ongoing learning, shared resources and support. These nonprofit organizations are aligned with nearly every school district in our state and collectively they raise more than \$80 million annually to innovate learning, power potential and celebrate success.

We believe strong collaboration is essential to ensure school success. Our effort to capture, elevate and share education innovations discovered amid the disruption of the pandemic is offered in that spirit.

Our **Top 10 Takeaways: COVID Education Innovation** report can be accessed at educationinnovationspotlight.com