



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

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Governor Abbott, TEA, TDEM Announce \$420 Million Reimbursement Program for Texas Schools To Continue Supporting Remote Learning During COVID-19

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott today announced a \$420 million reimbursement program to cover costs incurred by Texas public schools that purchased Wi-Fi hotspots and/or eLearning devices (such as laptops, tablets, and Chromebooks) so students could learn remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program, jointly administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) using federal CARES Act dollars, will reimburse districts for costs incurred since the 2019-20 school year if the district locally purchased eLearning devices and/or WiFi hotspots. This reimbursement program builds on the progress made by [Operation Connectivity](#), announced by Governor Abbott in May as an initiative to close the digital divide in Texas.

"Thanks to the collaborative approach of Operation Connectivity, students across the state have access to the eLearning resources they need to stay connected and receive a quality education through remote learning," said Governor Abbott. "This reimbursement program will significantly ease the financial burden on Texas public schools that have purchased these crucial eLearning devices and also helps ensure that more students have access to these devices as needed."

TDEM has already reimbursed school systems that purchased technology as a response to the pandemic during the final months of the 2019-20 school year. Additionally, TEA directly purchased roughly 1 million eLearning devices and WiFi hotspots in the summer, distributing that technology directly to Texas schools.

Since the start of Operation Connectivity, schools in Texas have acquired more than 2 million eLearning devices (such as laptops, tablets, Chromebooks) and more than 800,000 WiFi hotspots — totaling 2.8 million devices and hotspots combined and counting. Devices have been directly purchased by the state, purchased by school systems, generously donated by corporate partners, and in some cases, procured with the help of city and county governments leveraging federal CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) dollars. With this program, the State of Texas has allocated more than \$780 million in CARES Act funding for public education to assist local education agencies in connectivity purchases and reimbursement for COVID-19 expenses.

TEA has negotiated directly with suppliers, using the purchasing power of the state to drive down prices for devices an average of 30 percent. Given the number of eLearning devices purchased, Texas has largely closed the digital divide with regard to students who required

eLearning devices at home. Major progress has also been made to ensure all students have high speed Internet access at home.

School systems across Texas may apply for these reimbursement funds beginning Friday, November 20. TEA will be holding a [webinar that day](#), during which time details of the application process will be provided to participants.

"Throughout the pandemic we have maintained full funding for our schools, including the increased funds provided by House Bill 3, so that our students don't fall behind as we fight the coronavirus. Schools have established a wide-range of remote learning programs and have made laptops, tablets and WiFi hotspots available to students who need them to remain on track. This \$420 million in federal CARES Act funding for Operation Connectivity, along with the \$362 million in federal CARES Act funding that we have already provided, will ensure our schools — particularly in rural areas — remain on the cutting edge during the pandemic," said Lt. Governor Dan Patrick.

"The State and local school districts are partners in public education, and this reimbursement program will provide needed resources for schools who are struggling with unanticipated connectivity costs as they transitioned to a digital learning environment for students during the pandemic," said House Speaker Dennis Bonnen.

"Texas is working on several fronts to support our local school districts amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This financial support will help students, parents and teachers overcome the challenges presented by remote learning as we continue working to bridge the digital divide," said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Jane Nelson.

"While we all wish all our students could be learning in the classroom right now, we recognize that is not possible at this time. However, this cannot be a cause for different learning outcomes due to different levels of access to technology. I support the Governor taking this action to help ensure all of our students have the resources they need to learn until a return to the classroom is possible," said Senate Finance Committee Vice Chairman Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa.

"This pandemic has amplified disparities in access to broadband and brought them to the forefront. Together with our local education leaders, we have taken this challenge head on. With this investment we are one step closer to closing the digital divide and providing our educators with the necessary tools to ensure all children in Texas receive a high quality education. I want to thank Governor Abbott and my colleagues for prioritizing this effort," said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Giovanni Capriglione.

"Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many students lacked the necessary tools to adapt to distance learning," said Rep. Longoria. "School districts that addressed this by purchasing essential devices can apply for reimbursement," said House Appropriations Committee Vice Chairman Oscar Longoria.

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