

MINUTES**JOINT INTERIM COMMITTEE ON ADVANCED COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY****Thursday, February 2, 2012****1:30 p.m.****Room 151, State Capitol****Little Rock, Arkansas**

The Joint Interim Committee on Advanced Communications and Information Technology met on Thursday, February 2, 2012, at 1:30 p.m., in Room 151 of the State Capitol, in Little Rock, Arkansas. The following committee members attended:

Senators Linda Chesterfield, Chair; David Wyatt, Vice Chair; Jake Files, Mike Fletcher, Missy Irvin and Bill Sample. Representatives Mike Patterson, Chair; Sheilla Lampkin, Vice Chair; Mark Biviano, Jeremy Gillam, Karen Hopper, Buddy Lovell, Jon Woods, Tommy Wren, Justin Harris, and Kelley Linck (alternate).

Also attending: Senators Gilbert Baker, Joyce Elliott, Jimmy Jeffress, Michael Lamoureux, Randy Laverty, Jim Luker and Sue Madison. Representatives Tommy Baker, Jonathan Barnett, Lori Benedict, David Branscum, John Burris, Les Carnine, David Fielding, Billy Gaskill, Clark Hall, Andrea Lea, Betty Overbey, Terry Rice, Johnnie Roebuck, Tracy Steele, Randy Stewart, Tommy Thompson, Jeff Wardlaw and Marshall Wright.

Senator Chesterfield called the meeting to order. She recognized community members for introductions and Representative Patterson for comments.

Consideration to adopt Minutes of January 6, 2012, (Exhibit B)**Without objection, the minutes were approved by the Committee.****Review of the Department of Information Systems (DIS) Advice and Recommendations Report (Exhibit C)**

Senator Chesterfield stated that in 2014-2015, Arkansas will be moving to the Smart Core curriculum, this curriculum requires increased broadband capacity. Arkansas will have to determine how much broadband is available, what the needs are, and how to move forward to ensure that every child has an opportunity to be successful. Arkansas has areas that have high rates of service, underserved areas and areas that are not served. Individuals from ConnectArkansas and DIS will have critical roles in determining how to connect this state, to ensure that every child has access to broadband at home.

Ms. Claire Bailey, Director, DIS/State Chief Technology Officer, was recognized and gave a brief overview of the recommendations report. She said the report is a standard quarterly report that is presented to the committee, and sent to the Arkansas Legislative Council (ALC) for review. The majority of the reported information deals with questions from state agencies, boards, and commissions regarding network component.

Senator Missy Irvin made the motion to move the report for review by the ALC. Without objection, the motion was approved by the Committee.

In reference to Senator Chesterfield's comments regarding the critical roles of connecting Arkansas, to ensure that every child has access to broadband at home, Ms. Bailey stated that DIS found a critical element that showed the market demand for the telecommunication providers was missing for implementing broadband service to homes. She noted that ConnectArkansas is the entity that collects the information that is entered into the database distributed to telecommunication providers, to determine the market demand and growth areas for their industry.

Senator Chesterfield stated that if the industry decides that it is not cost effective to move into an area, what will ConnectArkansas do in order to make it happen for individuals in the unserved areas? Ms. Bailey replied that there may not be a mechanism in place for that nor is there funding available at the state or federal level to deal with this issue. She noted that this is difficult when there is no dedicated funding source available to provide the service.

Ms. Bailey stated that ConnectArkansas has an online map of the state that shows where broadband is available. Citizens can access the map and identify available providers and other pertinent information by going to www.connect-arkansas.org. ConnectArkansas is currently working with community leaders in 17 counties, to educate them on the services that are available. The goal is to locate funding and provide service in every corner of the state.

Technical Plans for Broadband in Underserved Areas (Handout #1)

Ms. Claire Bailey was recognized and introduced Mr. Don McDaniel, Director, Enterprise State Network Division, DIS and Mr. Thomas Melton, GIS Mapping Analyst with ConnectArkansas.

Ms. Bailey presented a PowerPoint, entitled "Technical Plans for Broadband in Unserved & Underserved Areas of Arkansas".

Ms. Bailey explained that the goal is to maximize the funding resources. Most of the funding for rural broadband services is through the Arkansas Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Through enabling legislation, DIS has one state network for agencies, boards and commissions. Services are provided to K through 12 and some areas of higher education. DIS works closely with the broadband providers as an anchor tenant for all of the communities, to promote broadband growth.

At the national level, \$7.2 billion was identified for broadband initiatives. Of this amount, \$4.7 billion was awarded to the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), to provide access to broadband in unserved areas, and to improve broadband access for underserved areas, as well as to provide broadband education, training and support. Ms. Bailey stated that \$2.7 billion was awarded for the Broadband Initiatives Program, to support the expansion of broadband service in rural areas. ConnectArkansas is working with DIS in this area, to assist with the adoption and education process for broadband.

As the state moves toward the Common Core Assessment, Senator Chesterfield asked, does the state have the capacity to allow every community access to broadband, to ensure that every child required to take the assessment has an equal chance at being successful? Ms. Bailey replied that she is not able to answer the question at this time, noting that DIS has to work with every school district and provider to answer this question. She stated that DIS is working with the Arkansas Department of Education (DOE), to perform capacity testing. Ms. Bailey noted that she has worked with Dr. Tom Kimbrell, Commissioner, Department of Education (DOE), to ensure that DIS is communicating with the providers. She pointed out that the state and the providers must be prepared and understand that this demand is coming.

With regards to the funding request, DIS has to look at the cost and work with the districts and providers, to ensure that the right and best contracts are in place.

In response to a statement made by Representative Tommy Wren regarding the \$102 million ARRA funds that were awarded to the University of Arkansas System (U of A), Ms. Bailey clarified that the funds were awarded for an internal infrastructure that is used for telemedicine.

Melissa Rust, Vice President, University Relations, U of A, was recognized and stated that the \$102 million BTOP grant was received through the Department of Commerce stimulus funds. The BTOP grant is for healthcare, education, and research. It also connects the community colleges. Of the \$102 million, \$41.2 million went to the Arkansas Research Education Optical Network (AREON). These funds were specifically for connecting all of the 22 community colleges within the state. The remainder of the funds was distributed to the University of Arkansas Medical System, to connect various healthcare facilities throughout the state. Ms. Rust stated that AREON goals include: healthcare, education, research, emergency preparedness, and economic development. AREON was primarily established as a network for higher education.

Senator Joyce Elliott asked if there had ever been a policy discussion in Arkansas regarding how to fund broadband. Ms. Bailey replied that there have been some discussions regarding this issue, but in today's economic time, it is very difficult to find a fee increase or a taxation mechanism to do this. Arkansas is not the only state fighting this issue. A lot has to be done to get a national plan and a state plan in place regarding how Arkansas connects its' communities. At the national level, there is more activity regarding a public safety broadband measure. Ms. Bailey stated that ConnectArkansas is working to develop a plan for the state. She noted that Arkansas can provide additional contracts to provide broadband.

Ms. Bailey stated that as technologies emerge, Arkansas has issued a statewide contract through DIS for the next generation state networks. DIS is in the final phase of developing rates that will require approval from the Committee. The goal is to increase capacity, and to receive the best possible cost. Ms. Bailey stated that anchor tenant projects are accessible for education, that include a dedicated state network component (broadband for educational enhancement) for education that provides cheap, low cost, internet only access. This measure has lowered costs for some school districts.

Broadband Accessibility within Arkansas Schools and Future Needs

Dr. Tom Kimbrell was recognized, and stated that Arkansas was the first state to connect every school district in the state to the internet. The connectivity was created to manage the financial and the student management side of schools. ADE created the Arkansas Public School Network System (APSNS) that became a part of the budget requirements and operational perspective. The new 21st Century technology tools that students and teachers are using began to eat up the pipeline. Every school has connectivity, but the pipeline has had to compete with all of the information that runs through the APSNS for financial and student management. ADE and DIS must determine what the needs are within the pipeline. Dr. Kimbrell noted that Arkansas needs to make sure that schools have the technology in place that they will need to ensure that students will be successful.

Dr. Kimbrell stated that we have a timeframe ahead of us, and all of the agencies have to work diligently as a unit. School districts are encouraged to work on the STEM Works Initiative programming (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). This would require the school districts to have additional access to broadband availability. ADE is working to develop an understanding of what the capacity is at every school.

Dr. Kimbrell explained that the Smart Core is a set of courses that students are expected to take to graduate. It consists of two tracks; the Core and Smart Core. Dr. Kimbrell's goal is to merge these tracks into one. The Common Core State Standards consist of English, language arts and mathematics. These are a common set of learning's that 44 states have signed onto. The standards must be assessed in order for ADE to determine whether the schools are meeting the expectations for students to be prepared for college and careers.

Dr. Kimbrell stated that two consortiums received federal grants. Arkansas along with 23 other states' are part of a consortium that received \$175 million, to develop a technology needs assessment tool. Of the 24 states, 12 states make up the governing board. Some of the important unknowns include the exam length for each grade level, and the length of days to administer it. Grades K- through 3 and K- through 5 will continue with the paper and pencil assessment. The assessment tool will be delivered by the end of this month. This will allow schools to assess where and what their technology needs are.

ADE's goal for 2014-2015 is to deliver a new assessment to K through 3 and K through 8 as well as for every math, English, and language arts student in grades 9, 10 and 11. Standards are created on a learning progression that moves from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Dr. Kimbrell expects that the platform development will be wireless. Some concerns include: schools not having the needed devices within the expected timeframe and secure servers. ADE and DIS will work together on the requirements. He noted that every school district is required to submit their technology plan to ADE.

Dr. Kimbrell stated that Mr. Derrick Brown, Chief Information Officer with the PCSSD, could elaborate further on specific broadband requirements for schools. He suggested that Arkansas look at what other states are doing to tackle this problem to make broadband affordable for everyone.

Senator Chesterfield asked what it would cost to provide broadband to the schools and the communities that the schools serve. Dr. Kimbrell replied that he did not know what the cost would be. He stated that ADE and DIS could reasonably consider what the State Educational Technology Directors Association (a national group) recommends, to provide some sort of cost estimate.

Representative Tommy Wren asked should ADE and DIS talk with the providers regarding the financial and bandwidth expectation, to ensure that there is adequate bandwidth in the schools. Dr. Kimbrell replied that he could not give the providers anything definitive until the assessment is completed. Senator Chesterfield stated that everyone impacted by these issues have to be at the table, noting that this is a massive rollout that is critical to Arkansas' future if we are going to be players in this global economy.

Representative Mark Biviano asked are there any other innovative programs for education that major bandwidth would be used for. Dr. Kimbrell replied that there is a period of time that the major bandwidth would be used for during the testing period. ADE will try to build systems that are far reaching. So far, the traditional public schools use the distant learning program and the virtual delivered curriculum.

Representative Tracy Steele asked is this an adequacy issue? Dr. Kimbrell replied that there is no statutory authority that requires ADE to provide bandwidth or the connectivity, but there is a statute that states, "if distant learning is going to be provided as an option; then the state will ensure that adequate connectivity is provided for the distance learning services". Dr. Kimbrell will work hard to ensure that every child and school is assessed using the latest technology, and continue advancing tomorrow's technologies to improve today's schools.

Dr. Kimbrell concluded by extending an invitation to the Committee to attend the EAST Conference to be held March 14-16, 2012, at the Convention Center in Hot Springs.

Senator Chesterfield recognized representatives from the following school districts: Dr. Jerry Guess, Superintendent, PCSSD; Mr. Derrick Brown, Chief Information Officer, Technology Department, PCSSD; Ms. Barbara Williams, Director of Instructional Technology, Little Rock School District (LRSD); and Mr. Travis Taylor, Instructional Technology Specialist, LRSD.

Senator Chesterfield asked what technology does the PCSSD have in place and what is needed to ensure that students are ready for the upcoming assessments?

Mr. Brown presented a PowerPoint entitled "Learning Powered by Technology". He stated that the technology plan is in the developing stages and is due in March. PCSSD has partnered with the telecommunication providers and negotiated with AT&T for aggressive broadband fiber rates for construction. PCSSD has invested \$800,000 to provide the broadband that is needed for the entire school district. After the E-Rate application is filed, PCSSD will pay 20% of the cost. This total is based on the districts free and reduced priced lunches. Mr. Brown stated that Fort Smith, Little Rock, North Little Rock, Conway and Cabot school districts built their own networks. PCSSD will utilize the state for support and maintenance. Mr. Brown noted that Arkansas is one of ten states that is bandwidth deficient.

Senator Chesterfield asked how PCSSD will deal with the students and communities that do not have broadband connection. Mr. Brown replied that this will be part of the initiative that PCSSD will work on with DIS. Every school in Pulaski County will have this access if the PCSSD receives approval to move forward.

Ms. Barbara Williams stated that LRSD has computer labs in practically all of the Little Rock schools. Community centers have computers for students and parents who do not have access to one at home. All of the classrooms have interactive white boards. Senator Chesterfield asked are there areas in Little Rock that do not have adequate broadband capacity within the school district. Ms. Williams stated that one school may be in this category, noting that the school may move to a new location.

Senator Chesterfield recognized the communications providers. Mr. Joe Molinaro, Executive Director, Arkansas Cable Telecommunications Association (ACTA), represents nine-member operators that provide approximately 90% of the cable service to cable subscribers in Arkansas. Mr. Ronnie Dedman, Board Member, AT&T, stated that several colleagues will work with the state to move the broadband effort forward.

Representative Steele asked what is the possibility of filling the gaps in some of the unincorporated areas of central Arkansas and Pulaski County, and how will the schools and communities be affected? Mr. Molinaro stated that ACTA recognizes areas the need to be served, noting that the areas are looked at, and an attempt is made to provide the services after they are evaluated.

Representative Steele stated that the McAlmont area population has decreased slightly over the past 10 years, and he asked how do you determine if it makes good business sense to provide service in areas like McAlmont or not? Mr. Molinaro replied that every area is taken seriously as if it were a new development. Engineers are sent into these areas to evaluate the cost, and to determine what it would take to bring the cable from the pole to the homes.

Mr. Dedman stated that AT&T also recognizes the problems within the McAlmont area, noting that AT&T has many opportunities around the state, including McAlmont, to provide high speed internet. AT&T looks at each area

individually, to build a business case for that particular area. For example, a group will assess the McAlmont area living units by looking at the potential takers rate. Based on these numbers, a decision will be made as to whether AT&T can provide services in the area. In some instances in rural Arkansas, AT&T draws money from the High Cost Fund, to provide high speed internet in these areas.

Senator Chesterfield stated that this is a very critical issue, noting that if we are going to provide adequate education for children who are going to compete in the 21st Century, we must have these discussions. She thanked everyone for attending the meeting, and noted that this issue would be discussed again.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:25 p.m.