

MINUTES**JOINT INTERIM COMMITTEE ON ADVANCED COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY****Wednesday, April 11, 2012****1:00 p.m.****U of A - Hope- Community College, 2500 South Main Street
Hope, Arkansas**

The Joint Interim Committee on Advanced Communications and Information Technology met on Wednesday 27, April 11, 2012, at 1:00 p.m., on the campus of the University of Arkansas at Hope - Community College (U of A Hope), 2500 South Main Street, in Hope, Arkansas. The following committee members attended:

Senators Linda Chesterfield, Chair; Mike Fletcher and Representatives Mike Patterson, Chair.

Also attending: Senators Larry Teague and Steve Harrelson. Representatives Kim Hammer, Michael Lamoureux, Randy Stewart, and David Powers.

Senator Chesterfield called the meeting to order. She recognized Senator Teague, Senate Pro Tempore-Elect; Representative David "Bubba" Powers, and Mr. Chris Thomason, Chancellor, U of A Hope for welcoming remarks. Community members were also recognized. Representative Patterson was recognized for comments.

Consideration to adopt Minutes of February 2, 2012 (Exhibit C)

Senator Fletcher made the motion to approve the minutes. Without objection, the minutes were approved by the Committee.

Update: Broadband Technology within Public Schools

Mr. Jim Boardman, Assistant Commissioner, Research and Technology, Arkansas Department of Education, was recognized and gave a brief update on broadband technology within public schools. He stated that some people are using the term computer based technology to refer to the Common Core Assessment, noting that the test has not been developed and may be land based.

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.

Mr. Boardman concurred with Senator Larry Teague's statements regarding the shortage of bandwidth capacity in the state to allow every student to take the assessment online. He stated that recently, two consortiums, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balance have partnered to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in English and math. They have also developed an assessment tool for school districts that is designed to look at the number of computers in the schools, the number of students and the bandwidth capability to determine where the gaps are. Only nine school districts so far, have entered information.

Mr. Boardman discussed the hardware specifications that are required for the online assessment. As requested by Senator Larry Teague, Mr. Boardman will provide a copy of the minimum hardware requirements and specifications to committee staff for distribution to committee members.

Mr. Boardman stated that as we look towards the future, bandwidth will be more important for classroom instruction than for testing. It will take more bandwidth to do distant learning, blended learning, and all of the resources that schools will need to help the teachers. In response to a question from Senator Michael Lamoureux, Mr. Boardman stated that he is not aware of the recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) order that will possibly impact broadband deployment in Arkansas. Senator Lamoureux asked that the committee make themselves familiar with the FCC order and further discuss the issue in future meetings. He noted that Mr. Mike Hernandez, Superintendent of Danville High School is a good resource for more information on the FCC order.

Representative Hammer asked what was the initial cost for implementing broadband in the schools. Mr. Boardman replied that he is primarily responsible for the infrastructure for distant learning, noting that the infrastructure bid amount is approximately \$450,000 per month. He stated that broadband does not cost the same in rural Arkansas as it does in some of the larger cities. A lot of schools are purchasing bandwidth above what the state provides. Mr. Boardman was not prepared to give the committee a cost analysis now but will have more information by the summer. Senator Chesterfield asked how the state will preclude itself from being sued for the inequity. Mr. Boardman did not have a definitive answer to the question.

Senator Chesterfield suggested having joint meetings with the Education committees to further discuss the broadband issue.

Representative Randy Stewart stated that as we move into requiring online testing, a comprehensive review of the schools have to be done to determine their broadband capability. The technician coordinator's ability to do the testing requirements at the schools should also be examined as well as security issues. Mr. Boardman explained that the Co-Ops can go into the schools with an etherscope to check bandwidth problems, noting that DIS has a good handle on the security issues but will need to look at the security of the local network.

Ms. Marie Bruno, Vice President, ConnectArkansas, was recognized and stated that ConnectArkansas' president, Mr. Sam Walls was unable to attend the meeting but submitted a video presentation [Handout#1] to update the committee on the ConnectArkansas project.

Mr. Walls stated that 80% of ConnectArkansas' projects are funded by federal stimulus funds. These funds will cease in two years. He discussed several of ConnectArkansas' projects that included the first online Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative. During the quarter, year ending March 31st, ConnectArkansas conducted twenty-six classes in five counties. Over 350, 7th through 12th grade students received hands on training to develop skills to start an internet business. Students used an iPad and web-based resources that encouraged them to turn their entrepreneurial ideas into a functional online business website. The second project, Arkansas SourceLink Website project is referred to as E-harmony for anyone in the state looking for help with starting or growing their ideas in their businesses. SourceLink facilitates the linking of nonprofit resource organizations and assists with establishing emerging and start-up small businesses throughout the state. The third project, Broadband Mapping Team has partnered with seventy-four internet service providers for the spring 2012 update of broadband maps. All county maps can be found on the ConnectArkansas website. The mapping team released a "white paper" documenting the current status of broadband availability to a number of community anchored institutions. These are public schools, law enforcement agencies, hospitals, clinics, and fire stations.

Mr. Walls stated that a ConnectArkansas' statewide surveys confirms that 55% percent of Arkansans consider high speed internet a luxury in relation to other utilities. He noted that these citizens are not subscribing because they do not think they need it.

The fourth project, Broadband Planning is limited to conducting field visits and e-Community meetings in seventeen counties. Mr. Walls challenged the committee members to help them in their effort by forwarding the surveys to their constituents. He stated that ConnectArkansas' goal is to further deploy high speed internet infrastructure and to increase the number of subscribers.

Mr. Walls stated that all legislators were emailed a save-the-date notice regarding a press release for ConnectArkansas' first live stream event on Arkansas E-Link that was broadcasted on March 16. Arkansas E-Link is an infrastructure project that will enhance broadband resources within healthcare, higher education, public safety, and research institutions. He noted that Arkansans will not be able to access these new opportunities unless they go online.

Arkansas has over 275,000 children that are eligible for free and reduced price school lunches. Numerous studies show that there are correlation between these households and their ability to afford computers. ConnectArkansas' Computers 4 Kids Program is growing. There are low-cost options available to families that may not be able to afford computers. A limited number of free computers are available to students that are identified by school personnel whose families are unable to afford these low-cost options. Families are required to attend six hours of technology training classes before they

receive their free computers. Since March 31, nearly six hundred students have attended the training classes and received computers. Mr. Walls noted that ConnectArkansas is not equipped to serve the entire state, but are exceeding their expectations with the stimulus funds they received.

Ms. Bruno noted that the stimulus funds that ConnectArkansas received are paying for them to draft and complete a state broadband plan. She expects that this will be done before the October 12 deadline.

Update: Broadband for Educational Enhancement

Mr. Don McDaniel, Director, Division of Enterprise Network Services, Department of Information Systems (DIS), was recognized and shared a handout entitled "Broadband for Educational Enhancement" [Handout#2]. He gave a brief overview of the states' network, video network and the Bandwidth for Educational Enhancement Initiative (BEE). Mr. McDaniel stated the BEE Initiative combines both business class and secures the state network to provide a more consumer grade internet access directly from the schools.

Mr. McDaniel stated that the plan is to replace the current state network technology (Frame Relay and Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM)) used since the early 1990s. He said that the wide area network (WAN) Ethernet is now more cost effective than other technologies. Bids were awarded to four vendors: Cox Business, AT&T, Windstream, and CenturyLink. Arkansas will have more cost effective bandwidth with many more bandwidth options, a more robust and redundant backbone, and will require build out of vendor networks to meet the states' needs. Mr. McDaniel noted that DIS is working with vendors to schedule conversions as vendor networks are ready. DIS largest customer is the Arkansas Department of Education. Mr. McDaniel noted that DIS has also been involved with configuring the aggregation device and content filtering appliance at one-hundred and fifty-six schools.

Senator Chesterfield asked does DIS anticipate knowing when the broadband capacity will be available. Mr. Boardman replied that the Common Core instruction is a long-term issue to address. Arkansas has never had a problem with getting broadband service at a cost to any school. Mr. McDaniel stated that more dialogue between DIS and the communication providers is needed to determine what the needs are and broadband availability.

Representative Hammer asked does DIS anticipate a rate increase. Mr. McDaniel replied that negotiations on rates are ongoing. Senator Chesterfield thanked Mr. McDaniel for his hard work.

Comments from area Superintendents

Senator Chesterfield recognized area superintendents for comments. Mr. Douglas Graham, Superintendent, Nashville Public Schools, asked will the Common Core assessment downloads go through the T1 line provided by DIS or will it go through any line that the school has in place. Mr. Boardman replied that the assessment may be downloaded to a secure server that will be placed at each school district.

Mr. Kenneth Muldrew, Superintendent, Hope Public School District, stated that his district will need the ability to make sure that information can be submitted to the ADE.

Mr. Albert Murphy, Superintendent, Genoa Central Schools, stated that the high school and elementary/middle school site in his district are connected by fiber optics. He said the school district is making good strides with preparing for the Common Core assessment. In response to a question from Senator Chesterfield regarding whether the high school was available for area students to use computers to do their homework. Mr. Murphy replied that the high school is open two afternoons per week to allow students to access computers. Tutoring is also provided. In response to a question from Representative Hammer regarding how much of the 2% funds were used for the school's infrastructure, Mr. Murphy replied that other funding sources were used such as the National School Lunch Act and Title I funds. He noted that the 2% funds were used for maintenance of operations and increments for salaries.

Mr. Robert Poole, Superintendent, Prescott School District, stated that his school district is trying to be proactive while preparing for the Common Core assessment, noting that it is very frustrating when the amount of bandwidth requirement for schools are unknown. Through the school district's E-rate program, 100 meg bandwidth has been added to prepare for the testing. Mr. Poole noted that their school is open every day and Saturdays for students to access computers to complete their homework.

Senator Fletcher asked if anyone can tell the schools how much bandwidth they will need. Mr. Boardman replied that the test has not been developed therefore, it is difficult to say how much bandwidth schools will need. The broadband requirements need to be presented to the schools and the legislature before the next legislative session.

Senator Chesterfield thanked the superintendents for attending the meeting and encouraged them to attend future meetings. She stated that more meetings will be held on a monthly basis until the 2013 legislative session to discuss this issue.

Comments from Communications Providers

Senator Chesterfield recognized the communication providers for comments. Mr. Ronnie Dedman, Board Member, AT&T, stated that it is important for the providers to attend these meetings, noting that AT&T would like to be part of the solution.

Mr. Patrick Lee, National Accounts Manager, Government Sales, Verizon Wireless, stated that Verizon would also like to be part of the solution as well.

Public Comments

Senator Chesterfield recognized the guests for comments:

Mr. Dave Phillips, Director of Telecommunications, U of A –Hope, stated that many schools have multiple campuses. He asked if a secure server is in a location, how you will guarantee that enough bandwidth is available between the campuses to handle the work load. This is a significant issue for schools, especially for smaller school districts. Mr. Phillips stated that other problems exist with E-textbooks and online research. He asked where the E-textbooks will be stored after they are downloaded.

Senator Chesterfield asked what role the colleges and universities will have in making sure that the access for communities is there. In response to a question by Senator Chesterfield, Mr. Phillips stated that the U of A-Hope is a public access site. The college is also a wireless access provider. Mr. Phillips stated that non-secure wireless access is becoming high risk these days, noting that secure databases are extremely important for protecting data.

Mr. Emerson Evans, GIS Program Manager, ConnectArkansas, stated that broadband maps are available and accessible on ConnectArkansas' website. These maps show where broadband is currently available within the state.

Ms. Lindy Franks, Director, Southwest Arkansas Education Cooperative (SAEC), stated that SAEC has partnered with the U of A- Hope . She stated that SAEC has a lot of concerns about technology such as: hardware, software, broadband, etc. This is a big problem and there are no quick solutions. She concluded by thanking the committee for addressing the broadband issue.

Senator Chesterfield stated that this is a statewide issue and the committee will take this conversation across the state noting that the government is here to help provide solutions not to be the problem.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.