

CPSD Approved for Grant to Provide Computer Devices to All Students

Every school district in Mississippi has submitted plans to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to provide all public-school students with the technology to learn at school and at home. The effort is a part of an MDE program called Mississippi Connects.

The Mississippi Legislature allocated \$200 million through two new laws for Mississippi Connects, so school districts can purchase computer devices and other tools that will enable students to continue learning when they are not in a school building.

“Canton Public School District applied for the Mississippi Department of Education’s Equity in Distance Learning Grant, and this morning, we were excited to learn that we were approved. Upon receiving the awarded funds, we will begin purchasing devices and other instructional resources to support our students and teachers in distance learning,” says CPSD Superintendent Gary Hannah.

The [Equity in Distance Learning Act \(SB 3044\)](#) provides \$150 million to school districts to pay for computer devices for students and teachers, software to deliver instruction, enhanced internet connectivity and professional development for digital teaching and learning. The [Mississippi Pandemic Response Broadband Availability Act \(HB 1788\)](#) provides \$50 million to districts to help expand internet access to students living in underserved areas.

Districts plan to purchase nearly 390,000 computer devices, which are expected to be delivered from late September through November. Districts that already have computer devices for students will use their digital learning funds to pay for other eligible expenses.

“The unexpected need for distance learning provided Mississippi with the opportunity to reimagine the digital learning experience and create an innovative approach to getting students what they need to learn, whether in a classroom or at home,” said Dr. Carey Wright, state superintendent of education. “With this investment from the Legislature, Mississippi sees the urgent need for technology and is ready to meet that need to ensure every student can succeed.”

The goal of Mississippi Connects is for every student to receive the technology needed to learn and to continue the state’s historic academic gains. Mississippi students’ academic achievement is growing at the fastest rate in the U.S., surpassing many of the goals of the Mississippi Succeeds Plan. Mississippi was able to exceed expectations by closely partnering with district leaders, educators, parents and students, and state legislators.

In every area of focus for improved public education – early childhood education, reading, advanced courses, and career and technical education – Mississippi is challenging students to reach higher, and they have surpassed goals. Now the state is ensuring students get the resources they need to excel in a digitally advanced workforce.

Mississippi Connects includes the following components:

- Laptops or tablets for students and teachers to use at home or school. Districts select Chromebooks, Windows laptops, MacBooks and/or iPads.
- High-quality instructional materials, learning management systems and other online learning tools. All software, security and support features come pre-loaded and configured for immediate use.
- Enhanced internet connectivity in areas of the state where students do not have broadband service. Districts will use funds to purchase services such as data plans and hotspots or to expand broadband access in community locations accessible to students.
- Professional development and technology support for teachers and students to implement distance learning.
- Student access to telehealth and teletherapy services for their physical, social and emotional health.

The MDE has already begun providing virtual learning professional development to educators and will continue to work with school districts to sustain digital learning over the long term.

“Mississippi Connects will increase equity among students by narrowing the divide between students with and without access to technology at home,” Wright said. “Equipping all students with digital learning tools will help shape and innovate the future of education in Mississippi.”

Learn more: mdek12.org/MSCConnects