

Best Practices for Launching and Managing a Successful K-12 Hotspot Program

In 2023, nearly 18 million K-12 students in the U.S. lacked adequate internet access at home. In Ohio alone, data from the Census Bureau shows that about 15% of all households with students are without broadband at home, and about 10% are without a computer at home. At the same time, 70% of teachers assign homework that requires internet access. As school districts continue to adopt more digital learning tools, wireless hotspot programs have become essential to bridging this gap. But not all hotspot devices, plans, and providers are the same.

With over 150 years of experience in telecom, Mission Telecom prides itself on helping schools, libraries, and nonprofits to achieve their connectivity goals. Here are our suggested best practices for managing a successful K-12 hotspot program:

1. **Understand the Need:** Work with teachers, administrators, and families to assess the connectivity needs in your district. Focus on underserved populations and those in rural or low-income areas where broadband access may be limited. Consider extracurricular activities and other use cases in your assessment.
2. **Understand Coverage:** At Mission Telecom, we use a third-party [Signal Strength Map](#) and [Speed Test Map](#) to ensure that network coverage is adequate where hotspots may be utilized. If 5G is available, consider purchasing 5G devices to support a better learning experience.
3. **Choose the Right Devices:** Ensure that your hotspots are user-friendly, durable, and capable of handling multiple devices per household. Verify that they offer 4G LTE or 5G speeds to keep up with modern digital requirements.
4. **Consider Rate Plans:** Many wireless providers offer watered-down rate plans with expensive overage fees and network limitations. Consider unlimited, uncapped rate plans with higher priority, like those offered by [Mission Telecom](#), to avoid expensive bills.
5. **Offer Support:** Work with your provider to provide families with simple tutorials and ongoing tech support. Equip your IT team with the resources to troubleshoot common issues, ensuring students can quickly resolve connectivity problems.

By prioritizing accessibility, education, and support, a K-12 hotspot program can help students stay connected and secure so they can succeed, regardless of their circumstances.

To learn more about Mission Telecom, please visit Booth 10 at the [EdTech Leaders Alliance Conference](#) October 20-22 in Lewis Center, Ohio, or by visit missiontelecom.org.

About the author: Mark is the Director of Broadband Operations. Before joining Mission Telecom, Mark served as the Senior Manager of Broadband Programs for the Colorado

Broadband Office, where he managed a team working on federal broadband grant programs, including Capital Projects Funds (CPF) and the Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program.

In addition, Mark was appointed by Governor Polis to serve on the Colorado Broadband Deployment Board, funding state and federal grants to connect unserved and underserved Coloradans.

Mark began his career as a Legislative Assistant in the U.S. Congress, focusing on telecommunications, spectrum, rural broadband, and IT issues. He also worked as a Senior Business Operations Analyst at DISH Network, managing projects related to providing world-class customer experience.

Mark earned a master's degree from the Interdisciplinary Telecommunications Program at the University of Colorado-Boulder, where he was the top graduate.