



THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

For information

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Community Foundation to Provide Grants to Expand Critical Student Access to Technology for Online Learning

Rochester Area Community Foundation has established a COVID Education Fund to urgently support the purchase of technology and home internet access for students who don't have reliable or high-speed internet access or computers in their homes.

When schools closed and in-class lessons quickly transitioned to online learning, this critical need became apparent. Younger students may be more directly affected because in some districts that took advantage of the state funding to improve educational technology, older students may have been given laptop computers.

"The goal of the Education Fund is to increase access to technology so students can continue learning and limit their learning loss," says Jennifer Leonard, president and CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation. "The lack of technology, coupled with schools not reopening this academic year, creates a crisis that may put many children in danger of falling even further behind in their studies."

When COVID-19 caused schools to close, students had only completed 64 percent or 115 days of the state minimum requirement of 180 days. Many students and those without access to online learning will end the year having missed out on a third of in-class instruction and educational supports. The accelerated transition to online learning also exposed how students' families, already suffering the challenges of the digital divide, would have limited capabilities to access services, medical information, apply for unemployment and jobs or develop the skills needed to advance in jobs they may hold.

An April 15 report on the digital divide in Rochester, researched by ROC the Future, illustrates the problem. The U.S. Census indicates that 88 percent of Rochester residents have some type of computer, smart phone, or wireless device and, of those, 63 percent live in a household with a desktop or laptop. And while 80 percent of Rochester residents have broadband access, 20 percent have no internet and 17 percent rely solely on their cellular phone's data plan. This means 37 percent of city residents have limited functionality for educational purposes.



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The Education Fund will begin accepting grant proposals from school districts and other educational organizations starting this week. Applications will need to include a school's or district's strategies for meeting the technology needs of students who currently don't have access. Grants will be awarded based on need and potential impact. For more information, email Grants@racf.org.

"This grant opportunity will not solve the challenges of digital disparities, but it can provide an intermediate and immediate solution to the most urgent needs our students and families are facing," says Simeon Banister, vice president for community programs at the Community Foundation.

The Education Fund, created by the Foundation's Board of Directors in April, is being seeded with a \$170,000 grant from the Maxion Family Charitable Fund, established at the Community Foundation in 1999 by the estate of a philanthropic family. The purpose of this permanently endowed fund is to promote "education for humanity" with grants supporting, among other things, access to technology for disadvantaged populations.

An additional \$51,000 has been added to the COVID Education Fund from Community Foundation fundholders. Leonard said contributions from other co-investors interested in supporting this initiative would be most welcome. Secure online donations can be made at www.racf.org/COVIDEducation. Checks payable to the fund can be mailed to Rochester Area Community Foundation, 500 East Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607.