

For Immediate Release
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Local Funders, Contributors Cover Monthly Internet Connection Costs for Rochester City School District Students

*\$240,000 from Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation
Makes Full School-Year Access Possible*

In just three weeks, local philanthropic organizations, businesses, and individuals responded with generous contributions to cover the \$85,500 monthly internet connection costs for Rochester City School District students through August, the end of summer school.

This rapid response was due in large part to ESL's offer to match contributions dollar for dollar, up to a total of \$350,000, to support a collaborative funding effort under way by ESL, Monroe County, Greater Rochester Health Foundation, and Rochester Area Community Foundation.

The investment by the community partners leveraged a \$240,000 grant from the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation, which closed the funding gap and secured the match from ESL. In all, contributions for this collaborative initiative to help students total \$855,000.

"The Farash Foundation has a long-standing commitment to ensuring equity for Rochester's children and families. This grant will help provide access to greatly needed internet service for RCSD students and families as they continue to navigate the challenges of the pandemic," says Holli Budd, executive director of the Farash Foundation. "The collaborative community approach to addressing this challenge collectively — particularly in a crisis — is wonderful to see and we are so glad that Rochester's students will benefit from this joint effort."

An October 30 announcement by community partners highlighted the glaring problem RCSD students were facing with the continuation of remote learning: Individual hotspot devices distributed in the spring for use at home were not providing enough speed or a consistent enough connection.

T-Mobile's Project 10Million is donating 2,900 mobile hotspots for RCSD students in kindergarten through high school who don't have reliable internet connections, and the partners agreed to raise money to buy up to 2,000 additional devices.

To cover the monthly costs of unlimited data for each of these hotspots, Monroe County committed \$175,000 of its federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act money for November and December.

ESL agreed to pay the connectivity costs for two months, with the Greater Rochester Health Foundation and the Community Foundation each paying for one month, ensuring coverage through April.

The grant from Farash, the ESL match, and contributions from United Way of Greater Rochester, Avangrid, and individuals will pay for the internet connections from May through August.

“We are sincerely appreciative of all those who have stepped up to support this initiative to fulfill the internet connectivity needs of the City School District’s students,” says Ajamu Kitwana, vice president and director of community impact at ESL Federal Credit Union. “Addressing the issues and challenges our community faces will take ongoing collaboration among multiple entities, and the actions taken to help these students is a perfect example that demonstrates the positive impact that can result.”

“I am incredibly grateful for the immense generosity of our community partners and their efforts to ensure that our scholars have access to technology and connectivity for their learning,” says Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small. “Our partnership and collaboration will make sure that our scholars are successful. A special thank you to the Farash Foundation for its continued support of the district.”

For more information or to arrange interviews, contact one of the following:

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