

## 2017-2018 ConnectHome - Partnering with Schools, 7-18-17

Jason Amirhadji: -- to the meeting invite, but the entire ConnectHome playbook is available on the ConnectHome website, [Connecthome.HUD.gov](http://Connecthome.HUD.gov). And it really provides a step-by-step guide for your communities based off the best practices that we've learned from the work that you're doing.

So we encourage all of you to take a look at it and also, to share it with other communities, because it builds off of your experience and provides a step-by-step for how other communities can be part of narrowing the digital divide. Susan, are you on the line? Okay. While we're waiting for her, I'll just kind of talk through her slides.

So on really the homework gap and then what was the driving force behind ConnectHome and ultimately, behind the partnerships with schools and that is that in this day and age, the Internet is essential for students to succeed in school, we all know that. Seventy percent of teachers now assign homework online.

Many school districts provide grades and feedback for parents and students online and without access to the Internet at home, it's simply impossible for students to be part of that.

So ConnectHome was really designed, initially in the pilot, to ensure that students who live in HUD-assisted housing have access to the Internet at home and aren't subject to the homework gap. So with that in mind, Christina, if you could just advance the slide, how can schools and public housing authorities really work together to make this happen?

That's really the heart of this playbook and today's webinar and it happens in a few different ways. One really critical way, as you'll see from some of our communities, is helping to identify students and make sure that they're [inaudible] and they have that connection from school to home.

So in a lot of cases, our PHAs don't necessarily know every K-12 student who lives in a development and a lot of schools don't necessarily know students who might not have access to the Internet at home. So one essential role that ConnectHome can play is just helping to make that linkage.

Another essential piece of ConnectHome partnering with schools is really leveraging some of the technology resources to make sure that whether it's through libraries or through the school itself, students have access to devices at home.

So you'll see in a few models our communities were able to use some innovative approaches to provide students with devices and Internet access through the schools themselves. And finally, our schools are a great resource for providing education and training and that's an essential piece of the ConnectHome model.

It's one of the three legs of the broadband device and digital literacy trainings tools. So it's really essential for the success of ConnectHome to partner with schools to help make sure that our students have the training that they need to succeed. So I just want to check real quickly, Susan are you able to -- are you back on the line?

So how do you get involved with schools? Well, what we found in looking at some of the best practices from our ConnectHome communities is that there's a lot of overlap. And so it's important to focus on shared goals. And what that means is that schools have an interest in making sure that their students have access to Internet at home.

They may not have the resources to make that happen, but they definitely have a vested interest in their students' success. So looking at ways that your interest can overlap, whether it's making sure that there's devices that the students can access, they can take some home from school, making sure the highlights are their common interest.

Another key is really just the personal and getting to know who the folks are in the school district and the school. You know, in a lot of our communities, it really comes down to personal relationships to make these kinds of partnerships happen. So it's an essential piece of the connecting with school leaders and school district leadership.

And then of course, the parents themselves through parent-teacher association. You know, they want to be involved. They're really excited when they hear about ConnectHome to learn about this opportunity. And so they're a great resource when you're thinking about who to partner with to get in touch with the PTA.

So really, when we talk about the shared goals from schools and PHAs, there's two pieces. There's the student access and the parent access and as I mentioned earlier, a lot of the feedback that used to be through parent-teacher conferences, through one-on-one conversations at school now happens online.

And so whether through student portals where parents connect with grades, they can have conversations [inaudible]. This is a really key component of the relationship between parents and schools and partnering with schools to make sure the parents have those connections through platforms like ConnectHome.

The other piece of it, of course, is student achievement and making sure that students have access to the resources online for their homework, for researching, for reports, but also, that they can use the computers and devices themselves to write, analyze data, really become part of the 21st Century economy and learn the skills that are going to be helpful today.

So who are some of the folks at schools that are important to know? Starting at the school level, the principals. You know, a lot of schools actually have now IT staff who are part of the schools who are school-level, housed at the school who are important to know, district-wide level. There's the CTOs, the CIOs and the superintendents.

And now we're really finding that in a lot of cases, the CIO and the CTO are very -- have close working relationships with the superintendents and with their school boards, because it's no longer just about making sure that there's computers in the classroom, but they're really seen as essential components to making sure that learning happens.

So again, just reaching out to parent-teacher associations. A lot of schools and school districts have these and by establishing relationships, not just with the schools, but with the parents, it can be a great resource for getting the word out to parents about ConnectHome, but then also, maybe tapping into some other resources in the community; you know?

We're getting some folks, I think, talking on the line. Christina, is everything okay with the audio connection?

Christina Payamps-Smith: So I'm trying to mute people that are not presenters. So if you could go ahead and mute yourself if you're not presenting, that would help.

Jason Amirhadji: Okay. And I apologize that Susan's having -- we're not able to have her. This is -- but we do have some of our communities onboard who have some great information for you. So Christina, if you could just advance the slide.

And what we found is that a lot of communities that were really successful in partnering with schools were persistent and they followed up beyond the initial pitch. I mean, I think a lot of schools are interested in ConnectHome and what this can offer, but they're also very busy and they have a lot of things going on.

So what we saw in our communities that have really experienced success is that they followed up and they were persistent and they were able to sort of take it to the next level beyond that initial connection, which you'll see in some of our case studies today. So once again, I think this is really the heart of what ConnectHome is about.

And in the playbook, a lot of the information really builds to this chapter, which is setting up your ConnectHome initiative, bringing partners to the table, making sure that you have all three elements of the three-legged stool; you know? And this is really the end point, which is making sure that students actually have access to the internet, devices and digital literacy training.

So this is a really key component of ConnectHome. With that in mind, we have, again, Denver and Fresno here to present today, but a lot of communities are doing some really great work with these partnerships in a number of different ways, whether it's providing devices, training, even just getting the word out that there's opportunities available.

And so some of the communities here, I think, have really provided a great model for ConnectHome Nation and for other communities to follow in terms of these partnerships. So a lot of you might've seen New York earlier this year announced a partnership to provide 5,000 free wireless hotspots to students through a checkout model.

So the schools and the libraries -- the city essentially owns the devices, but they check them out to students in targeted high-need neighborhoods and they do it through use of a library card.

So this is kind of an innovative approach where the devices can be used year after year to help connect students and they use the library and schools as a platform to help get those devices to students. And the devices themselves, of course, provide Internet access.

So Charlotte, although not an official ConnectHome pilot community, was a community that the department of education sort of identified as having another really innovative model using the school identification number instead of a library card. So we know that for a lot of the students, we want to reduce the barriers.

And then the library card, in some cases, can be an extra barrier, whether it's providing documentation of address or any of the other [inaudible]. So being able to [inaudible] a lot of success in Charlotte's model.

And when a -- this is another great case where they actually worked with the schools who had developed an online portal to then use ConnectHome to help ensure that the parents were able to access that portal.

So they came up with a process to identify students, conduct outreach, make sure that they let the families know that this was a resource that was available and then to actually provide them with devices that had a preinstalled app that parents could use to access the portal.

So it kind of created a start to finish solution where they were able to actually train the students and parents to use this and in the end, increase the adoption of this platform that they had already developed and spent a lot of time and money to develop. So ConnectHome sort of allowed them to actually use this as a platform.

So with that in mind, now we really want to take a deep dive into two of our communities who we're really happy to have today, Denver and Fresno. So if the folks from Denver on the line can just let us know and --

Anthony Frank: Hey, this is a test.

Jason Amirhadji: Hey. So thank you so much and please take the stage.

Anthony Frank: Very good. Hi. My name is Tony Frank and I'm with Denver Housing Authority and I'm going to kick it off with just four slides to give you some background on ConnectHome Denver and then I'm going to turn it over to our Denver public schools partners who will speak to the programs that we've partnered with.

On the first slide, very good, our first year in our pilot has involved five Denver Housing Authority developments that totaled about 1,150 units, mainly family units, and those are -- there's eight contiguous neighborhoods that they're a part of. And those neighborhoods in Denver [inaudible] and Southwest Denver as part of those two areas of our city.

And we -- in our process of selecting the pilot communities, we had a strategic plan that really looked at making sure they were near Denver public schools sites, Denver Public Library branches and Boys & Girls Clubs. So in some cases, they're almost directly across the street, in some cases, they're just a few blocks.

We also were required to identify where all the schools our kids go to within each of the sites. And for example, as part of that, I've heard about the checkout programs.

Here in Denver, we, too, work with Denver Public Library and the initial phase of a checkout program with DPL has involved five branches and four of those branches were selected to be near these developments in our target neighborhoods. So really beginning to align with others, including Denver public schools, which we'll hear more about.

And you'll hear more about something called technology hubs that within these five properties, there are opportunity centers where there are community classes and instruction and we work closely with one key partner being Comcast to turn them into technology hubs on having high-speed WiFi within the building, computers as well as other technology, like videoconference equipment and Smart touchscreens, large screens that people can touch and access the Internet that way.

And another key partner that's been a big help to this too has been PCs for People and we'll hear more about that here soon. Next slide, please.

And with our structure involving a core team, Denver public schools, Denver Public Library, the Denver Office of Economic Development, that's been our core team and we have what we call action teams, which are ISPs, which are device providers, education as well. We came up with this vision and mission for our ConnectHome Denver pilot.

Next slide, please. And so today's webinar is focused on our partnerships with schools and here are just some highlights that take us back over the last two decades. Denver Housing Authority has worked closely with our schools and there have been some natural linkages, includes grants and -- grants that we've been awarded and there's just some -- a list there.

Denver public schools have been a key partner in applying for those grants and ConnectEd, which existed before ConnectHome in many of our schools that we're working closely with have already benefited from ConnectEd and have been just sort of a natural alignment with what ConnectHome is doing and that's been going on for the last two decades.

And next slide we'll get to specifically what ConnectHome has allowed us to focus on. And so the three programs here that I'll turn it over to DPS to speak to, one being a [inaudible] portal and family empowerment teams. Secondly, our educational technology team, which includes Common Sense, which is a national partner of ConnectHome.

And there's 15 neighborhood schools that we have worked -- focused on as target schools that are near our DHA sites. And I'm going to turn it over to the parent portal and Katie Maestas at this time.

Katie Maestas: So hi, everyone. I'm Katie Maestas. I am the outreach and support manager for DPS' academic portal team. The academic portal team, we have a principal, teacher, parent and student portal, but today I'll focus specifically on the parent-student portal and how our relationship with ConnectHome has supported our families in monitoring progress.

Five years ago DPS decided to custom-build an online parent and student portal and this tool is designed to monitor student progress and really serve as the first-stop shop for parents and students to access the various applications -- online learning applications that we have as a district.

The reason we custom-build our tool is to really address the equitable kind of access and look at technical literacy skills with our parents. We have visual graphics on there in case our parents don't understand assessment data. We also have resources to support learning at home.

And so parents have an option to click on resources to learn about homework and standards-based grading and how they can best support their student at home academically. And then we had to ensure that we provided language support in our top-10 languages. DPS has roughly 171 dialects within our district.

And so we looked at our top-10 languages to provide language support within the online URL tool. We also developed a mobile app and our mobile app currently has full translations in those 10 languages. I'll share some adoption data with you.

When we started planning and kind of the grassroots of the ConnectHome initiative, our adoption rate for our URL, the Myportal.DPSk12.org site, we were at a 43.4 percent adoption rate and through partnerships and working directly with schools and specifically, the ConnectHome initiative, over this past year, our adoption rate has moved up to 75.3 percent.

So that's telling you that 75.3 percent of our students have at least one parent in the household with a parent portal account. Our mobile app data we started the year off with 2,400 downloads and ended the school year with 5,800 downloads. So I just wanted to give you a little background on our custom tool that we have built.

And I'll move onto our [inaudible] department team. And so through ConnectHome, we brought in our [inaudible] community and family engagement office and it's a subgroup of our larger community engagement office. And this team specifically works directly with schools to train parents on all kinds of things.

So we took two of their sessions, engaging with your child, and this is taking not just the technology of the ConnectHome, but really to a larger need that we saw in our school communities. So each session focused on social/emotional development, like EC-12 and then we added in technology.

So we looked at really leveraging existing efforts to integrate the technology piece so parents could really connect the dots and find value in that. Overall, our collaborative efforts, just little simple wins that we hit, we added our parent portal and student portal logos to all the PCs that were distributed by --

Anthony Frank: Denver Housing Authority [inaudible].

Katie Maestas: -- Denver Housing Authority. We did locate parent portal kiosks in all of the housing authority opportunity centers.

We targeted schools within our high-need areas that have low adoption rates for the parent and student portal and then we also leveraged Denver Housing Authority's property newsletters and their digital inclusion guides to include information about the parent portal and the value of using it as a tool. I am going to pass over -- that was really quick.

So hopefully we have questions at the end, but I'm going to pass over to my colleague, Brian Dino from our educational technology and library services department.

Brian Dino: Hi. Good afternoon. So I'm Brian Dino and I work a lot with schools on Internet safety and with families on managing family media. And it was mentioned earlier in the webinar that there's a lot of overlap between the ConnectHome and schools.

And so when Tony came to us and said, we're going to provide Internet to our families, we give them Internet, but now we can contact them. So what we do is we provide over 30 free research libraries and academic resources for all the families in Denver public schools and this includes a lot of the families in the housing development here in Denver.

So we give them access and now we give them, say, all of the curriculum. In fact, this fall all of the high school literature will be available digitally. So our families in these developments don't need to spend money on textbooks, it will be all available for them digitally. Almost all of our middle school language arts curriculum will be available online free for kids to read.

And we're approaching that almost 100 percent with our elementary school and we're trying to provide it in as many languages as possible. So that's directly linked on the DPS parent portal that Katie just referenced.

Another thing that we work with in families and also the development is, again, once you have the Internet at home, it's a good thing, but as we know, the Internet can be a free-for-all, especially for parents with limited resources, what is appropriate for kids to access on the Internet. So we do a lot of workshops on what we call managing family media.

That's where we introduce the Common Sense website. So if you're not doing that in your local development, I suggest you look at the Commonsensemedia.org site. They rate over 28,000 pieces of media. Anything a kid or family wants to watch on screen, they have reviewed it. So if you're educating families --

Again, if a new -- a nine-year-old gets the Internet at home, they will probably maybe explore social media. So is Snapchat -- is Facebook appropriate for a nine-year-old? Well, if you're not sure, you might want to introduce the Common Sense media ratings to give you a nice objective view of that content.

So again, it's the nation's largest database. We partner with them in Denver. They're a nonprofit, which is nice. So they have nothing to sell. As soon as you bring the Internet into any home, you're going to be faced with ads. And so the Common Sense media site is a great part of our training. We also do a lot of student programs.

In fact, we go over next week with the Boys & Girls Club down at the Johnson Center. They have a summer program on using technology. And so we do a full hour on how to be a good, what's called, digital citizen. So those are some of the elements of our work here in Denver.

I would just say, I think it was echoed earlier, just trying to engage parents is always challenging, but you have to do it through the schools and that's what we discovered with this partnership. Parents, in their limited time, they do make time for their schools, but you have to go through the school.

And we're starting to do a lot more parent copies, because parents -- sometimes at drop-off they're available. Parents at night are pretty busy. So the parent copies have been successful and of course, just building relationships with folks at the school level. That's certainly key. Thank you.

Mary Grace Longoria: Hi. My name is Mary Grace Longoria. I'm the family and community engagement liaison for Goldrick Elementary. And we were really excited to have partnered this last year with ConnectHome to ensure our families have the equipment and knowledge needed to be able to access educational opportunities through tech; right?

And so we were really excited to pilot this partnership. A little bit about Goldrick first, we're a neighborhood school with about 513 students, EC-5th, and 97 percent of our students are Latino -- identify as Latino or Latina and qualify for free or reduced lunch as well. As so our community needs are going to inherently be different than many other communities.

And so being able to custom-build this pilot program with ConnectHome and HUD was absolutely necessary and definitely a major reason for success.

We decided to partner directly with one point-person at the school, which naturally was our family liaison, specifically, because the family liaison we know is -- they're both connected to our parent-teacher organization, our parent leadership team and the school community in general.

So whenever challenges need to be mitigated or we need some partnership creativity, working with the community is always the best way to go. And so we needed that going into this partnership. Some of the activities and events that we held throughout the year that really led to an increase in that use of tech was we --

At the beginning of the year, we had a large distribution of computers with PCs for People, that was mentioned earlier as a community partner. We were able to serve over 125 families and the reason for that success of so many families, honestly, is we partnered with the distribution with our fall literacy night.

And so our fall literacy night tends to get a lot of attendance as well. So we figured we can tackle both at the same time. We're going to be reaching parents -- we're going to be reaching even more parents.

And so then we also had a Comcast Cares Day event both at Goldrick and at another Denver Housing Authority opportunity center where we -- where ConnectHome was able to share the Internet Essentials classes with students. We also had another movie night at the end of the year for students to be able to learn about ConnectHome Internet Essentials.

And throughout the year, finally, we had a partnership with the University of Denver's Bridge Project collaboration where, with our little activity bus that we have at Goldrick, we were able to bus about -- over 100 kids to the Westwood technology hub at the Westwood DHA to support robotics club and academic work.

So we did a lot of great stuff this year and really excited to continue the partnership with ConnectHome. And I'll turn it back to Tony.

Anthony Frank: Great. Thank you. Thanks, everybody, from Denver public schools. The last slide has our contact information if you want to get ahold of us. A couple key takeaways that I've really heard today is that having the connectivity is not enough, it's really a tool to point to other things. That was heard from Brian and Katie.

You know, connecting to online resources, now curriculum, connecting to how to engage with your child, seeing how their academic success is going. And then Mary Grace pointed out look at some other school events that you can be a part of, like a literacy night or a parent copy [inaudible] part of the PTA.

And I think partnering ConnectHome information with that is very valuable. So I will leave it with that and look forward to any additional questions at the end of the webinar.

Jason Amirhadji: Thank you so much, everyone. That was a great presentation. And for folks joining us, if you don't already have your chat box open, on the bottom of your screen, you should see a chat box that you can use to ask questions. We'll have a Q&A at the end of the webinar and really encourage you to reach out to them.

We sincerely appreciate Denver and everyone for being on the call and for lending your time and really sharing some of your great success with us. So thank you. And we're really also excited now to have folks from Fresno presenting their partnership model.

So without further ado, Bobby, are you on the line?

Robert Coulter: Yeah. I'm here.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you so much. It's yours.

Robert Coulter: Great. So at first, I was definitely a little intimidated having to follow Denver and all the great things that they're doing and especially seeing the roster that they had.

But at the same time, I'm -- I think it's good to show any communities that might be on the smaller side that don't have quite as many resources, that there's still a way to participate without having such a presence or such a large team. So we're lucky in Fresno as far as we have a great relationship with our local school district and they're the fifth-largest in California.

And they are very data focused. So one thing that as I'm sure we're all hearing every day is day-to-day data and how we use that to track success. So some of the things that we've done that have really turned out to be really helpful is we set up a MOU, a Memo of Understanding with a few of the local school districts to just kind of set the framework to connect our data to theirs.

So one thing we did was create an identifier in our information. We used Yardi property management software to identify what school district the kids belong to and in their student information system, we've created a link that says this is a Fresno housing kid, so that anything, as these data requests come in and being able to measure things like attendance, graduation rate, reading level or really anything that we want, now connecting the two data systems makes that possible.

And being able to filter that by location gives us the ability to really pinpoint what the needs are at each site and adapt our curriculum to meet those needs. Next slide, please. So one of the great ideas that are like from Denver that we're also doing is providing some familiarity when kids go from the school to their house.

And then most importantly, interacting with their parents, we've also added shortcuts to parent portals or their Office 365 account, their Google document account to our computer labs or any computers that we distribute so that when they start working on homework or any kind of work at school, they can transition to their home computer without having to memorize any URLs or any links, that everything looks and feels the same.

Because ultimately, what we're trying to create is a sense of device autonomy by utilizing some of the Cloud technology so that they're not as reliant on having their, quote-unquote, "computer" with them at all times, that they know they can access things like medical records or for the parents, their resumes or any important document anywhere they are.

Even borrowing a friend's computer or a friend's phone kind of gives them access no matter where they are. And so transportation issues aren't as big of an issue. Next slide, please. Another thing that -- you know, just echoing what Denver said is the recruitment part. Using just the resources that the housing authority wasn't getting the results we wanted.

And so having the parent -- you know, plugging into the PTA, having conversations with leadership at the schools about the extracurricular activities that they were doing and continuing those with our programming at the home was really fruitful as far as attendance and overall engagement and continued engagement.

We have one program where we teach a robotics class and we continued on the robotics competition and did recruitment at one of the robotics competitions at the school and not only did we get a full turnout, but we also had students that wanted to teach and be student aids for our robotics class; you know?

So that alone creates kind of the ripple effect and it's going to continue even when they're at their own home. I think throughout this entire process, Fresno being kind of one of the smaller ConnectHome communities, has taught us to really be innovative and creative and really lean on community partners as much as possible so that we're not duplicating efforts.

You know, if there's a great program at the school, kind of reaching out and asking how we can help and using our motto at the housing authority, which is stay in our lane and helping with the resident portion, but not necessarily trying to take over something that the school districts are already doing or any other local partner's already doing and doing well, but just figuring out how we can supplement that or help in any way we can.

So that's all I had. I was going to turn it back over to you, but thank you.

Jason Amirhadji: Thank you so much, Bobby and really appreciate your perspective and the great work happening in Fresno. And again, encourage everyone to use the chat box. We'll have a Q&A in just a minute to follow up with everyone who's presented today.

So I just kind of wanted to build off of what everyone was talking about today to say that there are a lot of different approaches to consider, it's not a one-size-fits-all model. You know, some of the success we've seen in communities comes from partnering with libraries, afterschool programs, really finding out where is it that you can best fit in in your community.

And we hope that this has provided a few models for that. The playbook has a lot of information about approaches that you can take. And as we look to bring on the next cohort of ConnectHome Nation communities, we'll be looking at the great work that you all are doing to help provide a model for their success.

So with that in mind, I think we'll open it up to questions and if we still have all the presenters on the line, I wanted to check and see if Susan -- if we were able to get Susan back in with us. Susan, are you able to get through? Well, if you have any questions, hopefully we'll be able to get Susan in to join us.

So for folks who are on the webinar, there's a square chat bubble that you can click on that'll bring up the chat with all and we'll have folks available for a Q&A. So while we're waiting for a few questions to come in, I'll actually kick it off with a question for Fresno, which is that sort of where did you, when you were first getting started, kind of look to as a model for your approach?

Robert Coulter: That's a great question. Really, it was the initial convening of all the local stakeholders. I think we had close to 25 and just trying to see how we can expand on what they're already doing. But one of the greatest parts of ConnectHome is the connection through the other communities.

So as soon as we started getting our programs rolling, we reached out to other communities within ConnectHome and asked what they're doing and asked our local representatives from, say, Comcast or someone else, here's what Denver's doing, how do we do that here?

So it was really leaning on local community members through that initial convening and then also, the rest -- the other ConnectHome communities.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you. And it sounds like you were able to use Denver as a model. For folks who are on the line from Denver, how were you able to sort of leverage your experience to serve in the mentor role with Fresno and other communities?

Anthony Frank: We -- I'll [inaudible] of our core team has been a critical piece to how we've grown. And having them apart of a monthly check-in meeting or something and advising us on where technology is being used and what [inaudible] technology tools they've had.

We've been [inaudible] to call quick wins that we could quickly align with the ed tech team, the parent portal team and then take some of that knowledge into the local schools that we're working with. In turn, we'd love to connected with Fresno more down the road.

We have linked up to other cities that are around Denver between Salt City and some others that we've shared what we've been doing and would look to more of more mentor opportunities as well.

Katie Maestas: And I'll speak too. This is Katie. I mean, we had a lot of challenges. So like we presented well and we definitely have hit some bumps along the road and we initially tried to host classes at the opportunity centers and came to realize like the turnout just wasn't really high.

And so in kind of debriefing and lessons learning and really trying to process map, how we can increase attendance and really connect our families was then when we were like we have to go to schools. It's like we have to leverage schools within the community and around the housing developments.

Even if kids -- we didn't know if like the kids all lived there. So it was really expanding this opportunity regardless of where the kids lived to the entire school, because we have a massive choice system in Denver. And so we didn't want to only just target DHA residents specifically, but the community in which the housing developments were surrounded by.

And so that's kind of some lessons learned along the way and then looking at the school to say, where does this fit in with existing initiatives and goals that you have at the school level. So it's

like looking at higher district kind of initiatives and goals and then really taking it down to the community level to say, goals are --

You know, you guys want to increase your attendance rate and you want to increase K-3 literacy scores. And so how does the ConnectHome initiative really tie into what you're already doing and how can we leverage that to be one kind of collaborative partner and meet the needs of all the levels within that goal.

Anthony Frank: And let me just add really quick that what's important is the school to be the driver frequently and Denver Housing Authority can be the host. And as we've developed these technology hubs, we now have the technology and WiFi network to allow things to happen, but in many cases --

And we have many of our DHA residents right there, but having the school as a driver to promote the program, make it kind of a school-sponsored event that then takes place at Denver Housing Authority site is another way to look at it so that -- we are looking for more opportunities to have the schools be the host.

But we're also learning in which the schools can look at our technology hub as a resource, but we're not the one that necessarily initiated it.

Like in the case of the movie night, the family liaison at Goldrick really did all the promotion and figured out who goes to Goldrick that lives in a Denver Housing Authority site and we did some promotion to those more targeted individuals. And they felt like more interested in it, because the school was behind it.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you so much. That was extremely helpful and I think provided a lot of rich information. So building off of some of the things that you all were just talking about, you mentioned some of the challenges. What were some of the sort of roadblocks that you initially encountered and how did you work through that?

I know Fresno also mentioned, Bobby, that they had some initial challenges too. So I'd be curious to know how you all worked through some of those.

Robert Coulter: Yeah. I mean, definitely, there's been some challenges. One, for instance, was we had a grant through the public utility commission to pay for an infrastructure upgrade, to basically turn about 17 of our properties into WiFi-enabled properties just like a hotel.

We did all the construction, set everything up and then the ISP that was signed up cut all of our contracts, because they felt like we were violating an internal procedure. And so effectively, we had 12 sites that had all of the equipment, spent all this money and had no Internet.

So challenges like that really taught us to fail small and to try pilots at each property individually and small properties just to see what would work, but also, to plug into your local and if possible, your national ISP leadership to make sure that the ideas that you have or -- because a lot of this is

really new ground, that any idea that you have isn't going against the grain of where their industry is.

So the lessons learned that were taken away from this are mostly around -- you know, fairly small, but find a partner in this that's going to be creative with you and is kind of looking to an understanding of what the goal is here and that it's not always to provide a way to market great Internet. Sometimes we have to find a way to make it free for people.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you.

Anthony Frank: Hi. Sorry, Tony again. One challenge that we found was that you may distribute computers to many families and -- but you haven't necessarily given them the information as to how to use it most effectively for our academic purposes. And so a lot of computers out there with Internet hotspots get a lot of questions come to us on -- after that event takes place.

Where we're learning, if you can try to address it as we work with some other schools, is that prior to receiving the computer, we could have the ed tech team or the parent portal team a part of kind of an overview of here's what's on your computer and here's how to use it and that might even help with more effective use that follows the event.

Katie Maestas: Yeah. And then another challenge -- this is Katie again. Another challenge was really our initially strategy was to basically offer schools like a huge menu of services.

So they could have ConnectHome marketing material, they could have actually a DHA representative come to a carnival event there to help kind of market and inform families and then we tied in the classes. And so what we realize is like we created a Google, essentially, form to provide schools with like a menu of services.

So I think it's important to know that even if you have -- you know, we have Goldrick in Southwest Denver and then we have a school several blocks down the street and to know that even though they're in the same community, they have different needs. And so I think us giving the school and finally realizing how to give the school the autonomy to really choose.

Like we're working with Castro and they actually only wanted marketing material at the end of the school year and us to speak at a parent event and then this upcoming year they'll be ready to implement some classes. And so I think it's just really important knowing that even the school that's within our community, they're all very different.

And so allowing a school that autonomy to kind of pick from a menu of services like with options that they have, that way you could really customize the ConnectHome partnership plan specific to their school community.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you. And we have a question on the line and I also just want to check and see if Susan was able to reconnect to join us. So the question is how did you all identify the needs of each school regarding digital literacy? So I guess, the needs assessment piece and then also, how did you work with schools to do that?

Anthony Frank: Hi. This is Tony in Denver. One thought I have is where Katie had mentioned [inaudible] data in our portal that we have [inaudible] option [inaudible].

Katie Maestas: Yeah. So we looked -- so we pull adoption rates weekly for the parent portal [inaudible]. And so we identified schools based on adoption rate. Again, it was an assumption, but typically, the lower adoption rates were -- are Title I schools that we know had limited access in literacy skills.

And so instead of singling out specific, I guess, needs we decided that we would just target our lower adoption schools assuming that those schools needed more support in the area of technology. So that was a way that we identified and then we plotted them kind of on the map as -- within relation to our piloted housing development.

Anthony Frank: And I'll add, with our partner pieces for people, when we do a distribution like at Goldrick, there is kind of a subtle survey that's on there that asks, do you currently have Internet in your home, do you have other computer devices, is your computer working or is it broken?

So you get a sense in that distribution event of what the needs are. And in many cases, they don't need Internet, they just need a working computer device.

Katie Maestas: And then along with -- every year DPS does a parent and student satisfaction survey. And so a couple years ago we added a question about access and Internet use. And so we looked at that data prior to kind of in our strategy planning for the ConnectHome, how we're going to target areas.

So we also looked at -- that's also self-reported so we could see how many -- or how many surveys were turned in for that school and kind of do some data on so that many were turned in, we're missing -- you know, 500 families didn't turn one in and then it was all self-report.

So again, there is some skew in the data, but we really use that to identify, also, our schools based on that data.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Well, thank you so much. And again, we really just appreciate all of the great insights and your time and sharing all this with us today. I think we might have, actually, Susan now on the line with us. Susan, are you here?

Susan Bearden: Hi. Can you hear me now?

Jason Amirhadji: Hey, Susan. Yes. Thank you. Sorry for the technical issues. So I want to give you a chance just to sort of provide some concluding remarks for everyone from your experience at the department of education. And thank you all, again, for just attending and being part of this. Really, you're helping to make this success happen across the country. So thank you.

And Susan, if you want to provide some remarks and then folks, just to let them know that the slides will be provided after the presentation and there'll be contact information for everyone who is on the webinar today.

Susan Bearden: First of all, I'd like to thank all of our presenters today. I thoroughly enjoyed listening to everybody and I hope that the -- what we heard today will be helpful to other PHAs and school communities. One thing I have learned is that the solution to closing the digital divide or helping address the homework gap, it is not a school community --

It is not a school problem, it is not a public housing problem, it is truly a community problem and I think that the best way for us to find solutions -- because everybody community is different, every community is going to have different challenges with regard to connectivity, with regard to digital literacy, with regard to the culture of a particular community and school.

I think that the only way we're going to solve these issues is by working together. And I want to thank the participants today for doing such a wonderful job in modeling the kind of successful community partnerships and I hope that these are something that we can expand, because this -- programs like this can really make a difference in the academic lives of kids.

So thank you all for attending the webinar today and thank you to our presenters.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you so much, Susan and we look forward to having everyone on future webinars about the playbook. So please be on the lookout for those invites and join us for those. So thank you so much, everyone, and have a great day.

(END)