



Online Learning Initiative Provides Internet Access to Students During COVID-19

At its peak, the Online Learning Initiative program procured over 100,000 mobile hotspots and wired internet service for qualifying student households in school districts and institutions of higher learning statewide during COVID-19 to help with distance learning.

The \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security or “CARES Act” was passed by Congress to help provide relief to the United States economy from the COVID-19 pandemic. The South Carolina General Assembly passed Act 142 authorizing the ORS to expend up to \$50 million for broadband initiatives related to COVID-19. Included in this \$50 million was funding to procure mobile hotspots and monthly internet service for qualifying student households through December 31, 2020.

Eligibility

Individuals that believed their household was eligible for the program were encouraged to contact their local school. Eligibility requirements for the program included households with an annual income of 250 percent or less of federal poverty guidelines, an individual in the household attends a school, the household did not have existing internet service, and the internet service was necessary as a result of the public health emergency caused by COVID-19. Another requirement was that the cost for mobile hotspots and related service was not provided for in a school’s budget as it existed on March 27, 2020. Priority was given to households in counties that contain a school district that was defined by the South Carolina Department of Education as having a poverty rate greater than or equal to 86 percent.

Participating Schools

Public K-12: 82

Private K-12: 4

Charter: 3

Higher Ed Institutions: 26

Total: 115

Working with Schools

Schools – public school districts as well as private schools, special schools, charter schools, private colleges, universities, and technical colleges – were required to complete a Memorandum of Understanding and submit an order form to the ORS. Schools provided the ORS addresses of eligible households to help determine the best available option. Depending on the location, wired internet service was made available, and the ORS received quotes from multiple wired providers offering competitive pricing.



AT A GLANCE

Using CARES Act funding, the ORS administered the Online Learning Initiative, providing qualifying student households with internet access to help with distance learning during COVID-19.

Allocation: \$20,000,000

Total Funds Expended: \$12,265,071

Funds Transferred to SCDOE: \$8,200,000

Total Hotspots/Wired Services Distributed: 92,542

Hotspots/Wired Services

Verizon: 59,701

AT&T: 24,476

T-Mobile: 1,377

Service Only: 390

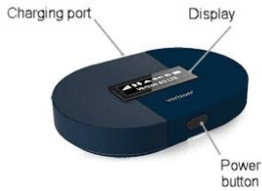
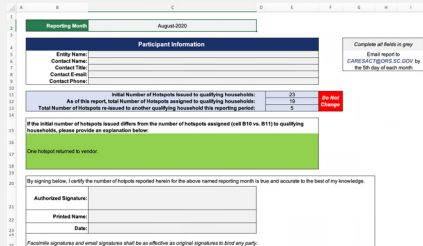
Wired: 6,598

Total: 92,542

Distribution of Devices

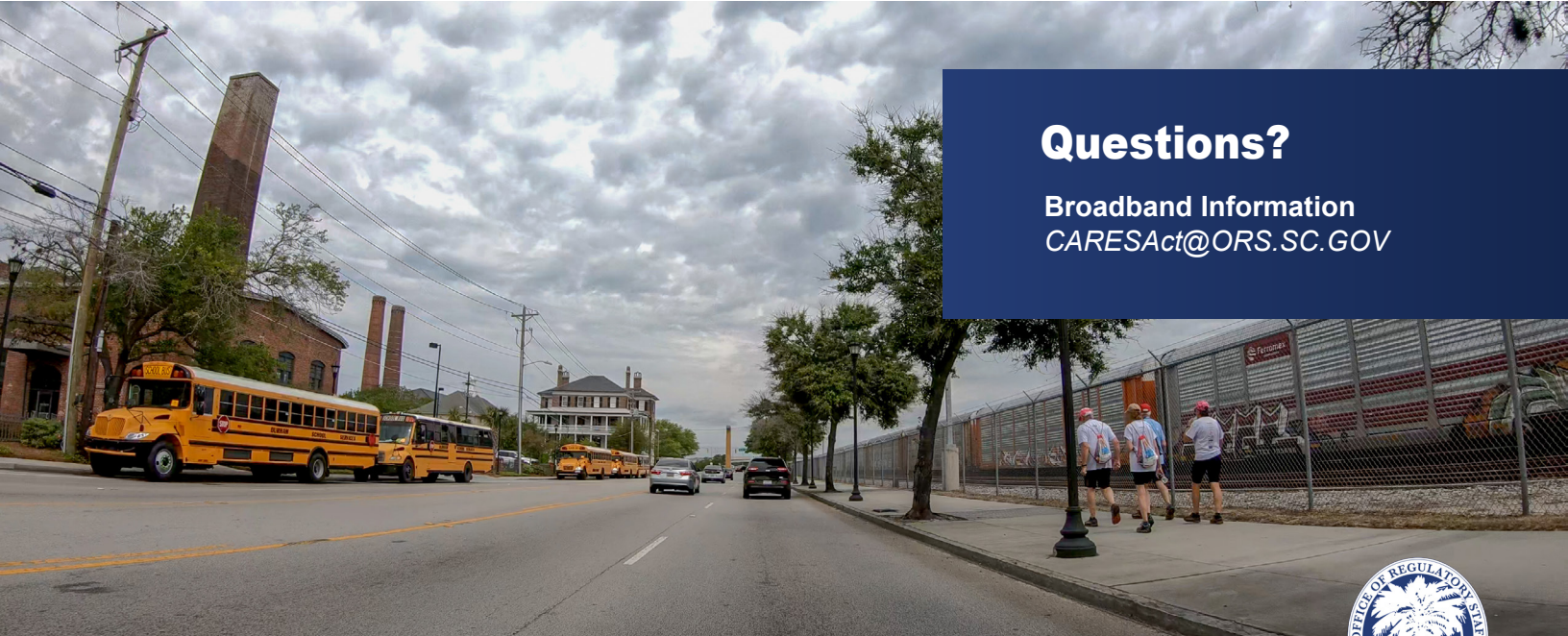
The ORS collaborated with more than 115 schools across the state to distribute devices and provide broadband access to eligible households. Schools reported monthly on the status of mobile hotspots and monthly internet service. At its peak, the Online Learning Initiative program procured over 100,000 mobile hotspots and wired internet service for qualifying student households in school districts and institutions of higher learning statewide during COVID-19 to help with distance learning. After returns, the number of mobile hotspots and wired internet service distributed settled to 92,542.

The ORS created communications materials including press releases, a program overview, and a video tutorial on how to complete monthly reporting.



The ORS, in coordination with the South Carolina Department of Education and South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, also worked to fill orders and help troubleshoot service issues with schools and households while administering the program.

The Online Learning Initiative program transferred to the SC Department of Education on December 31, 2020 along with \$8.2 million to provide service through June 2021.



Questions?

Broadband Information
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More information can be found at ORS.SC.GOV/broadband

