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Technology Bond FAQ

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Technology Infrastructure Bond Will Support Teachers, Students

What is the Technology Bond?

In May, the 2012 session of the General Assembly included a Certificate of Participation for \$20 million in the Fiscal Year 2013 enacted capital budget, which will expand wireless access to classrooms across Rhode Island over the next two years. In June, Governor Lincoln D. Chafee signed the budget into law, putting this Technology Bond into action.

What is the goal of the Technology Bond?

The goal of this project is to ensure that within each classroom, all students will have the same access to the tools and resources to prepare them for learning in the 21st century. With wireless technology in every classroom, every Rhode Island student will have access to opportunities for digital learning, including virtual classrooms, online instruction and communication, interactive instruction, instructional gaming, blended learning, on-line assessments (such as the PARCC assessment that Rhode Island will implement statewide in 2014), and many other facets of 21st-century learning that will prepare our students for success in the global economy.

Why do we need the Technology Bond?

Last year, the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) conducted a preliminary survey of access to technology in schools across the state. Our findings were:

- only 23.8 percent of classrooms have 100-percent wireless access;
- although most classrooms have wired access to the Internet, this access is usually limited to one computer – the teacher's; and
- student access to computers through labs and laptops covers less than 7 percent of classrooms at any given time.

In short, Rhode Island schools and classrooms do not yet have the infrastructure to allow students and teachers to access the Internet and other on-line resources that they will need to advance teaching and learning.

Will all communities benefit from this initiative?

All LEAs will be eligible to receive a portion of the bond proceeds regardless of their current infrastructure condition or their current level of access to technology. RIDE will also work

one on one with those districts (Smithfield, Lincoln, and North Providence) that already had school committee approved plans for this work and work was scheduled or underway when the budget was enacted to ensure that they are in alignment with specific requirements they will need to qualify for and substantiate requests for reimbursement. *Effective immediately, no additional LEAs initiating this work will be reimbursed for wireless services unless the services are performed by vendors identified through RIDE's RFP process, all work meets the criteria of this initiative, and a post implementation survey verifies the work and cost.*

My district has already paid for and completed implementation of a wireless solution in our classrooms. Will we be reimbursed for the cost?

LEAs that have previously invested in wireless access prior to July 1, 2012 for their classrooms have an opportunity to upgrade existing infrastructure. A review of the solution and a site survey will be required to ensure that the current solution meets our baseline requirements. In the case that it does not, LEAs will be eligible for funding to bring their infrastructure up to the baseline. It should be noted that this bond covers infrastructure only (access points, routers, switches, etc.), not devices and computers for the end users.

How will RIDE determine the criteria for eligible expenses and project timelines?

RIDE has established an advisory workgroup that includes representatives from LEAs and RIDE to guide the process. Based on feedback from the workgroup, RIDE will put in place criteria will to ensure equity across all LEAs. The workgroup will:

- recommend a list of eligible services for reimbursement;
- participate in the RFP technical-review committee for the selection of the state-approved vendors that will provide services to LEAs; and
- assist in developing the work plan, which will include the sequencing of services to LEAs.

An RFP for an oversight vendor to manage the project and a list of baseline requirements for wireless service that all LEAs must meet is undergoing final review at this time. The first RFP for oversight/management services is expected to be finalized early next week for release. Drafting of the RFP for site surveys, cabling, equipment purchase, and the installation of the wireless solution is underway and is expected to be finalized for release within the next one to two weeks.

Who is on the RIDE advisory workgroup?

The workgroup is comprised of Peter Santos (Providence), Eric Butash (North Smithfield/RISTE), Carlos Zambrano (East Greenwich), Mike DeMatteo (RIMA-BV/Charter), Al Notarianni (Tiverton), and RIDE staff Cynthia Brown, Carolyn Dias, Jonathan Gabriel, and Karen Cooper.

How will RIDE determine funding to LEAs?

It is important to note that the funding levels previously provided were only estimates and funding will be based on the actual costs of the site review, specifications and implementation. RIDE will evaluate every LEA, using a site survey that a state-approved vendor will conduct. The vendor will be responsible for evaluating items such as electrical capacity in classrooms, signal integrity, interference, security, power sources, and existing network infrastructure. Ultimately, the results of this survey will map out a plan that will define how to prepare the infrastructure in each school for wireless access.

Based on the site survey, a vendor from the approved list will install wireless-access points for each classroom as well as the necessary switches, wiring, and network controllers to bring wireless access to every school and every classroom in Rhode Island. RIDE will be monitoring the costs closely to assure there is adequate funding for all LEAs.

How do we access services?

RIDE will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) in the coming weeks for qualified vendors to conduct the site surveys, develop specifications, purchase equipment, and install the wireless infrastructure. Selected vendors will be placed on a Master Price Agreement. LEAs will select from this list of approved vendors. RIDE has targeted December as the date on which LEAs can begin accessing services from the MPA.

What should I do in the event that a Vendor contacts me directly to offer services related to the Technology Bond?

Please direct the Vendor to the State Purchasing website and encourage them to register so that they can submit their response when the RFP is released. Only Vendors on the RIDE MPA (Master Price Agreement) will be considered qualified vendors for this project.

Who will pay the vendor for the site review and installation?

RIDE will pay the vendor directly for the site reviews and for the plans that scope out the specifications for the school buildings. The RFP will require this service to be priced separately from installation services. LEAs will receive grants based on the building specifications and site survey estimate. (This strategy for the disbursement of funds may change based on the vendor responses to the RFP.)

It is important to note that this \$20-million investment can also leverage federal funds from the E-Rate program. Based on the number of economically disadvantaged enrolled students (eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), schools are eligible to receive up to 90 percent in matching federal funds for investments in technology. Most schools in Central Falls and Providence would be eligible for these matching funds; many schools in Pawtucket and Woonsocket would be eligible as well. Bond proceeds will be provided for these schools only to support the state match in order to leverage the federal E-Rate funds.

Who will make sure that this project succeeds?

With input from the Budget Office, the Rhode Island School Superintendents Association, the Rhode Island Society of Technology Educators, and the oversight vendor, RIDE will manage this project. RIDE will continue to work closely with all LEAs to assess the needs of each school, to invest these funds wisely, and to provide students and teachers with the resources and support they need to make our schools America's best. RIDE will be accountable to the State Budget Office and the General Assembly for effective oversight of these funds.

RIDE understands the urgency for the implementation of this initiative and will continue to keep you updated on the process. If you have any questions concerning this, please contact Cynthia Brown at cynthia.brown@ride.ri.gov or 222-4257.

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