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Technology

Comcast doubles speeds for low-income Internet Essentials program in wake of criticism



RECOMMENDED

A Comcast Internet Essentials giveaway event held at Strawberry Mansion High School Giveaway on Friday, August 31, 2020 in Philadelphia. The company announced Tuesday it's doubling download speeds for its Internet Essentials customers. (Joy Asico/Comcast)

JOY ASICO

By Michelle Caffrey
– Reporter,

COMPANIES

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Comcast Corp.

Philadelphia, PA
Broadcast Media

\$108.9B **190K**
Revenue Employees

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Philadelphia Youth Network ...

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Philadelphia
Business Journal

Feb 2, 2021

Updated Feb 2,
2021, 11:23am EST

Comcast is doubling the download speeds for its Internet Essentials low-income broadband program from 25 megabits per second to 50 megabits per second after the Philadelphia-based company faced criticism from students and legislators.

The upgrade, which also

includes an increase in upload speed to 5 Mbps, was announced alongside two other updates to Comcast's community-focused initiatives Tuesday. The company said it's also sped up its goal to launch more than 1,000 Lift Zones, community centers where students can use high-speed internet for virtual learning,

by more than a year and aims to have them running by the end of 2021.

The media giant also said it's invested \$3.5 million in community partners working to advance social justice and equality, including the Philadelphia Youth Network in its home city, as part of \$40 million in cash contributions to education and equity-focused

groups in the
past year.

“We’ve been on
a mission to
address digital
inequities in
under-
resourced
communities
through
Internet
Essentials for a
decade and
there’s never
been a greater
need than now,”
said [Dave](#)
[Watson](#), CEO of
Comcast’s
Cable division,
in a statement.
“As a media and
technology
company, we

have a unique
opportunity to
provide
meaningful
connection to
the
communities
we serve -
whether that's
through access
to the internet,
programs to
support
creativity and
digital literacy
and skills
training for
young people,
or workforce
development
opportunities
for adults.”

Comcast
initially raised

the Internet
Essentials
speed from 15
Mbps to 25
Mbps, the
lowest speed
that still meets
the Federal
Communication
Commission's
definition of
broadband, at
the start of the
pandemic. Low-
income
customers who
are eligible for
the program,
which includes
many
individuals and
families who
qualify for
public

assistance, pay \$9.95 a month for the service and have access to discounted computers and digital literacy programs. Since it was launched in 2011, more than 8 million people have been connected to the internet through the program.

As Covid-19 spread last spring, advocates in cities including Baltimore and Philadelphia called on

Comcast to do
more to help
students
struggling to
learn virtually,
including by
increasing
Internet
Essentials
speeds and
opening up its
residential Wi-
Fi network to
support free
public access.
Families
reported that
they still
struggled to get
everyone
connected to
their virtual
classes and
meetings, and

their children's
educations
were suffering.
Comcast has
consistently
maintained that
the Internet
Essentials
speeds are up to
par and able to
support
multiple video
calls at once,
and has
continued to
extend its offer
of two free

months of
service for new
Internet
Essentials is not
helping
schoolchildren
with virtual
learning. This is

why we ask
@comcast to
open residential
hotspots and stop
the charade
around IE being a
substitute for
digital equity.
<https://t.co/vAiRALZyhi>

– Helen Gym
(@HelenGymPHL)
January 12, 2021

City council members
in Baltimore and
Philadelphia, as well as
advocates from Detroit,
Louisiana and
Colorado, have worked
to draw attention to the
issue. They joined
together in a press
conference with a
Baltimore-based

student group this fall to push both Comcast and the FCC to expand access to high-speed Wi-Fi access, Technically Baltimore reported at the time. Philadelphia Councilmember Helen Gym, one of the loudest critics of Comcast's efforts in the city, also participated in the press conference. The Baltimore student group, Students Organizing a Multicultural and Open Society (SOMOS), also met virtually with Comcast representatives to share their concerns over falling behind in school

due to weak Wi-Fi connections, [BuzzFeed](#) reported last week.

The BuzzFeed story centered around a [viral Twitter thread](#) posted by a former Comcast employee, who argued 25 Mbps wasn't enough for families to do live Zoom classwork. He said he quit because he was “struggling with the requirements to pitch additional lines of business to struggling individuals in the wake of Covid at any cost.”

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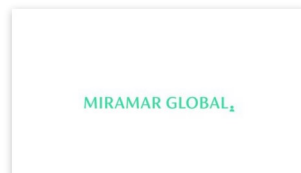


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