

their support.

First, we distributed more than 85,000 Chromebooks to students in need of devices, and then we hunkered down, determined to find a way to put our children and youth on **the best educational path forward.**

Born out of this effort was **PHLConnectED**—a groundbreaking initiative that will provide up to 35,000 Philadelphia families with internet service at no cost to them until at least June of 2022.

PHLConnectED was made possible by the creative thinking, collaboration and significant commitment of time, financial resources and talent of numerous City agencies, the School District, charter school leaders, and other partners.

Comcast Corporation, The Lenfest Foundation, The Neubauer Family Foundation, The Philadelphia School Partnership, The William Penn Foundation, Hess Foundation and the Philadelphia Housing Authority all play a vital role.

Together, we set out to build a program that is easy to access and will work for Philadelphia families who still need high-speed internet in their homes. This is achievable through Comcast's Internet Essentials program, the longest-running broadband adoption initiative in the country, and by providing T-Mobile Wi-Fi hotspots for those experiencing **housing insecurity.**

We are proud to be providing the equipment and speeds needed for our children to be successful in online learning—all for free. But simply providing no-cost internet service is not enough. It will still be a challenge to help some families cross the digital divide. Communities of color, non-English speakers and those in low-income neighborhoods face innumerable barriers that are the result of systemic societal inequities.

PHLConnectED seeks to overcome these internet adoption challenges by providing an equitable digital solution for our students and their families.

Establishing a reliable internet connection requires several steps including getting a router or hotspot, a laptop or tablet and human support to make sure all of the technical elements work the way they should. PHLConnectED provides all of these necessary ingredients for a reliable connection, but we need your help to spread the word.

Last week **we launched 211**, a simple way for families to learn about PHLConnectED and sign up. Just dial 2-1-1 from any phone and press option 1. The team is available 24 hours a day and is ready to walk anyone with a K-12 student through the process to obtain free internet.

It's true—nothing will replace in-person teaching and learning in a classroom. But we are confident that today, as Philadelphia's students start the school year digitally, their futures remain incredibly bright. Our children are poised to learn, grow, and work toward their dreams.

Please help us make this a reality for *all* students. Share the 211 hotline and encourage people to sign up. Support our school children by instilling confidence in them about this new way of learning. And support **our**

Jim Kenney is the mayor of Philadelphia. William R. Hite Jr., Ed.D. is the School District of Philadelphia superintendent.

Header photo courtesy City of Philadelphia / Flickr