

Schools lack bandwidth for classroom technology

By Lyndsey Layton, Washington Post

When a student at Elliston Elementary in rural Montana logs onto her laptop for a remote lesson over the Internet, Tressa Graveley must ration the Web for the rest of her tiny school. The teacher tells other students to shut down their browsers and stop streaming video or there won't be enough bandwidth for the eighth-grader's lesson.

Elliston Elementary is on the wrong side of a new digital divide in this country. The school, decked out with laptops and whiteboards, hoped to harness the power of the Internet to break out of its isolation. But its connection is too slow to allow the 15 students and two teachers to fully use everything the digital world offers – videos, music, graphics, interactive programs.

But it's not just rural school systems that are cut off from the digital world. An estimated 72 percent of public schools – in the countryside, suburbs and cities – lack the broadband speeds necessary to fully access the Internet, according to Education Superhighway, a nonprofit organization that wants to improve digital access in schools.

“Wiring schools has brought the Internet to the principal's office or maybe a teacher's desk,” said Evan Marwell, the chief executive of the group. “That's five million administrators and teachers. But we need to move this technology into the learning process, and that means 55 million students.”

President Obama agrees, and proposed in June that all public schools receive high-speed broadband and wireless Internet service within five years. “In a country where we expect free

WiFi with our coffee, why shouldn't we have it in our schools?" Obama said when he announced the initiative at a school in North Carolina.

The plan, called ConnectED, calls for the Department of Education to train teachers in the best ways to use technology in classroom instruction, an area that many agree is weak.

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