

## Warren County Joins Satellite Internet Pilot To Bolster Remote Learning

By Administrator

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Warren County students will soon be able to access high-speed internet via satellite technology, as the county joins Hyde and Swain counties in a pilot program aimed at improving internet access to support remote learning.

The North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) Broadband Infrastructure Office (BIO) and the Friday Institute at NC State University are leading the CARES Act-funded program, with additional support from the North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE), the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources' State Library, and Hometown Strong. Besides funding, the partners are also assisting the school districts with implementing the "Satellite Internet Technologies for Student Connectivity Pilot," which will allow students to access Space Exploration Technologies Corporation's (SpaceX) Starlink internet service.

"Our students need high-speed internet to succeed not only in these challenging times but into the future," Governor Roy Cooper said. "Innovative programs like this pilot with SpaceX can connect students to high-quality internet service to help with remote learning, and we are excited for it to expand."

Starlink provides high-speed internet service via Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite technology, which BIO has determined could be a viable option to reach residents in remote areas. Through the pilot, school districts will be able to test the feasibility of the service for K-12 students who live in areas with no broadband infrastructure or reliable cellular service.

"Many students in the county are still without high-speed internet service at a time where having that connectivity is especially critical to their success," Delores Pulliam, Warren County Schools Chief Finance Officer, said. "We hope this pilot will be a much-needed lifeline for our K-12 students and their families."

The pilot is funded by \$200,000 in CARES Act Funding from NCDIT and \$64,000 in CARES Act Funding from NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, on behalf of Hometown Strong. This funding will support this initiative in researching, analyzing, and providing recommendations regarding the use of satellite technologies that may help reduce the homework gap as well as improve rural healthcare and further rural economic development.

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The Friday Institute is providing technical assistance in developing and implementing the program.

### Quotes from Partners:

NCBCE is a business-led, education non-profit (501-c3) that operates out of the Office of the Governor:

“School district superintendents kept asking our Remote Learning Work Group for more solutions to reach their disconnected students, educators and families,” Caroline Sullivan, NCBCE Executive Director, said. “We are grateful for the generous support from our member companies that expanded solutions for remote learning and trust continued success will lead to more connectivity.”

### Friday Institute:

“We’re excited to begin testing rural student home internet access with the SpaceX Starlink service. Many students live far from cellular or fiber networks. By using the Starlink service these remote students will soon have equal access to the educational resources of their peers who live in more densely populated areas,” Ray Zeisz, Friday Institute Technology Infrastructure Lab Director, said. “We will be conducting performance measurements and monitoring service reliability to ensure future state funding for rural broadband expansion includes all technology options that meet the requirements, in the most cost-effective manner.”