

Ohio

Telecommunication Programs | Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants

Connectivity Key to Well-Being and Prosperity in Rural Community



USDA Ohio Rural Development State Director Jonathan McCracken (L) with Jefferson Area Local Schools Superintendent John Montanaro at an event recognizing the school district's \$1 million Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant award. USDA Photo.

On a tranquil spring evening in Ohio's northeastern Ashtabula County, community members filed into the Jefferson High School library for its monthly board of education meeting.

The evening was a celebration as the board recognized "Students of the Month," athletes who qualified for state meets, and its high school band, which received a superior score at an annual competition.

The celebration was punctuated by a proclamation read by Scott Ardary, President of the Jefferson Area Local Schools Board of Education, accepting a \$1 million Distance and Telemedicine (DLT) Grant from USDA Rural Development. Funding will help expand

educational opportunities and provide increased access to telemedicine and tele-behavioral health services for this rural town.

"The Jefferson Board of Education is committed to providing the best education possible for our students and having our district serve our community," said Ardary. "This grant will provide our staff, students, and our region's safety forces and local government access to a set of communication resources that is state-of-the-art."

Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants help rural communities use advanced telecommunications technology for increased connectivity so they can overcome the effects of remoteness and low population density, increasing access to social, educational, and economic opportunities.

Ohio Rural Development State Director Jonathan McCracken presented the award and commended Jefferson Schools superintendent, John Montanaro, and the school district for writing the grant and seeking outside opportunities for funding that will expand its ability to serve the community.

"Receiving a \$1 million grant is a great accomplishment for our school district," said Montanaro. "We know that technology is reshaping our society's personal, educational, and work environments and that the world of work that our students are entering has never been more complex."

Grant funds will purchase equipment to set up six hub and/or end user sites, each able to provide one-on-one or group educational classes and conduct tele-behavioral health or telemedicine services with providers both within and outside the region.

When up and running, the project will deliver real-time educational services to students, helping reduce absenteeism and improve test scores and academic outcomes. It will also increase access to tele-behavioral health for students and access to services like substance abuse counseling for community members who need them.

The district also will make these resources available to more than 600 local first responders, health care workers, teachers, and farmworkers so they can access professional development training, continuing education courses, certification workshops, and conferences.

When operational, the system is expected to provide services to more than 1,600 students and 3,600 community members.

“This grant is recognition of the fact that access to technology and connectivity is key to helping students and our community prosper,” said Montanaro.

Obligation: \$1,000,000

Obligation Date: February 1, 2024

Congressional: U.S. Rep. David Joyce (OH-14); U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown and J.D. Vance

Impact: End user sites and hubs will increase access to educational and telehealth resources for more than 5,200 students, community members and families in rural northeast Ohio.