In districts facing challenging economics, connectivity can power student equity and achievement.

As many educators know, helping students succeed is often a balancing act. On one hand, you're there to inspire learning and open educational doors. On the other? Difficult operational decisions based on unequal and inconsistent access to resources. In Southeast Texas, Beaumont Independent School District (BISD) is using technology to help empower teachers and bridge gaps for students.

With the oil and gas industry serving as the community's primary employer, many jobs are filled by both transient and permanent residents who depend on schools to provide critical services beyond education.

Community spirit runs deep, and BISD sits at the heart, acting as a support network, meeting place, and educational equity champion, all in one. With the help of BISD, even in tough economic times, Beaumont remains a vibrant city with rich cultural traditions and leaders focused on revitalization.[1]

For Toni McPherson, Director of Technology for BISD, connectivity is a powerful way to change lives for the better.
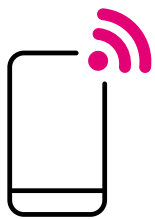
28 schools

16,700 students enrolled

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1 The Examiner

Where schools are safety nets, connectivity deepens support.

McPherson is fiercely focused on her team's role in BISD and the Beaumont community, especially when it comes to digital equity. With more than 77% of students considered economically disadvantaged and 38% at-risk, the team's task is formidable in both scope and scale.[2] Early in her tenure, McPherson set out to make a macro educational impact and provide social-emotional support through technology. The first challenge? Getting every student connected.

Fortunately, McPherson heard about Project 10Million™, a T-Mobile® for Education program that provides free internet high-speed data, free hotspots, and at-cost devices for eligible schools.

Project 10Million in Beaumont

30,000 students connected in three years

14,000 hotspots provided

The partnership with T-Mobile for Education saw BISD through the uncertain early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. With many single-parent and multigenerational homes in Beaumont, connectivity allowed the team to act fast, delivering structured remote learning right away. Readily available hotspots and devices also gave them a chance to deepen support for families. For many people, connectivity is a basic utility that they often take for granted, so it's easy to overlook its critical role in modern life, from paying bills to accessing healthcare. BISD, however, went steps further to ensure it specifically addressed individual student needs as well.

"We always talk about a well-rounded child—the social-emotional experience at school. During COVID, the brick-and-mortar safety net went away. My staff and I deployed services that monitored risk factors ...we became the safety net. Especially for kids in the 'gap,' connectivity provides equity."

- Toni McPherson, Director of Technology for BISD

Making the most of digital resources in key educational moments.

Hotspots in every home ensure access, but true equity requires enhancing the academic experience for students. Technology connects students to teachers and school-provided resources, but when deployed effectively, it also elevates engagement and improves academic outcomes. And that makes connectivity a powerful tool across educational programming.

In partnership with T-Mobile for Education, BISD was able to invest more in devices and experiences—since hotspots and connectivity were already provided—to create opportunities for students to excel.

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Connectivity partnership transforms program possibilities.

Nurturing literacy and love of reading—

Can your students access books online? A Scholastic report notes that frequent readers get more encouragement from role models like family members, principals, teachers, and librarians.[3]

89 **89%** of students agree their favorite books are the ones they choose themselves[4]

Supporting engagement is vital. BISD's MyOn program makes thousands of books available online, along with software that promotes interactive reading.[5] But they're not stopping there. In breaks throughout the school year, McPherson's team promotes the continued use of T-Mobile hotspots and devices in conjunction with reading contests.

Adding a new layer of technology and connectivity allowed BISD to increase engagement and make a real impact. Following various academic and technology-based literacy initiatives, the district has seen an uptick in A- and B-rated elementary campuses.

BISD elementary school rating improvements

+ One letter grade = **Four schools**

+ Two letter grades = **Two schools**

+ Three letter grades = **Two schools**

Supporting STEM curiosity—

Science, technology, engineering, and math literacy are fundamental to student success. From opening career paths to encouraging discovery and critical thinking, STEM programs are essential in the K–12 journey. Connectivity enhances academic programming, particularly in areas where hands-on experience is a must—which has been constrained in recent years by limited access to travel and face-to-face interactions with experts.

The BISD STEM center is exploring new technologies like AR/VR, 3D printing, drones and robots, emerging coding platforms, and more. Between competitions, community nights, and STEM-at-home projects, the program relies on high-speed internet to support robust exploration of STEM concepts.

"Impact classroom" curriculum innovation—

Connectivity and devices alone are transformative. But life-changing educational moments often happen in daily teacher interactions. For school technologists and leaders, extending innovation starts small and grows.

"We know that some of our teachers are doing great things with technology—that kind of inspiration spreads like wildfire."

- Toni McPherson, Director of Technology for BISD

In partnership with T-Mobile for Education, BISD is looking closer at what leaders are calling "impact classrooms"—educational environments shaped by resourceful, creative teachers deploying technology in new ways. Once identified, the joint team works on building out curricula for teachers across BISD to leverage. Not only does the process give educators a chance to develop professionally by learning exciting new technologies and ways of working, but it also gives students more opportunities to engage because it makes learning fun.

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3 Scholastic 4 Ibid. 5 MyOn 6 BISD STEM center

For tech leaders in education, increasing equity starts in the community.

"Public schools in urban areas serve as the foundation of the community… [My advice to other technologists is] get out there. You can be the difference. If you can touch one person's life with a tool or resource, that has a ripple effect."

- Toni McPherson, Director of Technology for BISD

With the challenging economic forces at play in Beaumont, BISD fills a critical role as a safety net—it's one of the only districts in Southeast Texas that provides free meals year-round for all youth ages 1–18.[7] McPherson's team recognizes that in Beaumont, successfully deploying technology for students requires supporting the entire community.

Their ROAR Reading Express community literacy bus was designed to do just that.[8] Chock full of books, foodbank packages, backpack giveaways, and more, the bus goes into housing communities to increase city-wide literacy. McPherson saw an opportunity to add digital literacy to the mix.

Now the bus is also equipped with T-Mobile hotspots and laptops people can use to connect to the internet and interact with the latest technology in a supportive, welcoming environment.

Project 10Million hotspots and laptops have also opened the door for BISD to get parents and families educated and involved. McPherson's team hosts technology nights where staff teach basic skills like Microsoft Office, resume writing, and cybersecurity training.

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7 12NewsNow   8 ROAR Reading Express

Maximizing educational impact through technology.

Beaumont is so much more than the sum of its economic challenges. In a time of disruption, McPherson and her BISD team modernized educational resources and enhanced ecosystem support. The partnership with T-Mobile for Education played an integral role.

"There's a difference with T-Mobile for Education. They're past educators, so their goal is not the sell—it's the successful implementation of your educational goal. My goal is what hotspots help us do: bridge the gap between what's happening in my classrooms and at home."

- Toni McPherson, Director of Technology for BISD

Together, the organizations are addressing the root causes of digital inequity through new and existing programs. In fact, T-Mobile education experts are helping McPherson's team conduct feeder pattern analysis to better serve at-risk students. They're looking closely at new technology use cases and how to extend the impact district-wide. The process is agile and ongoing. As new opportunities and challenges arise, the combined team is ready with the right combination of expertise, technology, and commitment to student success.

T-Mobile for Education is committed to providing reliable connectivity and increasing digital equity for schools, students, and communities. Ready to learn more about how Project 10Million works?

Visit T-Mobile.com/P10M today.

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