

Insider Q&A: T-Mobile pushes internet for virtual school

13 September 2020, by Tali Arbel



These undated photos provided by T-Mobile shows, from left, T-Mobile executives Matt Staneff and Mike Katz. T-Mobile is pushing to offer internet service to schools that are doing online learning with a program aimed at low-income students who don't have access. (T-Mobile via AP)

T-Mobile is pushing to offer internet service to schools that are doing online learning with a program aimed at low-income students who don't have access. In the U.S., millions of students don't have high-speed internet or computers at home—a difficult enough situation when it was just about trying to get homework done, but a much bigger problem when many school districts have moved part or all of the school day online during the coronavirus pandemic.

School districts are spending big to address the crisis. The L.A. Unified School District is investing \$100 million in online learning, including computers and [internet service](#) for kids who don't have them. T-Mobile wants to expand its business that serves large organizations like big companies and schools.

It had already planned to give districts 100

gigabytes of free wireless data per year per [student](#), a commitment the company made while pursuing its acquisition of Sprint. But since that allotment wouldn't last more than a few months if kids streamed [school](#) all day, T-Mobile is adding two paid plans as well: \$12 a month per household for 100GB, or \$15 a month for unlimited data. The carrier says those prices are discounted to reflect the free-data offer.

Matt Staneff, T-Mobile's chief marketing officer, and Mike Katz, an executive who leads the T-Mobile division that caters to large organizations like schools and [big companies](#), spoke with The Associated Press about the company's new effort to serve schools. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Is providing connectivity to schools something that you see as a big business opportunity?

Staneff: Sure, there's business opportunities there. But the motivation of doing this is that we recognize there's a problem in society of kids not being connected. We want to do more than just try to win customers. This is a huge problem.

Q: And you think 10 million kids have connection issues that stops them from being able to do online school? Estimates vary, but I've seen higher numbers. (A new study says [between 15 million and 16 million public-school students](#) don't have adequate [internet](#) connections or devices for online school.)

Staneff: There's another data point that says 56% of school-age kids have had trouble completing their homework. And that's a little bit broader because it's not just the internet. A lot of them do it on a phone. They have internet access. It could be that they need a bigger screen, which is why we're also offering at-cost, larger-screen devices. We've looked at the enrollments in the school lunch program, we've looked at all the Census data.

That's what this number is.

Q: What have you been charging schools for getting internet to students who don't have it?

Katz: It ranges greatly. I can tell you this program is now going to be our main education program. The district, they can get unlimited starting at \$15. That's value that's not available anywhere else in the market, and it enables schools to then pass through service at no cost to the students.

Q: So does the new program offer better pricing for schools than what's available to them from T-Mobile now?

Katz: It's netting so prices are lower than what we've done at any time.

Q: How long will this be available?

Staneff: Once you sign up, you're good for five years.

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APA citation: Insider Q&A: T-Mobile pushes internet for virtual school (2020, September 13) retrieved 21 October 2020 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2020-09-insider-qa-t-mobile-internet-virtual.html>

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