



GRINNELL – NEWBURG

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Grinnell-Newburg Community School District – IA OCIO ITQ Application

Grinnell-Newburg Community School District
925 Broad Street
Grinnell, Iowa 50112

March 27, 2023

To the Office of the Chief Information Officer of the State of Iowa:

The Grinnell-Newburg Community School District is submitting this application in response the OCIO Invitation to Qualify for a Broadband Intervention Zone. The Grinnell-Newburg CSD, in association with local organizations within our represented geography, has identified a specific area of geographic concern with regards to existing broadband availability. As such, we are proposing that a Broadband Intervention Zone be established for the area in and around the Grinnell-Newburg Community School District in Poweshiek County. Pursuant to the Iowa Broadband Map v.5, this area is currently noted as either unserved or underserved in terms of a broadband provider and speeds required of 100/20 for a minimum threshold for robust connectivity. The prospective Broadband Intervention Zone would bring needed broadband connectivity to numerous families currently either unserved or underserved homes and businesses in the area as further represented by the diagram in the grant application.

This area is a part of a larger area that has been named an “Opportunity Zone” which is an IRS designation and an economic development tool that allows people to invest in distressed areas in the United States. This Opportunity Zone has: a median household income of approximately \$38,000, which is 39 percent lower than the median household income for the state of Iowa which is \$62,000; the percentage of households below the poverty line in this Opportunity Zone is 16 percent, which is 5 percent higher than the rate for the state of Iowa of 11 percent; and this Opportunity Zone has a median home value of approximately \$110,000, which is 31 percent lower than the median home value for the state of Iowa of \$160,000.

Through a collaborative initiative: Building Equitable Solutions – Digital Connectivity through the Grinnell Education Partnership Network, the Grinnell-Newburg Community School District has established partnerships with the Grinnell-Newburg School Foundation, Grinnell College, Grinnell Education Partnership (GEP), Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation, Mahaska Communication Group (MCG), and other community organizations resulting in over 20 community organizations bringing their

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respective resources, capacity building, skills, credibility, influence, access, and knowledge to the table to address issues such as robust broadband. Working together we serve a rural area with three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school as well as a four-year liberal arts college and a community college.

Employers in our area include local, regional, and national companies engaged in agriculture, insurance, higher education, internet, and other categories including retail businesses. Unlike large cities, our rural area within the school district contains five zip codes and within these zip codes are pockets of poverty ranging from 7.7 percent of households in poverty to 23.9 percent in poverty (the poverty threshold being a family of four with \$23,000 annual income or less). The free and reduced lunch population is 34 percent in the Grinnell-Newburg Community School District.

We believe equitable connectivity matters. While students in grades 5-12 receive a device for the school year they can take home to complete online schoolwork, access to a device does not come with e-connectivity or broadband access. Rural geography disrupted learning for some K-12 students who did not have internet access when schools closed due to the COVID pandemic; and real concerns existed at that time regarding the class of 2020 being able to fulfill graduation requirements due to online instruction for those lacking sufficient internet connectivity. The financial impact on families without budget available for Internet service is significant, and the learning loss for children in homes without internet is severe and contributes to a continuing cycle intergenerational poverty. During the pandemic, our community partners worked to set up a limited discount rate with an internet provider, and the Grinnell-Newburg School Foundation reimbursed the provider on behalf of the families. This allowed those families to access the internet in their homes for free for the 2020 school year. The Grinnell-Newburg School Foundation also created the Support for Technology Resources, Innovation, and Participation for Every Student fund, which helps subsidize student expenses; however, this fund is not an adequate long-term solution for e-connectivity and broadband for local students and their families. We continue working with our community partners to focus on supporting K-12 academic success and leveling the playing field for all students regarding social mobility – now and in the future.

While recent experience underscored robust broadband as a critical need for equal access learning, we also recognize the needs of our aging population and their access to the internet for telemedicine and/or virtual medical visits. The ability to engage virtually for a workplace is an increasing need that contributes to economic growth. In addition, modern agriculture is based on robust broadband access. Today and going forward, robust broadband is a basic need for quality of life for all people across the state of Iowa.

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Our greater community has a strong track record for coming together to support needs. We appreciate this Invitation to Qualify for a Broadband Intervention Zone, but this opportunity only recently came to our attention. While it is too early for us to identify specific contributions regarding deploying new rural broadband service, we believe many partners will align to support next steps once named a Broadband Intervention Zone – and specifics regarding community broadband capital can be better described later. We respectfully direct attention to the Community Support Letters included with our Invitation to Qualify application.

Please accept our appreciation for your consideration of our ITQ application to qualify for a Broadband Intervention Zone on behalf of our rural residents and community. We also thank your office and staff for your efforts regarding broadband access in rural Iowa for the education, health, safety, and empowerment of future generations.

Sincerely,

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