

WASHINGTON STEM 2021 POLICY PRIORITY: BROADBAND ACCESS & DIGITAL EQUITY



Washington STEM is a catalyst for opportunity, possibility, and prosperity in STEM. We work in partnership with eleven regional networks to provide equitable access to STEM education and pathways to careers in the in-demand fields of science, technology, engineering, and math for all Washington students, especially those furthest from opportunity

During these unprecedented times, it's vital to our state to assist individuals with the ability to access critical information digitally and have access to reliable, fast, and affordable broadband.

DIGITAL EQUITY:

We support the policy proposed in [House Bill 1450/ House Bill 1365](#). Washington STEM does not have a position on the sales tax proposed. The proposed bill:

- Requires school districts to provide learning devices to all students and instructional staff and establishes a grant program through OSPI to fund those devices.
- Directs the ESDs to establish a digital navigator program to provide support for districts in technical assistance in multiple languages, training, outreach, and device repair.
- Directs the ESDs to establish an optional procurement program for learning devices, learning management systems, cybersecurity protection, and device insurance that districts may elect to use.
- Both the OSPI grant program and the procurement and digital navigator programs through the ESDs will be funded by a tax on smart wireless devices.
- Directs OSPI to establish a Technology Equity Plan and provide regular updates to the Legislature on their progress in meeting the goals of the plan.

WHY: We support this plan to implement a digital equity, access, and inclusion program in collaboration with the Education Service Districts (ESD) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to assist students and their families. It ensures that students furthest from opportunity are given both access to and support for the digital tools and skills needed to be connected and able to successfully navigate remote learning. It provides staff with the tech support, training and access they need in order to support a diverse population of students and their families. Community based partners like Washington STEM can help OSPI collect data for and implement their statewide plan to achieve digital equity in **all** public schools. The proposal also enables a coordinated response from the larger eco-system by encouraging collaboration with school districts, ESDs and community- based organizations.

BROADBAND EXPANSION IN THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET:

Washington STEM supports the broadband expansion plans that are included as a priority in Governor Inslee's [2021-23 budget](#).

- \$1.2 million to staff a Statewide Broadband Office
- \$25 million to support a [competitive broadband loan program](#) to support infrastructure
- \$45 in the capital budget to expand broadband access to underserved homes and business.
- \$9 million to expand broadband access for licensed child care businesses that serve about 20,500 school aged children
- \$79 million in education and operating to support residential broadband connections for families

ABOUT US

At Washington STEM, our work revolves around three main areas:

- **Strategically Convene and Partner** with 11 Regional STEM Networks, alongside business, education, and community leaders to identify and scale effective local solutions.
- **Provide direct support** through open-source access to data and measurement tools and targeted financial investments.
- **Advocate for change** through educating decision makers, storytelling, and collaboration in order to create the foundation for lasting, equitable change in our state.

If you have any questions about our work, please contact Washington STEM Policy Director Dr. Bish Paul at bish@washingtonstem.org.

1,000,000 students across the state are supported through STEM Network activities and programs.

