

# Bringing Digital Equity to All Students in the Community

March 14, 2023

@readingby3rd #GLReading #LearningTuesdays



CRUCIBLE  
OF PRACTICE

*Reflections on Lessons Learned*



# Presenters



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Executive Director  
Greater Poweshiek Community  
Foundation



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General Manager  
Mahaska Communication Group



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Vice President of Community  
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Office of Community Partnerships,  
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Project Coordinator  
Grinnell Education Partnership,  
Grinnell College



**Melissa Strovers, M.A.**  
Director of Collective Impact  
Office of Community Partnerships,  
Planning and Research,  
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**Janet M. Stutz, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent  
Grinnell-Newburg School District



**CRUCIBLE  
OF PRACTICE**

*Reflections on Lessons Learned*



# *Building Equitable Solutions:* Digital Connectivity through the GEP Network

Tuesday, March 14, 2023



# Presentation Overview

- ✓ Why digital equity in Grinnell Iowa?
- ✓ Who is engaged in the work?
- ✓ What are we doing in the area of digital equity?
- ✓ Results
- ✓ Challenges & Key Takeaways



# Grinnell College At A Glance



## COLLEGE

- Private, co-ed, residential liberal arts
- #15 US News & World Report
- 1,700 students
- 19% international, 24% people of color



- Anchor Institution
- People Power
- Resources

## BACKBONE

# Why Get Involved with Early Literacy?



2015



## GRINWELL SCHOOLS TASK FORCE REPORT

July 1, 2015

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An essential element of a healthy community is a high quality school system, meeting the needs of all students and offering opportunities for academic and extracurricular success. Another important aspect of a thriving community is the strength of the partnership and collaboration among community organizations and institutions. As two institutions dedicated to education, Grinnell College and the Grinnell-Newburg Community School District share a common goal of pursuing excellence and opportunity for the children and youth of the Grinnell community. This White Paper details the work of the Grinnell Schools Task Force during the spring semester of 2015. The Task Force was charged with identifying ways that the relationship between Grinnell College and the Grinnell-Newburg District could be strengthened and expanded. The Task Force, comprised of representatives from a variety of stakeholder groups within the community, developed recommendations for programs, events, and activities to forge a more intentional and effective partnership between the two institutions.

The Task Force report begins with an introduction to the Task Force, including the impetus behind its creation, membership, and charge. The report then describes the process of the work accomplished this semester with the various stakeholder groups involved in the work. It will then detail the recommendations from the Task Force in each priority area, including both existing efforts and proposed new efforts. Following this will be a set of recommendations that cut across all of the priority areas. The report concludes with a discussion of areas that require additional attention that were not able to be addressed by the Task Force's work this semester.

The recommendations developed by the Task Force vary across subject matter, format, and grade level. These suggestions reflect attention to the needs and gaps identified by teachers and parents in the District, as well as areas where District stakeholders feel the partnership is currently making a positive impact upon students' experiences.

- The first recommendation is to expand opportunities for summer learning activities for preschool-12<sup>th</sup> grade (PK-12) students, regardless of student ability or achievement level.
- The next recommendation is to provide and coordinate additional opportunities for academic enrichment for PK-12 students, with a particular focus on opportunities related to technology and language and culture.

The Campaign for  
GRADE-LEVEL  
READING



AmeriCorps

# Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation (GPCF)



## **BACKGROUND:**

- Serving the greater Poweshiek County area since 1989
- Involved in the Grinnell Education Partnership since 2015

## **ROLE:**

As a “backbone” organization, GPCF is a convener, supporter, communicator, evaluator, accelerator in partnership with Grinnell College



# Why is GPCF Involved?



- A core function of community foundations is to be a convener or community catalyst focused on building partnerships that support community needs
- GPCF has two strategic priorities that align with the work of the GEP:



**Strengthen and mobilize nonprofit leaders, donors and community members to respond to emerging needs**

and

**Speak up and take risks to fight for justice, equity and systemic change**





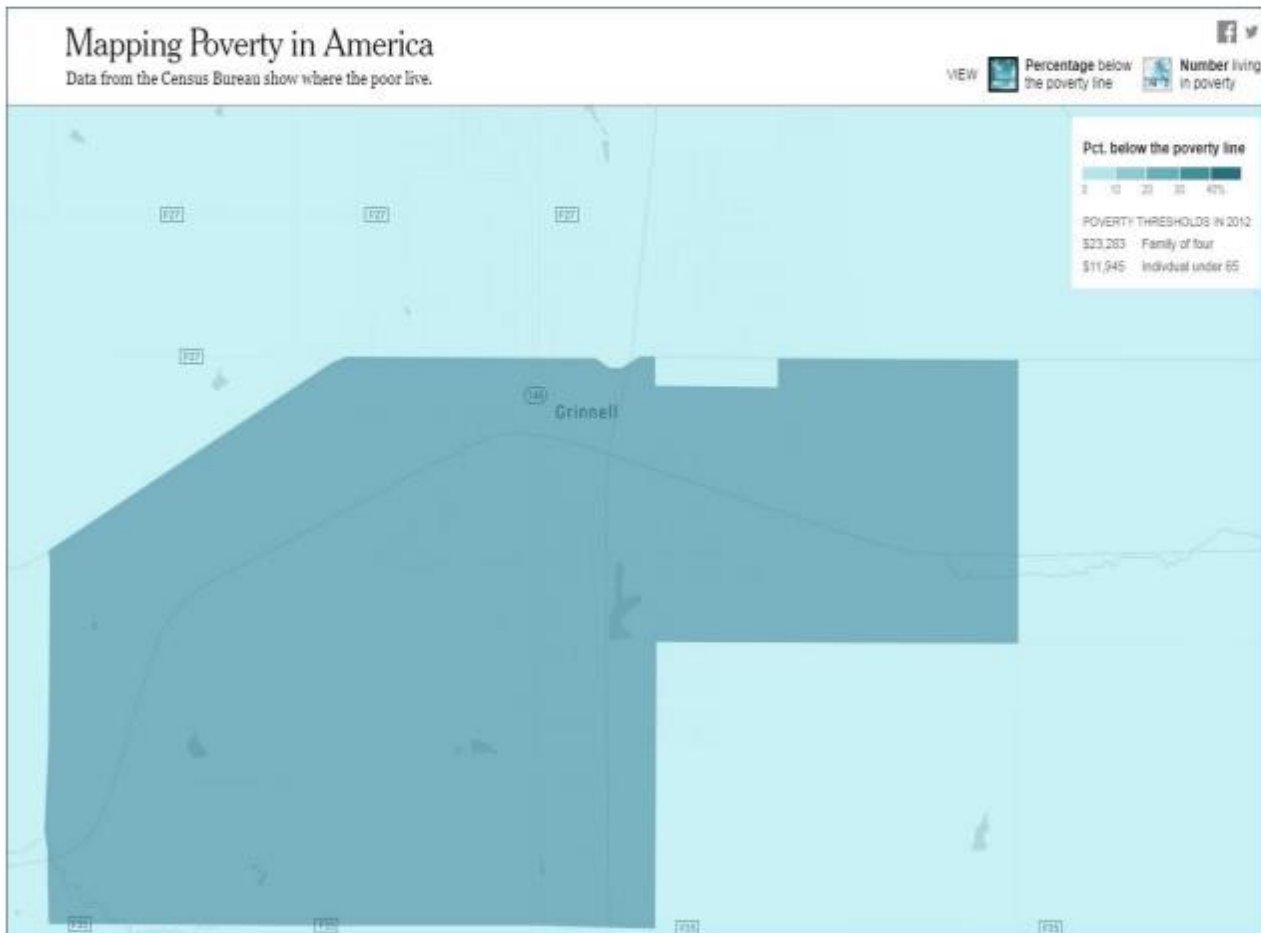
Why digital  
equity in  
Grinnell, Iowa?

# About Grinnell



- Rural, Central Iowa Town (Interstate 80)
- Grinnell population: 9,513  
(U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2021)
- One School District:
  - Grinnell-Newburg Community School District
- Two Colleges:
  - Grinnell College (4-year private, liberal arts)
  - Iowa Valley Community College
- Employers:
  - Bayer Crop Science (Agriculture)
  - Grinnell Mutual (Insurance)
  - Grinnell College (Higher Ed)
  - Mahaska Communication Group (Internet Provider)

# Why Grade Level Reading and GEP?

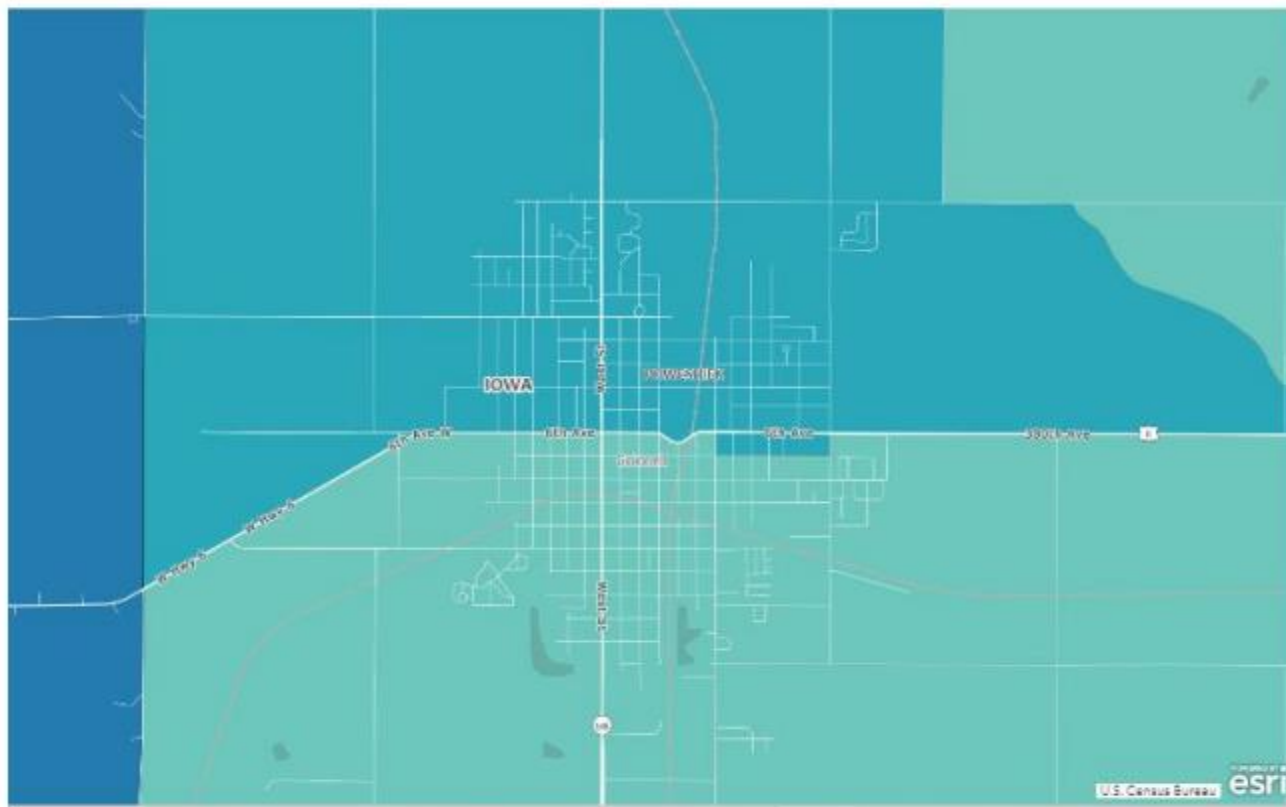


## Varied Experiences & Access

The fact is children and families have **very distinct experiences** in our community **based on where they live** – as illustrated by this map.

- The percentage of households below the poverty line in light blue areas is 7.7%; in dark blue areas the poverty level rises to 23.9%.
  - Poverty Thresholds: \$23K for a family of four

Information taken from the 2014 project [Mapping Poverty in America](#), from the New York Times.



## Digital Divide-Grinnell

Light Green Area in Grinnell:


- Fewer HH with broadband
- Matches area in previous slide where more-higher percentage of low-income families reside
- This area is also considered a federal "Opportunity Zone"

# Why: Equitable Connectivity Matters



## Barriers

- ❖ **Rural geography** disrupted learning for some K-12 students who did not have Internet access when school closed for COVID
- ❖ **Financial Impact** on families without budget available for Internet
- ❖ **Learning loss** for children in homes without internet
- ❖ **Intergenerational poverty** cycle continues

- 
- ✓ K-12 academic **success**
  - ✓ **Leveling** playing field for all students
  - ✓ Social **mobility**

## Access



**Who is  
engaged in  
the work?**

# Who: Grinnell Education Partnership

The Grinnell Education Partnership works to support and enhance our community's educational programs. GEP consists of three pillars:

1. **Grinnell College (co-backbone)** acts as orchestrator, connector and people power
2. **Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation (co-backbone)** supplies and secures funding
3. **Community organizations + AmeriCorps** serve as innovators, bringing their respective resources, capacity building, skills, credibility, influence, access and knowledge to the table



# What is the GEP focus?



- Cradle-to-career support for P-12 Grinnell students
- Grade-level reading
- Aligning community efforts with partners through collective impact approach

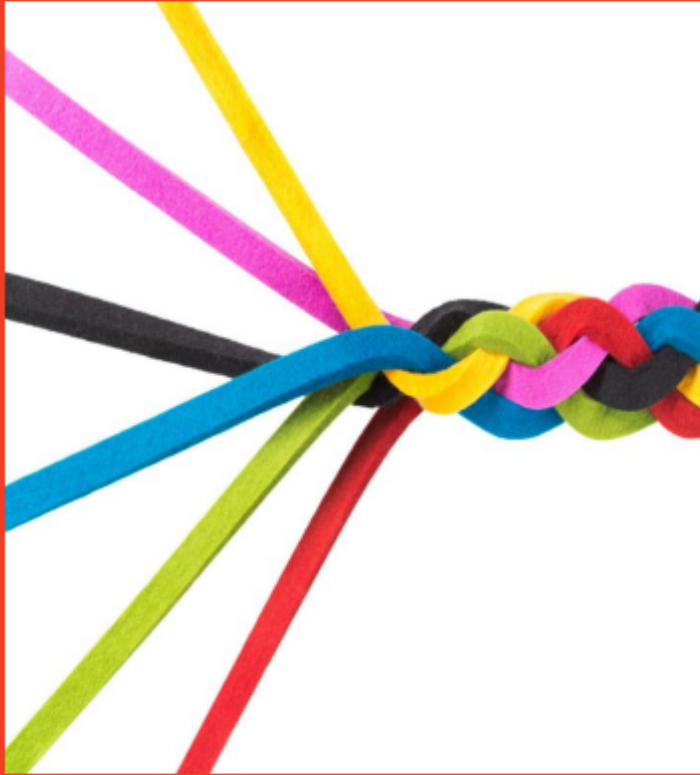


## Current focus areas:

- Skills Gap
- Family Engagement
- Equity and Inclusion
- Summer Learning



## Collective Impact



## Network-Based Approach:

### When?

- ✓ Striving for **population-level** change
- ✓ Requires leaders and organizations from **multiple sectors**
- ✓ Needs **different kinds of strategies** (not just more of the same programs and services)

### Why?

Allows us to make the best use of:

- ✓ The **exponential power** of the network
- ✓ **Depth and breadth** of resources (people, programming, and funding) within the system
- ✓ Energy behind **co-created solutions**

# GEP Network: Lead Digital Equity Project Partners



**Dr. Janet Stutz**  
**Grinnell Newburg Community School District**  
**Superintendent**

**Liz Hansen**  
**Grinnell Newburg School Foundation**  
**Executive Director**  
**Grinnell College, Collective Impact Coordinator**

**Jill Harris**  
**GEP Project Coordinator**  
**AmeriCorps Alum**

**Steve Burnett**  
**Mahaska Communication Group (MCG)**  
**General Manager**

**Melissa Strovers**  
**Grinnell College, Director of Collective Impact**

**Nicole Brua-Behrens**  
**Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation**  
**Executive Director**

**Monica Chavez-Silva**  
**Vice President of Community Engagement and Strategic Planning**



# What are we doing in the area of digital equity?

Three Phase Approach

## Grinnell-Newburg Community School District (GNCSD)

- The Grinnell-Newburg Community School District is located in central rural Iowa
- Currently, we house about 1590 students PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Our district encompasses roughly 224 square miles
- Our free and reduced population is 34%.

Our Role:

Public Education PreK-12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Five Schools:

Fairview: PreK-2

Bailey Park: K-2

Davis: 3-4 Grade Center

Grinnell Middle School: 5-8

Grinnell High School: 9-12

# GNCSD Connection to the Project



Home of the Tigers!



Grinnell Students Connected To:

- Equal Access to Learning
- Access to Rural Areas
- Free and Reduced families are connected
- Teachers living in Rural Iowa Connect with their students

# Phase #1: Pandemic Response

Fall 2020 to Spring 2021



## **Grinnell Newburg Community School District** Reached out to Grinnell Newburg School Foundation (GNSF)

- Concerned about class of 2020 not able to fulfill graduation requirements and instruction being online
- Not all students had home Internet access

# Grinnell Newburg School Foundation

Liz Hansen Executive Director

**Lead Agency  
Funder  
Connector**

## **GNSF MISSION**

Working with the community, GNSF promotes excellence in the Grinnell-Newburg public schools through fundraising efforts.



**GRINNELL-NEWBURG**  
SCHOOL FOUNDATION

# Phase #1: Pandemic Response (cont'd)

Fall 2020 to Spring 2021



GNSF Created Multi-Agency Taskforce: *Internet for Students and Families in Need*

**Taskforce Goal:**  
Provide immediate Internet solutions for school district students and families, especially graduating seniors.





# Phase #1: Pandemic Response (cont'd)

Spring 2020



## **GNSF Actions:**

- Fundraising and grant writing
- Purchased 40 hotspots to connect families
- Engaged MCG to provide free WIFI at various places (parking lots) in Grinnell
- Supported GEP & GNCSD online summer learning programming with hotspots

# Phase #1: Pandemic Response (cont'd)

Fall 2020 to Spring 2021



- GNSF outreach to GEP to provide additional capacity
- GNSF & GEP: Engaged City of Grinnell to consider WIFI for support
  - Granted \$5,000 from Campbell Fund
  - Covid numbers escalated
  - Students sent home
  - Online learning resumed
- GNSF purchased additional 20 hotspots (for a total of 60)
- GEP and GNSF engaged Windstream
  - Negotiated affordable home WIFI (\$30/month for qualifying households)
  - GNSF supports monthly WIFI cost for families recommended by GNSC

# Phase #2: Sustainability

Spring 2021 to current



## Ongoing

- GNSF and GNCSF
  - Provide hotspots and home WIFI as needed
  - School personnel identify families who need digital access

## New

- GNSF created a permanent equity fund: STRIPES
- **Supporting, Technology, Resources, Innovation, Participation for Every Student**

# Phase #3: Community-Wide Expansion

Summer - Fall 2022



## Summer 2022

- GEP gains awareness of Affordable Connectivity Program during a GLR webinar
- GEP and GNSF collaborate on next steps

# Phase #3: ACP Expansion Rollout (cont'd)

October - November 2022



## **October 2022 -**

- GEP convenes community stakeholders

## **November 2022**

- MCG develops & prints ACP flyers to be distributed in community
- DCL, MICA, GHA distribute flyers to eligible families

# Phase #3: ACP Expansion Rollout (cont'd)

December 2022 - January 2023



The flyer features a logo at the top left consisting of three interlocking puzzle pieces in green, yellow, and blue, forming a house shape. To the right of the logo, the text 'AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY' is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below the logo and text, the phrase 'Free Internet FOR QUALIFYING HOUSEHOLDS!' is written in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font. The central heading 'ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?' is in a large, bold, green font. Below this heading, the text 'Your Household qualifies for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the following:' is in a smaller, blue font. There are four numbered items in colored rounded rectangles: 1 (green) 'Household Income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Guidelines', 2 (yellow) 'Participates in one of the Government Assistance Programs (additional information on insert)', 3 (teal) 'Received a Federal Pell Grant in the current award year', and 4 (dark blue) 'If you or anyone in your household already receives a Lifeline benefit or meets the eligibility criteria for Lifeline'. At the bottom, the MCG logo is shown, followed by the text 'Mahaska Communication Group', 'Call Today to Learn More', '641-676-1000', and 'mahaska.org/affordable-connectivity'.

**AFFORDABLE  
CONNECTIVITY**

Free Internet FOR QUALIFYING HOUSEHOLDS!

**ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?**

Your Household qualifies for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the following:

- 1 Household Income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Guidelines
- 2 Participates in one of the Government Assistance Programs (additional information on insert)
- 3 Received a Federal Pell Grant in the current award year
- 4 If you or anyone in your household already receives a Lifeline benefit or meets the eligibility criteria for Lifeline

**MCG**  
Mahaska Communication Group  
Call Today to Learn More  
641-676-1000  
mahaska.org/affordable-connectivity

## December 2022

- MCG provides additional support to families by assisting in individual sign-up in their office and other sites
- MCG offers a \$30 plan for ACP approved families
- Superintendent puts info in her weekly update
- GNCSD staff distribute flyers to eligible families

## January 2023

- MCG finishes laying fiber in the Grinnell area
- GNSF partners with MCG to financially support identified families who do not meet ACP eligibility requirements
- GNCSD staff distribute flyers at Parent-Teacher conferences

# Why Does MCG Want to Help Build Digital Equity in Our Communities?



- Our mission speaks to this very topic. Only through digital equity will we truly fulfill our mission of strengthening economic vitality, social development, and overall quality of life in the communities we serve.
- Building digital equity is the first step in developing the strong and viable workforce of tomorrow. Many of these students will remain in our rural communities if they have the education and skills needed by employers. Participating in this program will help with our workforce needs in the future.

# Mahaska Communication Group



**NOT YOUR  
ORDINARY  
COMMUNICATION  
PROVIDER**

- Mahaska Communication Group (MCG) is a telecommunication company headquartered in Oskaloosa, Iowa. The **worldwide Musco Sports Lighting Company** formed MCG to overcome the limitations and unwillingness of the national provider to provide reliable, high-quality Internet service for Musco.
- Today MCG provides **high-quality services to seven south central Iowa communities.**
- Our mission is to provide the most **reliable communication** services and **superior customer support**, strengthening economic vitality, social development, and overall quality of life in the communities in which we live, work, and play.

*Steve*  
**BURNETT**  
General Manager







- The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) helps families connect to the Internet from home by providing a monthly benefit to help pay for an internet service plan.
- Eligible households can purchase a broadband service of 100/100 Mbps for \$30 and receive \$30 in assistance resulting in FREE Internet service.

## **WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM?**



Households qualify for ACP with income at or below **200% of the Federal Poverty Level** or if a household member meets at least one of the criteria listed below:

- 1. Participates in one of these Government Assistance Programs:**
  1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps
  2. Medicaid
  3. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
  4. Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
  5. Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA)/202/811
  6. Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
  7. Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program (Section 8 Vouchers)
  8. Received approval for benefits under the Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program or the School Breakfast Program, including at U.S. Department of Agricultural (USDA) Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools.
  9. Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit
- 2. Received a Federal Pell Grant in the current award year**
- 3. If you or anyone in your household already receives a Lifeline benefit or meets the eligibility criteria for Lifeline.**

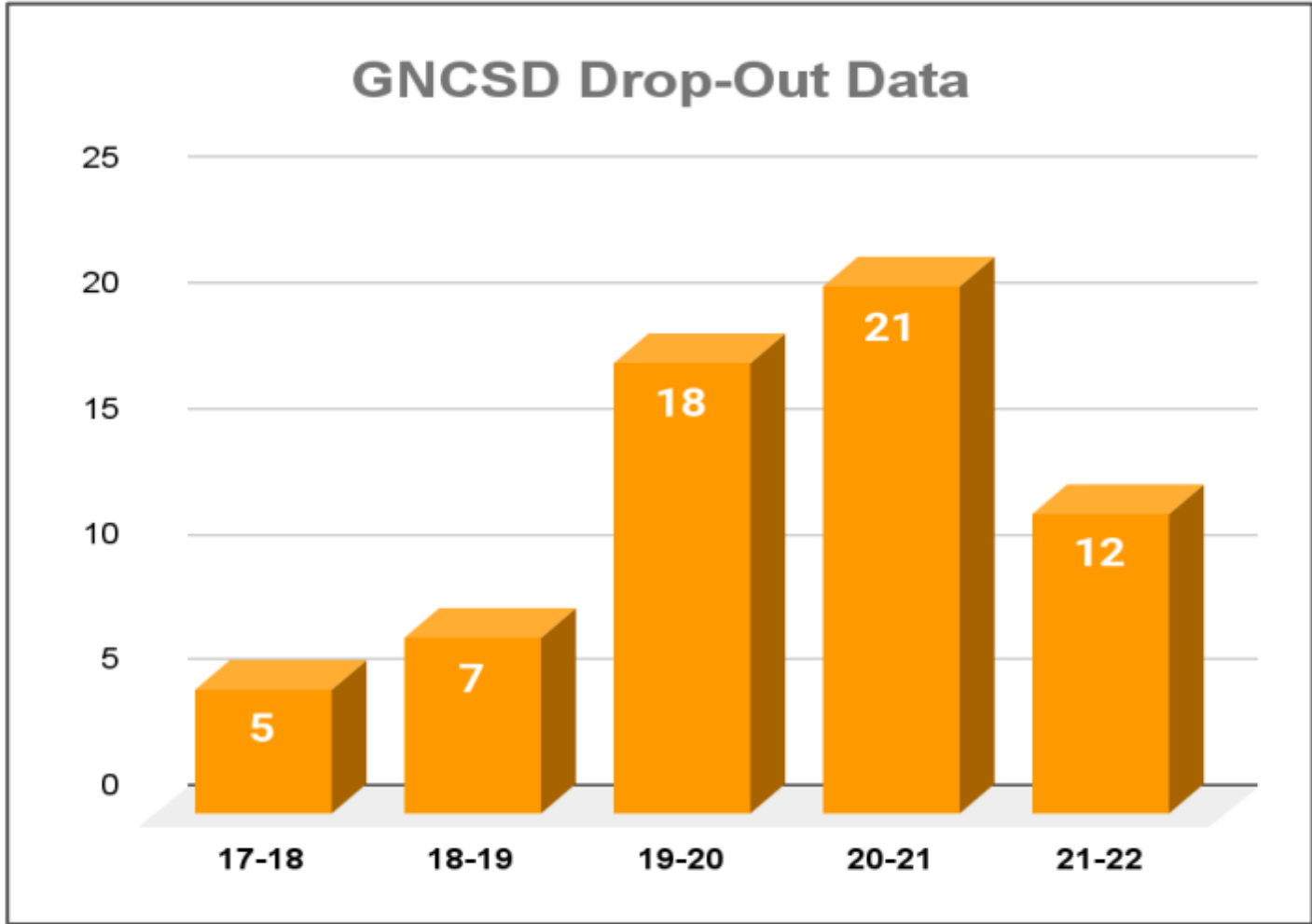


# The Results

# Results

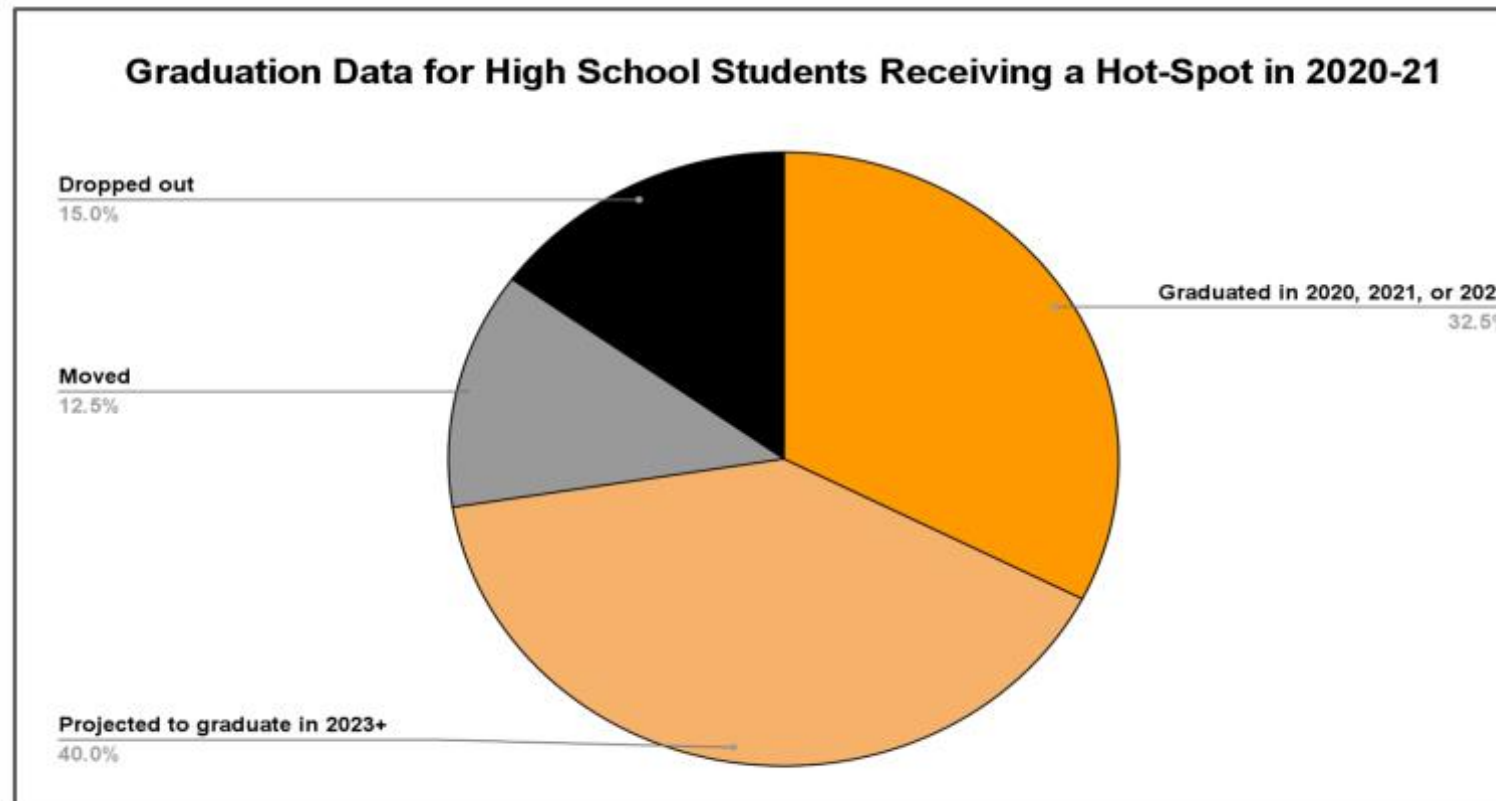
- ✓ **Connectivity:** MCG has connected 19 families through the ACP offering in the last five months
- ✓ **Sustainability:** GNSF continues to support families who signed up in with another local Internet Provider plus support families who are not eligible for ACP
- ✓ **Growth:** Continue to partner with school personnel, housing and family specialist agencies to increase connectivity numbers

# Reduced Drop Out Rate



# Results: Strong Graduation Rates

- Providing Internet Hot-Spots Have Supported Educational Outcomes for GHS Students





# Challenges & Takeaways

# Ongoing Challenges

- Trust among families
- Rural broadband access issues
- Delay in access: Timing was critical!
  - At risk for progressing academically
  - At risk to not graduate on time
- Establishing long-term relationships with **all** local Internet providers
- Limited staffing capacity
- Sustainable funding
- Centralized coordination
- Keeping up with available governmental programs





# Takeaways

- Partnerships are key
- Trust is imperative
  - Provider to partner
  - Partner to family
- Work in progress
  - We are still at the beginning of this work
  - This work will never be done!
- Long-term solutions are needed
  - First step: ACP (Affordable Connectivity Program)
- Equitable, reliable, and sustainable rural access solutions



Visit our website  
[www.grinnelleducationpartnership.org](http://www.grinnelleducationpartnership.org)

And Follow us  
on Facebook!  
<https://www.facebook.com/GrinnellEducationPartnership>





■ Grinnell  
Education  
Partnership

**Questions???**



GLR 2023:  
What's Working Xchange (WWX)



INVITATION

**This invitation to share is open to everyone!**

We are gathering information about a few strategies related to **learning loss recovery**.

The form is quick and easy to complete. This information will help all of us understand what's happening in our communities and support engagement that will unfold later this year.

Here is the link to complete your responses:  
[WHAT'S WORKING QUESTION FORM](#)



# Upcoming GLR Learning Tuesdays Webinars:

## LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY CHALLENGE

“Summer and OST: Smart Investments Outside of School to Accelerate Learning”

Tuesday, March 14, 3:00–4:30 p.m. ET/12:00–1:30 p.m. PT

## FUNDER TO FUNDER

“Making Summer Count: Philanthropic Opportunities for Summer Learning Acceleration”

Tuesday, March 21, 12:30–2:00 p.m. ET/9:30–11:00 a.m. PT

## LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY CHALLENGE

“From Classroom to Community: Investing in Whole-Child Support Systems from Cradle to Career”

Tuesday, March 21, 3:00 – 4:30 p.m. ET/12:00-1:30 p.m. PT

## LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY CHALLENGE

“Access & Action: Why Diverse Books Matter”

Tuesday, March 28, 3:00 – 4:30 p.m. ET/12:00-1:30 p.m. PT

