TECHNOLOGY HOLDS GREAT PROMISE FOR RURAL EDUCATION. It can give students access to great teachers. It can enable them to tap into resources they would never find in a school’s media center. It can let them personalize their learning to meet their own unique needs; use that learning to create presentations, websites, and movies; and open doors to forge networks with other students across the world. And it can free local teachers’ time, enabling a school’s great teachers to reach more students and help other teachers succeed.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

CHALLENGE #1
MORE ROBUST TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

- Provide broadband access to high-speed internet
- Evaluate bandwidth use and unmet demand to ensure broadband expansion meets immediate needs
- Ensure school districts have the capacity to maximize their current bandwidth
- Bring broadband to students outside the schoolhouse
- Increase school access to excellent digital software

CHALLENGE #2
EFFECTIVE QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

- Set clear standards and measures for online and blended instruction — The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), Idaho Standards for Online Teachers, and the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) have made strides in that area
- Offer training and professional development — state-funded IDLA and the Idaho Education Network (IEN) currently provide development opportunities
- Build an elite corps of remote teachers

CHALLENGE #3
MUCH GREATER FLEXIBILITY

- Allow schools to rethink school staffing and time to improve rural students’ access to excellent instruction
- Maximize flexibility to group students as needed to capitalize on digital learning opportunities
- Support districts seeking to exchange online instruction
- Address funding restrictions that inhibit local reallocation to pay for digital strategies

“... it is clear that teachers are a student’s primary ticket to academic success, the single-most important school based factor affecting student achievement. Any strategy for using technology to improve rural education needs to focus on increasing the number of rural students who have access to excellent teachers.”

ENVISIONING THE POTENTIAL OF TECHNOLOGY FOR RURAL EDUCATION

Two types of education technology and what they can do for rural education:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY</th>
<th>DIGITAL LEARNING RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect people across vast geographies</td>
<td>Enrich and personalize students’ learning experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow great teachers to reach students anywhere</td>
<td>Offer interactive learning activities that allow students to learn at their own pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable students to connect with peers in any location</td>
<td>Provide administrative efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable rural districts to supplement in-person learning experiences</td>
<td>Eliminate regular purchase of textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase access to AP, honors level courses, foreign languages and less common electives</td>
<td>Free-up time for excellent teachers to reach more students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable credit recovery</td>
<td>Extend the time and place in which students have access to learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RE-ENVISIONING SCHOOLS

Together, these two modes of technology become even more powerful when combined:

- Improve rural students’ access to course offerings and excellent instruction
- Help overcome pressure on school districts to fill teacher shortages
- Give on-site teachers even more time to improve their practice
- Offer excellent on-site teachers the opportunity to reach more students

VOTERS SURVEYED SUPPORT TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

83% of voters surveyed support putting high-speed internet access in all American public schools within the next five years

88% agreed that high-speed Internet provides access to new learning resources, online educational tools, instruction on foreign languages, college prep tools, and distance learning programs

ROLES FOR POLICY AND PHILANTHROPIC LEADERS

1. Ensure widespread broadband access
2. Insist on quality
3. Remove policy barriers
4. Support investments in innovation, quality, and scale

This report was authored by Bryan Hassel and Stephanie Erba Dean of Public Impact. Read the full report at http://www.rociidaho.org/research-publications/