HIGH SPEED INTERNET

AND DIGITAL LITERACY

OVERVIEW

Having the skills to use a computer and navigate the Internet – often referred to as "digital literacy" – allows people to benefit more fully from high speed Internet. Digitally literate Americans are more attractive to prospective employers, and businesses comfortable with digital technology are more economically competitive. Tech-savvy students use high speed Internet to improve their academic performance and prepare for future jobs. Broadband enables people familiar with teleconferencing and online social networks to strengthen their ties with faraway friends and family. Fundamentally, high speed Internet is a tool with endless potential, and only the digitally literate have the skills to harness it effectively.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Computers connected to high speed Internet are of little use to those unfamiliar with digital technology. In both rural and urban areas, a significant portion of Americans cannot afford a computer, or the sometimes high cost of broadband subscriptions. Furthermore, many choose not to subscribe to high speed Internet even when it is available in their area because they do not understand the benefits it provides. In this fast-evolving information economy, digitally illiterate students and workers without access to broadband are at a stark disadvantage compared with those who are able to tap the resources of the Internet with ease. Expanding telecommunications infrastructure into underserved areas is vital, but it must happen alongside efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of high speed Internet and create digitally literate citizens.

BENEFITS OF DIGITAL LITERACY

- As more services go online, digitally versatile workers have an increasing advantage in many sectors ranging from information technology (IT) to the service industry. Digital skills apply to and transfer across many professions, and even enhance a worker's ability to apply for a job.
- Digitally literate students improve the quality of their school work by easily accessing online resources including lecture videos, library databases and teacher-student e-mail correspondence.
- Digitally literate people save time and money by paying bills, applying for jobs, doing their taxes and banking online.
- Digitally literate computer owners are far more likely to incorporate the Internet into their daily routine and realize the countless benefits of broadband.
- When an entire family is digitally literate and connected to broadband, social networking, video conferencing, and e-mail correspondence can strengthen family ties across vast geographic distances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Measures to expand broadband to unserved and underserved areas should also provide technology training and support which promote digital literacy.
- Initiatives to improve digital literacy should target groups that need the most help like low-income families and communities.
- Programs designed to provide affordable computers and broadband to low-income areas should be supported.

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